

# Strategy, Narratives, and Reading the Public: Developing a Micro-Level Theory of Political Strategies within the Narrative Policy Framework

Kellee J. Kirkpatrick, James W. Stoutenborough, Sarah N. Davis  
Department of Political Science



## Abstract

Research shows that stakeholders strategically switch away from their preferred policy narrative to a different policy narrative in an effort to better appeal to the public. This level of strategic decision making is not surprising, but frameworks such as the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) do not currently outline a theoretical explanation to predict when and why this behavior occurs at the micro level. While the NPF deals with strategic decision-making, it has done so at the meso-level. Thus far, NPF micro-level development has focused on explaining why the target of a policy narrative would choose to adopt a particular narrative as their own view on the issue. This project begins the process of developing micro-level theory to outline how an individual engages in strategic decision-making.

## Third Person Effect

- Individuals tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behaviors of others.
- Mitigating Factors
  - Message Desirability
    - An individual will assess whether the message will likely produce personally desirable outcomes.
  - Social Distance
    - An individual will assess if they are socially different than the others.
  - Intellectual Distance
    - An individual will assess if they are intellectually different than the others.

Strategic Selection NPF Micro-Level Hypotheses		
Hypothesis	Exact Wording	Extant Research
H1	Policy entrepreneurs strategically select policy narratives they believe the public will be most likely to accept	Identifiable Reference 1 (2016), Current Project (Qualitative)
H2a	Policy entrepreneurs will be more likely to select narratives that they perceive the public views as more socially desirable	Current Project (Qualitative)
H2b	Policy entrepreneurs will be more likely to abandon their preferred policy narrative if they perceive that public views it as socially undesirable	Current Project (Qualitative)
H3a	Policy entrepreneurs will strategically choose narratives based on perceived social distance from the public	Current Project (Quantitative)
H3b	Policy entrepreneurs will be more likely to abandon their preferred policy narrative if they perceive larger social difference from the public	Current Project (Quantitative)
H4a	Policy entrepreneurs will strategically choose narratives based on perceived intellectual distance from the public	Current Project (Qualitative and Quantitative)
H4b	Policy entrepreneurs will be more likely to abandon their preferred policy narrative if they perceive larger intellectual distance from the public.	Current Project (Qualitative and Quantitative)

## Research Question

When and why do stakeholders strategically change their narrative preferences for the public?

## Methods

- Portneuf River Stakeholder Survey: 87 Responses in total
- Follow up Stakeholder Interviews: 20 in-person interviews.

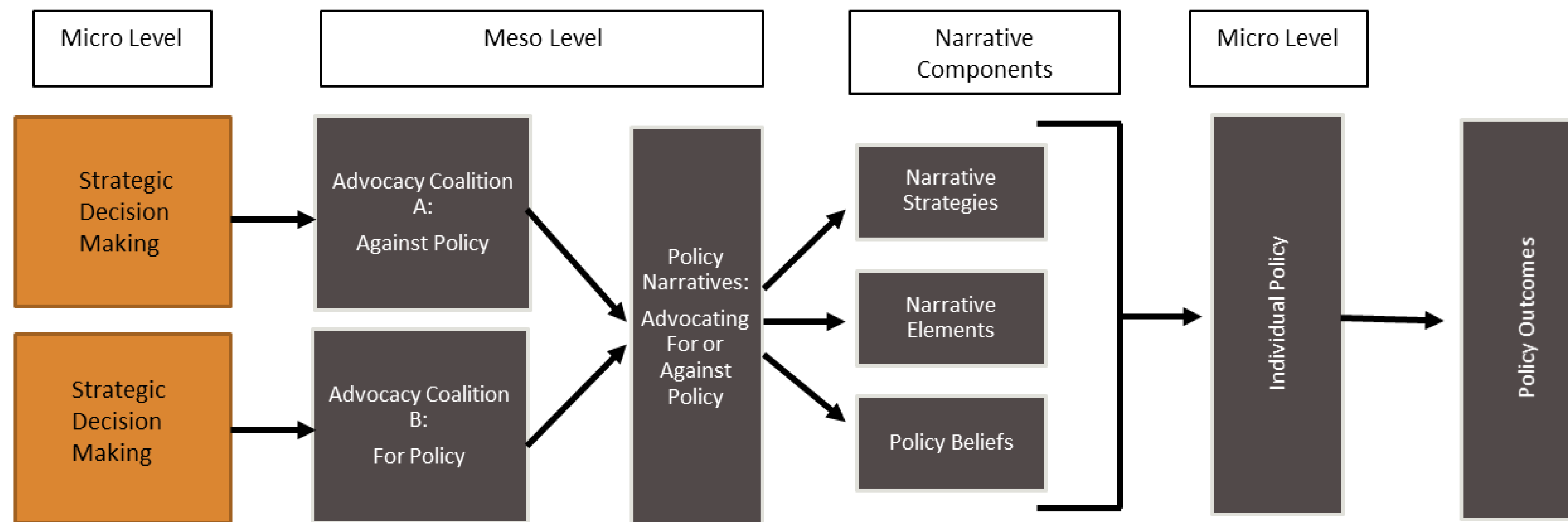
## Results and Conclusions

- Stakeholders sometimes change their preferred narrative for the public based on perceived intellectual and social distance.
- Stakeholders can incorrectly assume how the public will react to a message.
- Portneuf River stakeholders are trying to be strategic in their communications with the public, but those communications can be misguided; meaning that their efforts may fail.

