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# House Bill 2 & The Backlash: A Story Of Frames

## **Abstract**

While over 20 states considered so-called bathroom bills between 2013-2016, only one state, North Carolina, passed one - in the form of House Bill 2. House Bill 2 modified North Carolina's non-discrimination legislation, as well as restricting access to multi-user restrooms on the basis of sex designated on one's birth certificate, which would require some transgender men to use the women's restroom. The debate between those for and against HB2 raged in the press, the legal system, and finally at the ballot box. An analysis of the first two months of coverage indicates how frames were used by each side in different areas and over time. This paper demonstrates how the Pro side majorly focused on one frame, Safety, whereas the Anti side spread out their arguments across several different frames. Additionally, it shows how outside events, such as a letter from the federal Department of Justice and announcements of business boycotts, can impact which frames are relevant and to whom.

## **Keywords**

bathroom, bill, north carolina, transgender, rights, framing

## **Disciplines**

American Politics | Business Law, Public Responsibility, and Ethics | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies | Other Political Science | Political Theory | Tourism and Travel

# **House Bill 2 & the Backlash:**

## **A story of frames**

Kerry Schellenberger

*Submitted to the Philosophy, Politics and Economics Program at the University of Pennsylvania in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors.*

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## **Abstract**

While over 20 states considered so-called bathroom bills between 2013-2016, only one state, North Carolina, passed one - in the form of House Bill 2. House Bill 2 modified North Carolina's non-discrimination legislation, as well as restricting access to multi-user restrooms on the basis of sex designated on one's birth certificate, which would require some transgender men to use the women's restroom. The debate between those for and against HB2 raged in the press, the legal system, and finally at the ballot box. An analysis of the first two months of coverage indicates how frames were used by each side in different areas and over time. This paper demonstrates how the Pro side majorly focused on one frame, Safety, whereas the Anti side spread out their arguments across several different frames. Additionally, it shows how outside events, such as a letter from the federal Department of Justice and announcements of business boycotts, can impact which frames are relevant and to whom.

## **Introduction**

In the three-year period from 2013-2016, at least 24 states considered legislation that would restrict access to multiuser restrooms, locker rooms, and other sex-segregated facilities on the basis of" so-called 'biological sex'<sup>1</sup> (Kralik) . Such "bathroom bills" are very controversial given their potential impact on transgender individuals, who feel safer using the bathroom (or other facilities) that match their current gender identification rather than those of the sex they were assigned at birth. Despite the fact that nearly ½ of states considered such a bill, only North

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<sup>1</sup> Note that biological sex was defined differently in many of these bills, from the sex marked on changeable documents, such passports or driver's licenses, or as the sex assigned at birth regardless of what a person's current documents list as their gender. While some listed changeable documents, those bill still would have impacted many transgender people as getting one's gender marker changed can be a long and expensive process and is different in different areas in the country.

Carolina actually enacted such legislation into law via House Bill 2 (HB2). This bill became a lightning rod of controversy, prompting not only outcries from activists, but business boycotts and a formal reprimand from the Department of Justice, and even helped to eventually shape the outcome of the 2016 NC gubernatorial election. What led HB2 to become so controversial and have such an effect on North Carolina politics? While no single project could answer this question, this study examines the media coverage of this bill, and in particular, analyzes the arguments the supporters and the opponents of the bill made in different locations over time. This helps us to better understand how the arguments made by political actors help to shape the evolution of this issue.

Analyzing dozens of news stories over a several month period, I found that the HB2's supporters primarily focused on their belief in the potential of the bill to protect the safety of women and girls from so-called predators, either defined as transgender women or as men pretending to be transgender women. In contrast, those opposing the bill focused on several different arguments, including attempting to shift the discussion of safety onto the safety of transgender individuals, as well as arguments about state vs. local authority, and the economic consequences of the bill. While these arguments were present throughout the state, the most urban areas focused on whether this bill made NC an outlier on the national stage, whereas more rural counties discussed other arguments. Across time, there were two peaks in coverage, the first coming from the original bill and peaking three weeks after it was passed and the second coming from federal government intervention and peaking in week seven.

This matters because House Bill 2 was a bill that both was largely unpopular on the national stage and ended up having a huge negative economic impact on North Carolina. It's probable the sponsors of the bill did not anticipate either of those outcomes. In fact, the coalition

that rose against them, included both Democrats and big business, is remarkable in its own right. To understand how this coalition and bill backlash arose, it is important to understand how perspectives on the local/state level varied and adapted during that national stage backlash, and then what that tells us about broader trends in national politics.

### What is House Bill 2?

To understand House Bill 2, we need to begin with its antecedent, Charlotte City Ordinance Number 7056, which passed the Charlotte City Council on 22 February 2016, and was scheduled to be implemented on April 1, 2016. This ordinance revised the city's anti-discrimination code. Prior to this ordinance, businesses in the city were banned from discriminating on factors such as race, religion, and national origin<sup>2</sup>. These rules applied to any business that had a contract with the City of Charlotte and/or was a place of public accommodation. The ordinance updated this list to include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression<sup>3</sup>, granting new anti-discrimination protections to LGBTQ individuals.

While the ordinance did not pass until 2016, its genesis dates to 2014, when MeckPAC—a local LGBT Political Action Committee—and its allies<sup>4</sup> began to advocate for the ordinance. The group argued that Charlotte should expand its non-discrimination ordinance to cover sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression to provide adequate protections to LGBT

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<sup>2</sup> There were several separate sections of the ordinance code which each had different items covered, however those three were covered by all relevant sections.

