Op-Eds and Commentary

The time is right. Your public is calling. Now how will you turn mountains of data and research into a short op-ed?

Today you learn …

Guidelines for Op-Ed, Commentary, and Opinion Writing

featuring Thomas K. Lew, MD, PhD
in conversation with Luciana Herman, PhD (SLS Lecturer & Program Director, Law & Policy Lab)
GLOBAL CAUSES
OP-ED
RULES
The OpEd Project's mission is to change who writes history.

We are a community of thought leaders, journalists, commentary writers and activists who proactively share our skills, knowledge and connections across color, creed, class, age, ability, gender, orientation, and beyond. Through our programs we elevate the ideas and knowledge of underrepresented expert voices, including women, and to accelerate solutions to the world’s biggest problems--problems that cannot be solved justly or sustainably without a diversity of voices, expertise, experience and identity. We have stunning results. We believe the best ideas, regardless of where they come from, should have a chance to be heard and to change the world.

The OpEd Project is an Echoing Green Project.
Op-eds are a promising tool to promote conversations about why science and technology topics are important to all members of society.

We are excited to be collaborating with Science Rising to help individuals compose, target, and submit compositions to their state and local and newspapers. Our goal is to support writers who can help spread evidence-informed ideas and concise calls-to-action to people and communities who may not consume mainstream scientific news. We believe that hearing a community member’s voice (yours!) is a more powerful way to create change.

Read more below for our expected timeline & guidelines and please feel free to reach out to opeds@scipolnetwork.org with any questions!

OP-ED ACCELERATOR TIMELINE & GUIDELINES

https://scipolnetwork.org/page/op-ed-accelerator
Science Policy Can’t Be Simply about Science

As early-career researchers, we argue that it also has to prioritize justice and social equity.
Spreading Your Message

• Target your publication
• Think about social media
• Tweet & post to your accounts first & tag others
• Kickstart the issue
Spreading Your Message

- Reframe the debate
- Deepen discussion
- Heighten your credibility
Preventive care in the best of times can reduce health risks in the worst of times. **Thomas Ken Lew**, an attending physician at Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare, writes about the health issues that can make people more likely to get very sick from COVID-19.

Severe coronavirus is more likely if you neglect your health. Many of our sickest coronavirus patients have undiagnosed chronic conditions. Don't neglect your health.

**Fear of contracting COVID-19 should not stop you from seeking medical care when you need it. It is easier than ever to make an appointment with your doctor through telephone visits and video chats,** writes Stanford Health Care-ValleyCare's **Thomas Ken Lew**.

Opinion: Don't let COVID-19 fears stop you from seeking needed care. A doctor's advice: Delaying needed care can be more dangerous than the virus itself.
Happening tomorrow! #Stanford students, post-docs, residents, and affiliates: Join us for an expert panel and skill-building session on global health communications and advocacy on May 10!

@StanfordMed
@StanfordDeptMed
@StanfordJourn

globalhealth.stanford.edu/event/communic...
WHAT CAN DO FOR YOU

WHY THEY NEED TO TAKE YOUR VIEW

YOU CAN DO FOR THEM

THE YS

YOU SHOUL

WHAT

YOU NEED TO TAK
Guidelines

When opportunity strikes and you have a hook
And the forum is right
And your research illuminates something new
Then take a stand!
Structure & Style

1. The lede or news hook
2. Motive or Theme
3. Evidence, Arguments, Research
4. Turning point, Ask, or Aha!
5. Open or Closed Ending
6. Cogent Argument
How do you compress all that research?
Frame issue for an audience

- Who is your target audience? Where will you publish?
- What example explains or resonates best with that audience?

- What are your values? What are their values?
- What are the phrases, images, or concepts that express your values in common terms?

- Does your message leave anything important out? If it does, is that a strategic choice? Have you anticipated counterargument?

- Create your central frame through key words that resonate.

Framing the Issue: How Common Values Create Public Support
Hook the reader with a compelling lede

- A good lede has an opening hook that seizes on the urgency and critical nature of the issue.
- The lede has a motive that frames the problems and may point toward the solution.
- It should be direct and to the point.
- It should underscore why your issue matters.
- Ask yourself: Why today?
As a doctor, I've seen what an AR-15 does to the body. Unless we act, so will many Americans.

I'd like to be able to tell my patients who've suffered gunshot wounds that no one else will suffer the way they have. I can't.

Dr. Thomas K. Lew
Opinion contributor
USA Today
04/23/23
2
Hook
Motive
Theme
Hook
When I was in the operating room observing as surgeons repaired the bleeding organs and frayed muscles of a gunshot victim, one horrifying image came to mind: shredded meat.