## Recommendations

- Stakeholders should not make assumptions about public preferences, but rather rely on data gathered from interviews, surveys, and/or focus groups.

## Model of Meso-Level Narrative Policy Framework with Addition of TPE



## Stakeholder Narrative Preferences & Recommendations

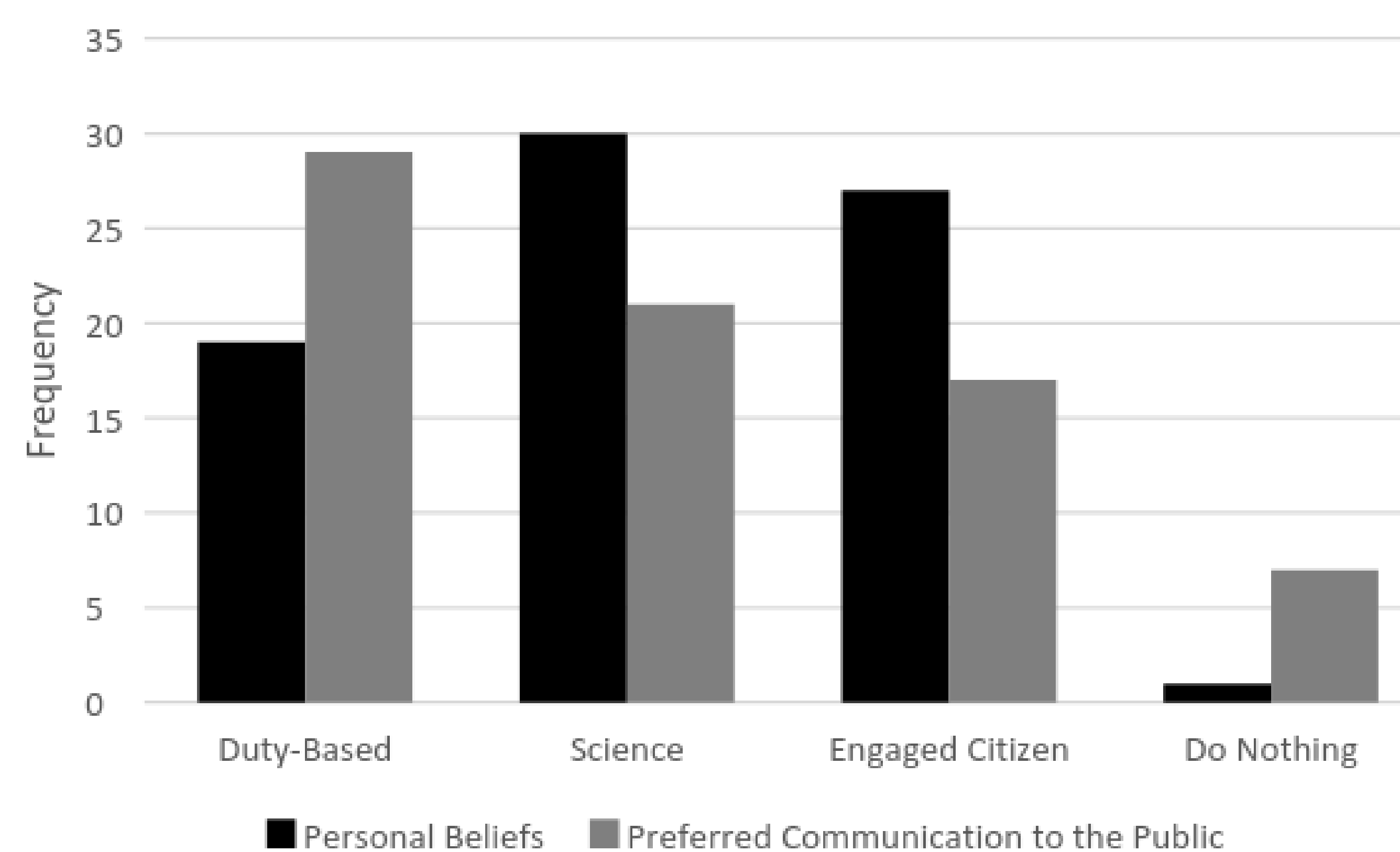


Table 6: Summary of Hypothesis Support in Analyses

	H1	H2a	H2b	H3a	H3b	H4a	H4b
Qualitative Interviews	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Base Models							
Abandonment	-	-	-	-	No	-	No
Recommend Duty-Based	-	-	-	Yes	-	Yes	-
Recommend Science	-	-	-	No	-	No	-
Recommend Engaged Citizen	-	-	-	Yes	-	Yes (2)	-
Recommend Do Nothing	-	-	-	Yes	-	No	-
Specific Models							
Abandon Duty-Based	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	No
Abandon Science	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	Yes
Abandon Engaged Citizen	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	Yes
Switch to Duty-Based	-	-	-	No	-	Yes	-
Switch to Science	-	-	-	No	-	Yes	-
Switch to Engaged Citizen	-	-	-	No	-	Yes	-
Switch to Do Nothing	-	-	-	Yes	-	No	-
Maintain Duty-Based	-	-	-	No	-	No	-
Maintain Science	-	-	-	No	-	No	-
Maintain Engaged Citizen	-	-	-	Yes	-	Yes	-