<sup>3</sup> Gender Identity refers to the way someone identifies, and gender expression refers to how they express themselves through things such as clothing, jewelry, and hair style. Expression is visible to an external audience whereas identity is internal and not directly observable.

<sup>4</sup> the Human Rights Campaign, Quality North Carolina, Gender Lines, the LGBT Democrats, the [American Civil Liberties Union] and Democracy North Carolina and Straight Allies Charlotte

individuals in Charlotte.<sup>5</sup> They noted that other cities had adopted similar rules, and that to keep pace with them, Charlotte should do the same. That is, MeckPAC’s argument relied on a norm-based appeal, suggesting that the inclusion of these categories was common around the country, but also that these were “good” practices (i.e., LGBT-friendly). That said, the proposal was met with some skepticism, and some council members requested to slow down and, to allow for time to gather information “about what the practice is in the other cities are”, as well understand the full impact of such a change.

While the proposal was initially introduced on Nov. 24<sup>th</sup> 2014, there was not much media coverage until December 22 of that year, when *The Charlotte Observer*, a prominent local paper, printed a front-page story about it (Harrison). This story focused on the so-called bathroom debate, which would come to define the entire debate over this ordinance, and eventually spark HB2. This “bathroom debate” focused on the aspect of the ordinance which would prohibit sex discrimination in bathrooms, locker rooms, and related facilities.

This provision matters because of how it treats transgender individuals. Transgender people in North Carolina are often legally classified as the sex they were assigned at birth regardless of how they identified, dressed, and were perceived by others. A transgender man, who was legible to everyone around him as a man, would be legally required to either use a women’s restroom, or potentially wait hours until he is in an area with an available single-use or private restroom. The Charlotte ordinance changed that and allowed individuals to use the restroom that matched their appearance and gender.

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<sup>5</sup> The group also argued that the city should clarify that its policy prohibits discrimination based on both familial and marital status, as the existing statute inconsistently switched between both terms. This change, however, received significantly less attention than the other aspects of the ordinance

Bathroom access is an issue of vital concern for the transgender community because of the risk of harassment and assault in those spaces. 68% of transgender and gender non-conforming people surveyed reported verbal harassment and 9% reported physical assault in restrooms or similar spaces (Herman 2013, pg. 71). To avoid these frightening situations, many transgender people avoid using public restrooms. However, this avoidance can lead to major health concerns such as: limiting food and water intake (32%) to avoid needing to use a restroom which could lead to dehydration and other problems, as well as avoiding the restroom when needed which could lead to kidney-related medical issues or urinary tract infections (8%) (Trotta 2016). While an ordinance that encoded the right of transgender people to use the bathroom that matched their gender would not end harassment and assaults, it was signal that such harassment was legally wrong.

Nevertheless, this new ordinance did not go unchallenged. The other side of the “bathroom debate”, mostly comprised of conservative Christians, did not focus on the positive impact this aspect of the ordinance could have for transgender North Carolinians, but rather suggested it would enable “a pedophile [to] dress up as a woman and go into a women’s restroom” (Harrison). By the time the ordinance was passed in February of 2016, the counter-mobilization to it by this group had cemented.

Conservative opponents of the Charlotte City ordinance mobilized and demanded action. They persuaded four Republican General Assembly members—Representatives Bishop, Stam, Howard, and Steinburg—to call for a special session of the North Carolina State Assembly and introduce House Bill 2 on 23 March 2016. HB2 would, among other things, prohibit local governments from passing non-discrimination ordinances including categories not included by the state non-discrimination law (House Bill 2, Part III, Section 3.3, G.S. 143-422.11b). This



would have the effect of repealing the Charlotte ordinance (since the state anti-discrimination policy only covered race, religion, color, national origin, age, sex, and handicap, not sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression). The bill passed the House and the Senate and was signed by the Governor Pat McCrory, all in that one day (23 March 2016).

While HB2's supporters may have thought that it would quickly fade from public view, it did not, and it generated a great deal of media attention. To understand the bill's fate, and how the response to it evolved, we need to understand the arguments, or frames, that both sides used during this debate. Frames are the "particular conceptualization of an issue" that supporters or opponents use to support their position (Druckman and Chong 2007, pg. 104). Frames are important because there are many different ways to consider an issue, and the frame used can powerfully affect public opinion (Druckman and Chong 2007, pg. 109). Beyond the individual level, framing can have broader macro-level effects, shaping not just public opinion, but public policy more generally (Baumgartner et al, pg. 1058). Thus to understand the passage of and backlash to HB2, it is important to understand the frames used by both sides.

Those advocating for House Bill 2 argued that under the protection of the Charlotte provision, "predators" would enter the women's restroom and harm women and girls. The definition of predators varied from advocate to advocate, some stating that transgender women were the group to be feared, whereas others stating that cisgender<sup>6</sup> men would pretend to be transgender women to gain entry to these spaces. Regardless of how this group of "predators" were defined, it was clear that the "women and girls" that needed protection were cisgender women and girls, because removing the non-discrimination ordinance put transgender women

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<sup>6</sup> Cisgender, the opposite of transgender, describes individuals who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth.

and girls at risk, not only from the health problems arising from lack of bathroom access but also from the heightened risk of violence they would face in these spaces.

The opposition to the bill tried several different tactics. Some argued that harassment and assault would have still been illegal without House Bill 2, and this bill only puts some groups--like transgender women and girls--at more risk. Others took a different tack, and instead talked about the balance of state vs. local power, arguing that it was wrong for the state government to prevent local communities from passing separate antidiscrimination ordinances. The frames used here are of interest because they offer an example of some frames' flexibility to be used effectively by both sides at different points, as well as suggest that there are both a geographic and temporal component to which frames are most powerful for a given population.

## **Methodology**

To better understand the various framings of HB2 over time, I carefully analyzed newspaper coverage of this issue throughout the state during the first two months after the bill was passed (from 3/23/16 to 5/23/16). This period was selected because it was the period before big businesses and entertainers started threatening to cancel their planned new buildings or tour stops, when much of the coverage shifted from the bill itself to the economic consequences of this boycott. Using an archive of North Carolina newspapers (Proquest's NewsBank), I gathered not only the articles themselves but also metadata about where and when the article was written. The complete set of articles comprised 456 articles, some of them identical articles published multiple times through multiple different newspapers. I took a random sample of 100 articles (which became 83 after duplicates were removed) to read and code according to a list of frames I

generated from a smaller sample. Whenever I encountered a new frame, I would mark it and if it appeared numerous times, I would add that frame to my list.

By the end of the process, I had 13 frames, all listed in Table 1.

Table 1: The 13 Frames listed in order of Frequency

<b>Frames</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Safety	A concern of about physical safety of a certain set of individuals (ex. “women and girls”, or “transgender folk”)
Economic impact (businesses)	A viewpoint that consider the reaction of businesses to this bill (or the backlash to it) and how that might have an economic impact on NC
Impact on federal funding	A concern that this bill will impact the amount of federal funding that NC (and/or its counties) will receive for public projects: such as schools, highways, etc.
Not a problem before	The claim that prior to HB2, there were no filed cases of sexual harassment in bathrooms where a transgender person was the alleged aggressor
“Common Sense”	The idea that certain things are common sense, and thus don’t need to be explained or justified as everyone should understand and follow them
Federalism	The claim that bigger government was overreaching and imposing its will on smaller government (such as state on local or federal on state)
Religion	The invocation of religious imagery, persons, or ideology
Rights	The claim that certain people are owed a certain freedom to or from a certain thing
Bullying	The concern of certain actors (ie certain legislators, schoolchildren, etc) unjustly forcing their will on others who couldn’t defend themselves
Norms/Outliers	The claim that certain things were normal, and some were outliers and that being an outlier was bad
State pride	The invocation of patriotism towards NC and the suggestion that we shouldn’t do anything to tarnish NC’s image
Rushed process	The suggestion that the special session used to pass the bill made the process unfair/undemocratic or, that the financial cost of said session was too much.
Constituent concerns	Invoked by legislators to claim their opinion/vote was purely/mostly motivated by what their constituents wanted.

In addition to coding what the frame being used was, I also marked whether the frame was being used to in a pro-HB2, anti-, or neutral way. A tally would be added for each frame-side combination for each time a frame was invoked within each article. Beyond that, each article would be coded for its primary frame (if one existed). For neutral articles that tried to balance

pro- and anti- arguments, up to two primary frames could be assigned if both sides' arguments had separate central frames.

I additionally marked the number of people quoted in each article under the categories of advocates, federal officials, state officials, local officials, transgender people, business people, educators, and others. Each individual was only counted once, even if they were quoted multiple times in the same article, and were placed under only category. Usually placement was unambiguous, however if someone was described in the article as fitting multiple descriptors, the text was analyzed to understand which role the article focused on.

Finally, I noted whether the article mentioned at all, and if so how prominently, the non-bathroom aspects of the bill: (im)possibility of enforcement, minimum wage standardization, workplace antidiscrimination, and the removal of ability to argue discrimination cases in state court. The scale for measuring the prominence of an aspect was from 0 to 5 (with 0 = no mention, 1 = brief mention, 2 = significant mention, 3 = discussed at length, 4 = a central focus of the article, 5 = the main focus of the article). It is worth noting that there were only one 3 and one 2 recorded, with the rest being 0s and 1s.

I then compiled the metadata for the articles, regarding the date of publishing along with the paper it was published in. Then using the paper data and online research, each article was grouped by county. These two measures allowed the variation in other attributes to be compared geographically and temporally.

## **Results**

As to the main frames for each side, the pro-HB2 side focused heavily on "Safety", with "Common Sense" and "Religion" as only two other frames making up more than 5% of the

coverage. Whereas, the anti side focused on many different frames simultaneously, leading to a lack of a signal dominant frame. Clearly some of the frames (safety, federalism, bullying, economic impact) were more significant than others (common sense, religion, constituent concerns), nevertheless as no frame made up more than 13% of the coverage, no clear singular anti side frame emerged.

Table 2: Rate of frame invocation

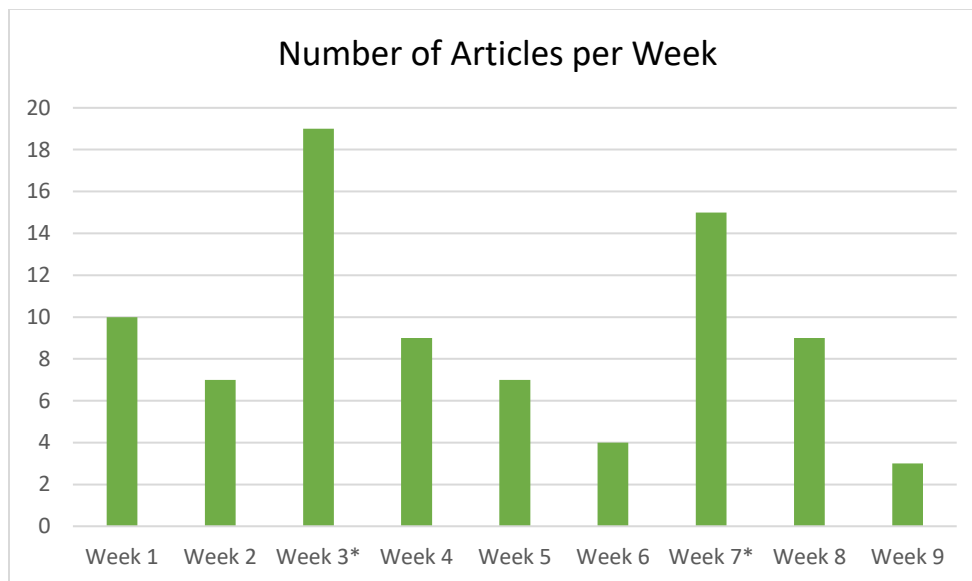
Frames	% of Pro coverage found in	% of Anti coverage found in
Safety	<b>55%</b>	<b>13%</b>
Economic impact (businesses)	3%	<b>13%</b>
Impact on Federal Funding	2%	7%
Not a problem before	0%	4%
“Common Sense”	<b>13%</b>	2%
Federalism	4%	<b>11%</b>
Religion	<b>7%</b>	5%
Rights	3%	7%
Bullying	4%	<b>11%</b>
Norms/Outlier	4%	9%
State pride	1%	9%
Rushed Process	1%	7%
Constituent concerns	3%	2%

The narrative of the pro side was more homogenous, focused on a singular primary frame with a few secondary frames. Contrastingly, the anti side had various different narratives. However, these graphs combine the data from all regions and throughout the nine-week timeframe such that interesting variations and developments are invisible.

### Temporal

The number of articles published varied by week, such that the first wave of articles reached a peak in the third week after the bill was published and a second wave occurred in the seventh week.

Graph 1: Coverage over time



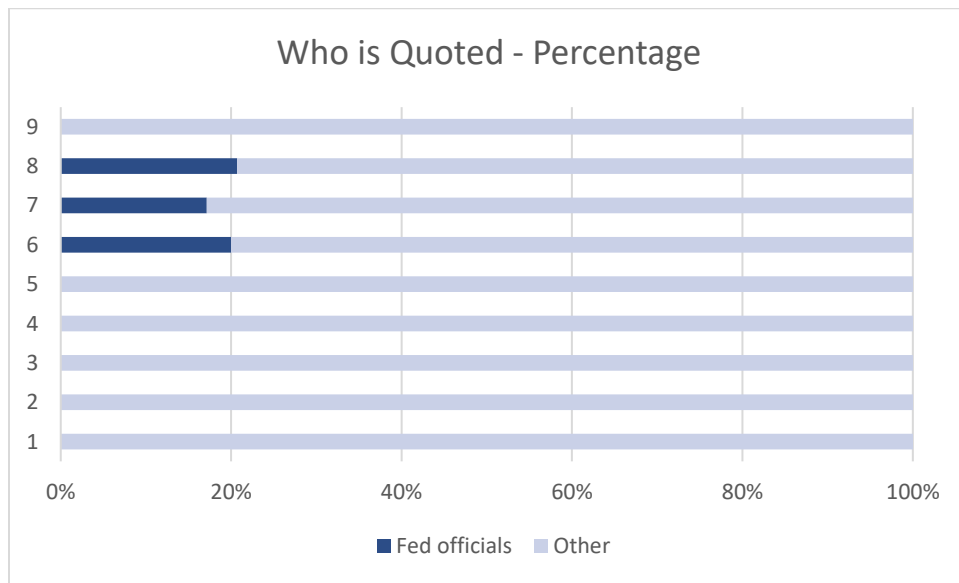
\*Week 3: The peak in the original coverage

\*Week 7: Peak due to DOJ involvement

The two waves reflected two significant events, the passage of the bill and the mailing of a letter by the Department of Justice to NC Governor, Pat McCrory, stating “as a result of ... North Carolina House Bill 2 (“H.B. 2”), both you and the State of North Carolina (the “State”) are in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (Gupta, pg. 1). The letter argued that HB2 was “discrimination against transgender state employees” and violated “guidance that educational institutions ‘generally must treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity’” and by allowing non-transgender state employees and non-transgender students to “access restrooms and changing facilities that are consistent with their gender identity in public buildings” while not allowing transgender state employees and students the same access. This letter focused on the rights frame, over any other. However, after the letter was released, coverage focused more on the fact of a letter condemning HB2 has illegal discriminatory than the details of the arguments said letter made.

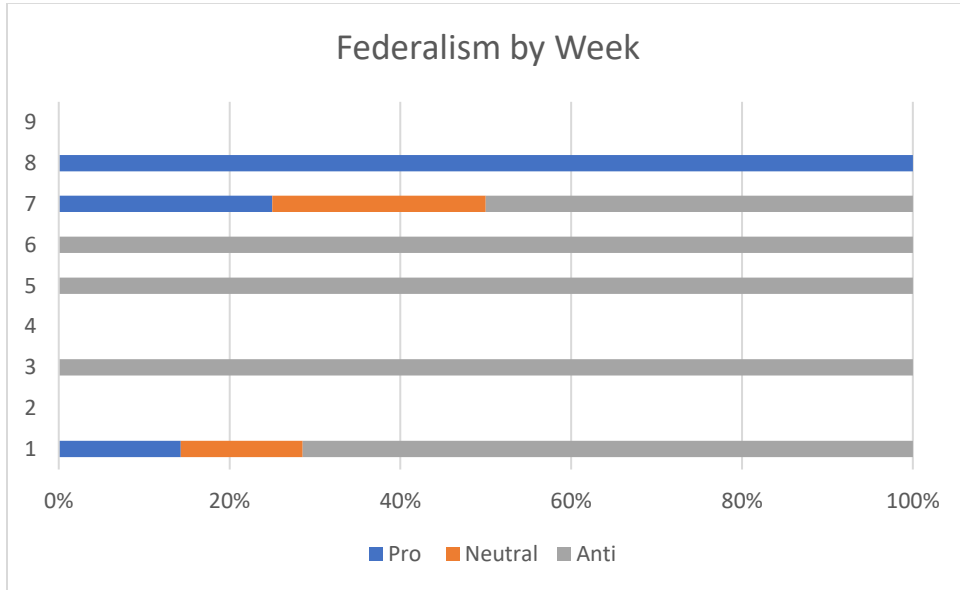
This event created two changes in the coverage of House Bill 2. First, federal officials were quoted in weeks 6, 7, and 8 (2, 6, and 6 times respectively) whereas they did not appear in any articles before then. However, many of those instances involved the same quote from North Carolina native and Attorney General Loretta Lynch and federal officials did not become a significant portion of the overall quoted people.

Graph 2: Who is quoted over time by percentage



Additionally, one of the frames, “Federalism”, the concern that balance of power between local, state, and federal government was off, switched sides.

Graph 3: Rate of Federalism frame invocation by each side over time



Previous to the Department of Justice’s letter, critics of House Bill 2 argued that state government had overreached by not only overriding Charlotte’s local ordinance but also by prohibiting all local governments from making their own non-discrimination ordinance and forcing them to follow the state’s policy. However, after the Department of Justice’s letter, supports of House Bill 2 argued the federal government had overreached by threatening to override House Bill 2 for being in violation of federal policy. This demonstrates how the entry of a previously exogenous actor, the Department of Justice, into a policy debate can shift the landscape such that frames previously relied on by a group becomes adopted by their opposition and dropped by the original group.

### Regional

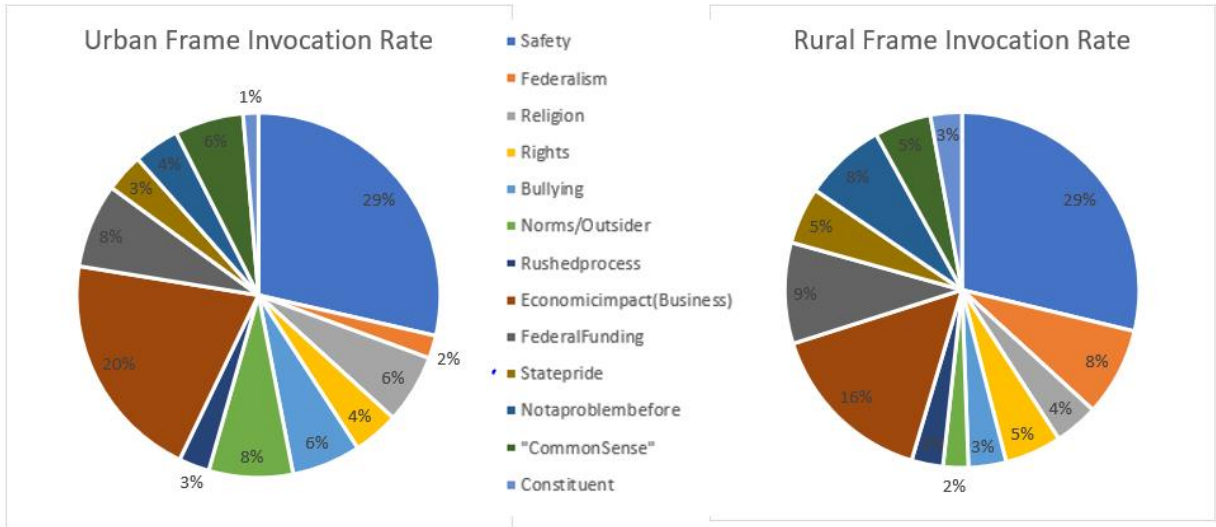
In addition to there being temporal development in prevalence of frames, there was also regional variation.



Beyond variations in county-by-county coverage, there were also differences that emerged between the urban and rural counties. Lumping together Mecklenburg, Wake, and Guilford counties (home to the three largest cities in North Carolina: Charlotte, Raleigh, and Greensboro respectively), created a group that made up approximately half of the articles (40 out of 83). Comparing this group, referred to in this paper as urban counties, against a group comprising the rest of the countries, referred to as rural countries, shows a few significant differences.

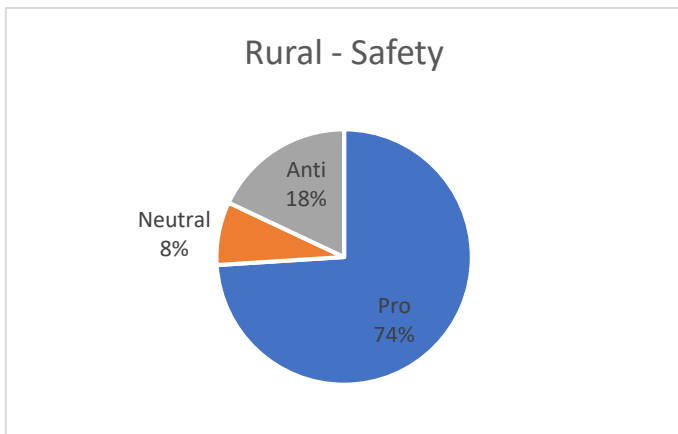
It is worth noting that this urban/rural bifurcation does not simply capture pure urban/rural divides as there are many variables that correlate with urban/rural-ness in North Carolina, from political slant (more Democrat/Republican leaning), to demographic makeup, to socio-economic variation. Thus while these differences will be called urban/rural differences, as that is what can be measured with the data available, I was not able to control for those various confounds and thus it is possible and in fact likely that it is not only an area's rural or urban status that drives these findings but rather a combination of factors that all correlate with an rural/urban status. The first of these differences is that the urban counties more often invoked the norms/outliers frame and less often invoked the federalism frame than the rural counties.

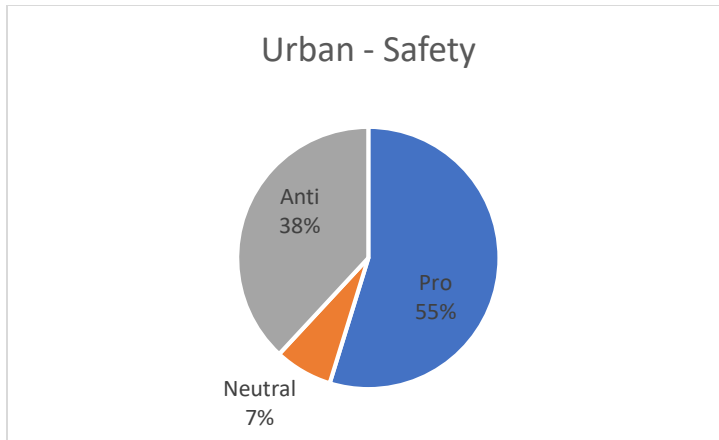
Graphs 4.1 and 4.2: Urban and Rural breakdown of frame invocation



The second of the two significant differences related to the safety frame. While the safety frame was invoked by the pro-HB2 side far more often than the anti-side, this was even more true in the rural counties' coverage than the urban. When the safety frame was invoked by the anti- side, it tended to highlight the safety threats to transgender people if they were forced to use bathrooms that conflicted with their gender. Whereas the pro side generally focused on threats to (assumed cisgender) women and girls from "predators" (Pittenger).

Graphs 5.1 and 5.2: Rural and Urban breakdown of Safety frame invocation



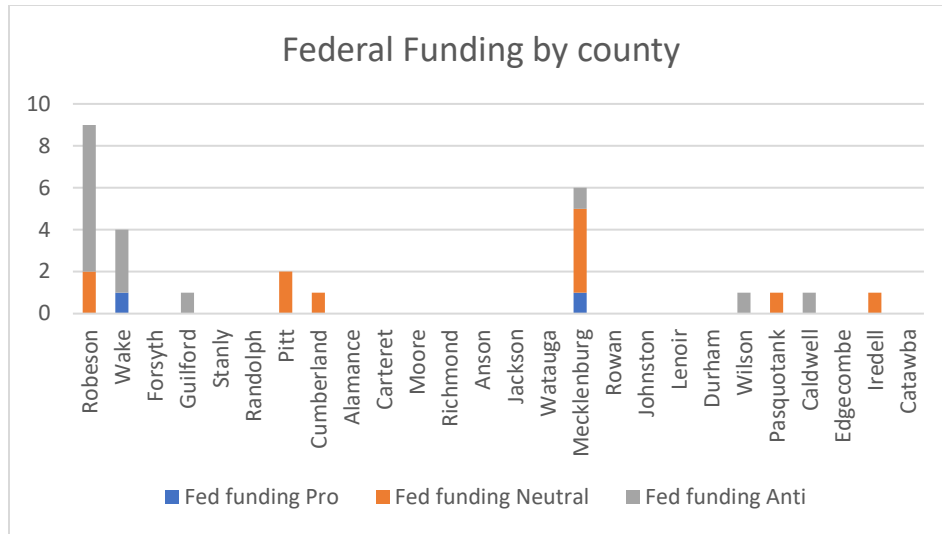


This demonstrates while the frame was invoked roughly the same number of times in rural counties as in urban ones, there was a difference in which side this frame was used to support, suggesting that not only does the amount of coverage a frame receives vary between geographic regions but also that the side a frame is used to support varies as well.

Combination: Temporal and Regional

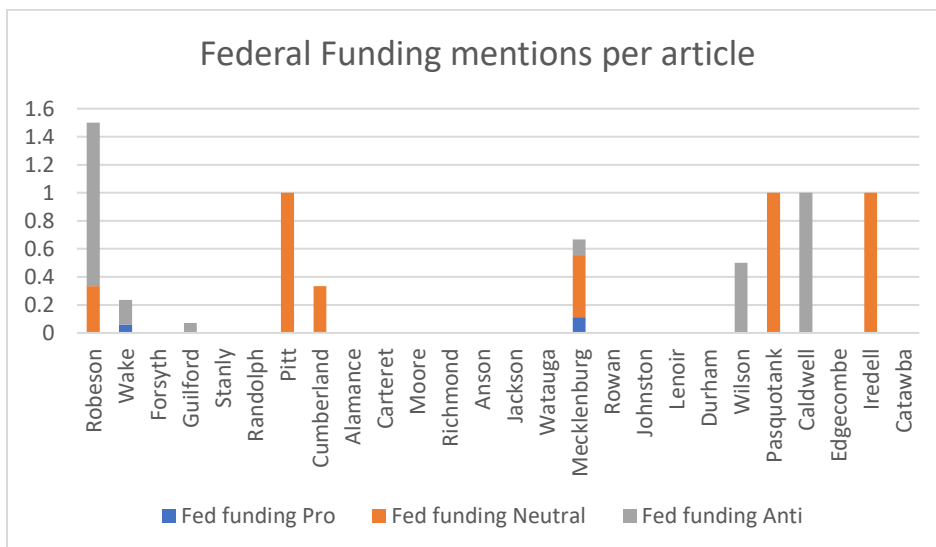
There are also situations that arise from a combination of regional and temporal factors. For example, Robeson county had almost no articles about HB2 until after the Department of Justice’s letter and from that point, the coverage focused heavily on one potential ramification of HB2, a drop in federal funding.

Graph 6: Number of Federal Funding frame invocations by county



While it may look like Mecklenburg’s coverage of federal funding is comparable to Robeson’s, when one accounts for the sheer number of articles published in Mecklenburg (home to Charlotte, the biggest city in North Carolina), it becomes clear that Robeson not only has more mentions in total of the federal funding frame but also per article.

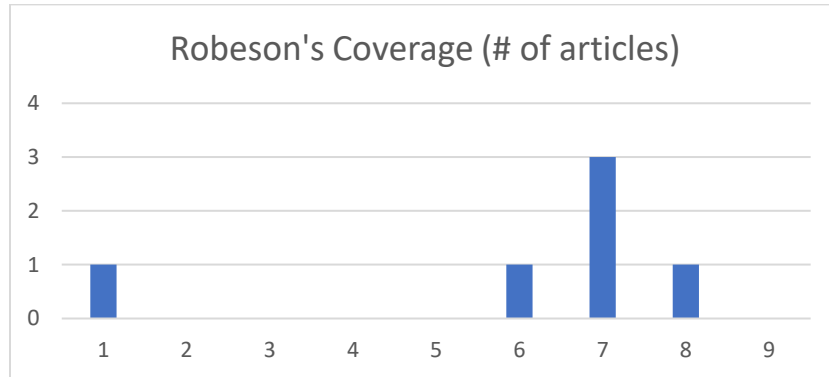
Graph 7: Federal Funding frame invocation by county per article



While the difference depicted this way appears regional, analyzed temporally shows that 7 out of Robeson’s 9 references to federal funding appear in weeks 7 through 9. What is shown here is

that not only do some frames resonate well enough with an area to dominate coverage, but also sometimes a new frame in fact drives coverage where there was little or none before.

Graph 8: Number of articles published in Robeson on HB2 over time



These articles, published in the wake of the Department of Justice’s letter explain why federal funding is an issue that Robeson county residents, especially, should be concerned about. One of the articles explained: not only had Robeson County’s “local system received almost \$32 million in federal funding during the 2015-2016 school year, including about \$11 million for nutrition programs and \$7 million for handicapped students”, but also “the Public Schools of Robeson County also uses federal money for technical education, abstinence education, children with disabilities in preschool, school improvement, infrastructure and preschool programs” (Isaac). This demonstrates that the combination of a new actor in a policy space along with a locally relevant frame can dramatically increase the amount of media coverage an issue is receiving.

## Discussion

The media coverage around House Bill 2 contributes to the theory around frames, from the process of issue definition and policy image to discussions on policy venue. My analysis

shows in the potential fungibility of frames, the importance of local coverage for uncovering geographic variation in frames, and the ability of events to differentially impact interest and coverage in an issue.

Several important conclusions emerge from this study. First, as frames are contested, their valence can change—what is a pro-LGBT rights frame at one time becomes an anti-LGBT frame at another. That is, people will co-opt frames and arguments when it benefits them, but some frames are more malleable and thus more easily adopted by either side at different times.

Initially, opponents of HB2 argued that Charlotte had the right to set its own antidiscrimination policy without interference from the state, suggesting that they were the pro-federalism side. But once the federal government intervened, federalism became a rallying cry for those who supported HB2, since they wanted to avoid the federal government overturning their policy. When the question of venue was local city councils versus state legislature, those against the bill argued for the more area-specific actor over imposition from a larger body. Whereas when the question of venue became state legislature versus the federal Department of Justice, those against the bill fell silent and the arguments for area-specific policy over imposition became common on the pro-HB2 side. This reflects the recognition that certain policy venues are more hospitable to certain sides on a particular issue at a given time.

This shows us how in particular arguments about decentralization vary in valence, and those vary based on the institutional actors involved. There's a parallel here to numerous other arguments in recent years. For example, this can be seen in other contexts in how conservatives prefer state legislatures as venues for determining Voter ID laws but not for gun laws; when states move to pass stricter gun regulation laws instead of stricter Voter ID laws, conservatives

move from “let the states decide” to arguing for the appropriateness of the federal level as venue (Lee).

Further, different frames carry different connotations in different areas. Regional variability can certainly be seen in the differential use of the pro-HB2 main frame, safety, in that the pro-use of the safety frame was especially common in rural counties, whereas in urban counties many invocations of the safety frame were attempts to use it against HB2. This reflects how different contexts change the understanding of an issue. For example, Pew Research found a rural/urban divide in “the extent to which [people] associate the right to own guns with their own personal sense of freedom”. Even when only considering gun owners, “there are significant differences based on the type of community in which they live. More than eight-in-ten rural gun owners (82%) say the right to own guns is essential to their personal sense of freedom, compared with 59% of gun owners in urban areas” (Igielnik). Thus a freedom-based frame might be used more to support the right to own guns in rural areas than urban ones, as it resonates more with locals’ understanding of what the issue is about. For House Bill 2, safety as used by the pro- side, with its focus on the dangers posed to cisgender women and girls by predators, may have resonated more with rural counties, whereas in urban counties, safety as used by the anti- side with its focus on the dangers posed to transgender people of all genders or on their view that the bill did little to actually protect cisgender women and girls from anything, resonated more.

Beyond that, the coverage of HB2 demonstrates not only is there regional variability in the impact of certain frames, but also that a regional variability can emerge where none existed before because of outside events making frames newly relevant to an area. Robeson county had little to no coverage of HB2 before the Department of Justice letter, which then drove a spike in coverage almost exclusively focused on the potential ramifications this issue could have on the

federal funding that Robeson receives. This suggests that regional variability can have a temporal component, as changes occur that are differentially impactful or interesting to different regions. Additionally, this finding would not have been visible through the analysis of national papers, such as the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*, or even through important state papers, such as the *Raleigh News & Observer* or the *Charlotte Observer*. Rather it was only visible through analysis of local coverage, indicating the value of noting, analyzing, and discussing local media. The impact of such a bill on one counties' school budget likely wouldn't take center stage in a national newspaper, but nevertheless it was important enough to drive and influence local coverage.

In the end, this research demonstrates that while the number of articles arguing against House Bill 2 strongly outnumbered those supporting, they did not have a single unified frame to push against the supporters, but rather relied on many different arguments that, like the supporters arguments, responded to regional conditions and external events. The pro-HB2 and anti-HB2 camps were talking past each other, to their own audiences and remaining unresponsive to or unconcerned with the arguments brought up by the other side.

Even though the anti-HB2 coverage was more fractured, ie used a higher number of arguments instead of focusing on one or two strongest, local opponents of HB2 found allies in the Department of Justice in week 6, and in a short period after the widow of analysis, a large group comprised of celebrities, such as musician Bruce Springsteen, and businesses such as Lionsgate and PayPal. This suggests that HB2 bill opponents did not have to settle on a single or small set of frames before they were able to expand their coalition and begin to convince businesses and performers to exert economic pressure in retaliation for this bill.



This politicization of business is interesting to note. While in the past businesses were willing to connect themselves to certain valence issues, such as supporting the troops (Clampin), the decision to take a position on wedge issues, such as House Bill 2, is a new development. This is especially true given that such positions were supported through decisions with large economic ramifications, such as cancelling new offices or stops on a tour.

This so-called activism on the behalf of businesses/performers seem to motivated by the desire to avoid embarrassing their brand. It is worth asking, as Robert Pittenger does in one of the articles from that time period, what counts as “in violation of [a company’s] values and principles”? For example, PayPal, in reaction to HB2, “[cancelled] plans to build a global operations center in Charlotte”, however they still continued to do “business in five countries where the penalty [for homosexual behavior] is death”. So why is HB2 enough to convince PayPal to stay out of North Carolina, but harsher policies elsewhere are not enough to keep PayPal out of those areas? This returns to one of theoretical underpinnings of framing theory, intermittent attention (Baumgartner, pg. 10). The fact that House Bill 2 was receiving a lot of attention as a recent development compared to the relatively static laws of Maldives, Brunei, and other anti-gay regimes, likely explains why PayPal responded to one but not the other.

To return to House Bill 2, its economic backlash, from PayPal and others, had far reaching impacts; one ECU political science professor, Jonathan Morris, said while before HB2, State Governor McCrory was favored to his Democratic opponent Cooper, “North Carolina voters knew that McCrory was responsible for HB2 and the loss of jobs” (Birch). In November, Cooper beat out McCrory for the governorship under the promise to repeal HB2. This business-activism development is not isolated to this particular case, but rather is part of a larger trend. In an age where social media is both of place of competing political ideologies and competing brands, as

Jon Ronson said in his book *So You've been Publicly Shamed*, “we’ve created a stage for constant artificial high drama. Every day a new person” or brand “emerges as a magnificent hero or a sickening villain.” On this stage, businesses are aware of who and what their brand is seen as connected to because of the large impact it could have. Sometimes they attempt to cultivate an apolitical image, such as what L.L. Bean attempted to do in January 2017 after Linda Bean, “the granddaughter and heir of the company founder”, donated a group in support of President Trump (Woolhouse). In response to a boycott of L.L. Bean organized because of Linda Bean’s action, the Executive Chairman stated in a Facebook post (L.L. Bean):

“We are deeply troubled by the portrayal of L.L.Bean as a supporter of any political agenda. L.L.Bean does not endorse political candidates, take positions on political matters, or make political contributions. Simply put, we stay out of politics. To be included in this boycott campaign is simply misguided”

However often this awareness results in decisions to clearly align/dis-align a company with/against a certain political action or entity. For example, in August of 2017, President Trump’s “major business advisory councils”, councils “which hosted many of the top corporate leaders in America” that were also known as Trump’s CEO councils, choose to dissolve after the President “appeared to show sympathy for some of the people who marched alongside the neo-Nazis and white supremacists in Charlottesville” (McGregory). Not only did representatives of JM Morgan Chase, Campbell Soup, General Electric, among others resign, but also publicly condemned President Trump’s words and actions, and in so doing, distanced themselves and their brands from that of the President’s and his “deeply troubling” comments.

Obviously, the reaction is not simply of businesses to politicians but also voters and politicians to businesses. For example, in February 2018, after a school shooting in Florida, Delta ended a “promotional discount with the National Rifle Association”, and then was threaten that “conservative lawmakers” in Georgia, home to one of Delta’s major hubs, would “remove a \$50 million sale exemption on jet fuel” (Fausset and Hsu). Clearly, business decisions are political decisions—and vice versa—in the contemporary era.

The history of House Bill 2, traced through local ordinance through state-level legislation to national news story, teaches us about the differential relevance of frames over time and location, the malleability of frames, and the role businesses and brands play in the political landscape. It helps us understand the differential strategies employed by each side, as the Pro side focused primarily on one argument whereas the Anti side focused on several different arguments simultaneously. Additionally, it showed the torrential impact that business boycotts can have on local economies, and thus on later political elections. In summary, House Bill 2 provides a situation ripe for analysis of external actors and institutions (from the federal government to private businesses), and of differential framing techniques.

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