Motive
This was during my trauma rotation years ago in my medical training, and by then, I had seen a few patients with gunshot wounds. But this particular young man lying on the operating table in front of me was shot with a semi-automatic rifle. The damage from any bullet to the human body is astounding, but this was particularly terrifying.

These images have come to mind in recent days as we yet again have a slew of gun violence across our great nation.

Theme
Something needs to be done; legislation finally needs to be passed to address gun violence. And as a culture, we need to acknowledge that this is a problem that needs to be fixed.
Hook / Lede
Motive / Theme
BREAKOUT
SESSION
3 EVIDENCE: Help them UNDERSTAND the issue and your motive
Core Characteristics of Op-Ed

**WHO and WHAT / Where**
1. Describes the problem in terms of WHO the major player/s are, sometimes framed as a representative example.
2. Concisely *states the problem or issue* often in term of current policy or as a situation.

**WHY**
1. Explains why the issue is troubling. May offers *reasons* for changes to that policy or situation.
2. May signpost *key options* or approaches; sometimes this is simply stated as the status quo, sometimes it includes alternatives that seek to remedy or address the problem.
3. May signpost the *pros and cons* of key options or may highlight the *general trends* in addressing the issue.
4. References key data, examples, statistics, or scholarly analysis as evidence of WHY.

**HOW / When**
1. Recommends course/s of action or *states findings* that may lead to recommendations in future policy work.
2. Offers *supporting reasons* for selecting or highlighting that course of action or findings.
3. May offer a *timeline* to carry out the recommendations.

**SO WHAT or THE ASK**
1. Returns to the motive or central objective to underscore the *urgency* of the issue and/or importance of acting on the recommendations.
I'm a gun owner: I'm a sitting duck until commonsense gun laws are on the books.

We seem to be in a cycle where mass shootings happen, we are upset, but then nothing is done. Arguments are made that it is too soon after shooting, or that politicians are politicizing a tragedy, or that any gun legislation tramples Second Amendment rights. Time goes on, and the issue fades to the background.

Guns are a public health crisis: I survived a mass shooting – and found Americans aren't all that divided on gun safety.

Want fewer shootings?: Pass tougher gun laws. Our research shows lax laws fuel violence.
We aren't helpless as a nation

But we as a nation are not helpless and can make a change. We need to put pressure on our elected leaders for more comprehensive gun control. We need to expand background checks and reinstate the federal assault rifle ban, which was shown effective in reducing mass shootings. We also need to be open to more studies on gun violence, research the government has traditionally been resistant toward putting money into.

I’d like to be able to tell them that no one else will suffer the way they have, and that the mass shootings shown so frequently on the news these days will slow down and stop. I continue to hope this will be true, but we need our elected officials to act, and to act now before more lives are lost.
1. Personal experience: Staying in Las Vegas hotel when a shooter fired an AR-15 into a music festival, killing 58 people.

2. Research: We also need to be open to more studies on gun violence, research the government has traditionally been resistant toward putting money into.

3. Professional experience (returns to and resonates w/ personal experience): Today, while I no longer am in the operating room, I still see the effects of gun violence on my patients as a hospital medicine doctor.

3. Case study or examples: Many of those I have treated in the hospital have become paralyzed from a bullet to the spine. They come in repeatedly for infections or blood clots from immobility. Others have mental health difficulties or post-traumatic stress disorder from their experience with gun violence.
SWOT is a tool to quickly outline strengths – weaknesses / opportunities – threats of status quo and alternative approaches.
Evidence and Data Breakout
the ASK
We can make science policy more equitable by holding our institutions, including professional societies and universities, accountable. We demand our organizations adopt clear, public values that advocate for evidence-based policy as well as social justice.

We call on our organizations to incorporate justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) considerations in all aspects of their work, including event planning.

Finally, we advocate for “Hill Day” agendas that go beyond research funding and toward urgent issues including application of research for societal benefit and equity, sexual harassment and immigration policy.

In addition to pushing for structural changes, scientists and engineers can take action as individuals to increase and expand their political engagement.
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Memorable Close

What happens if we do not take action? What is the status quo? Where will that take us in the future?

What would happen if we do take action?
What is the better path for future?

Why is this urgent? Remind reader of why this matters.

Do …
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Don’t …

Urgency
The Ask
And a Memorable Closing
Breakout
Why the NYPD’s decision to drop a unit that spies on Muslims may help counterterrorism

By Rachel Gillum  April 16, 2014

Muslim community and supporters protest the NYPD surveillance operations of Muslim communities during a rally in Foley Square on Friday, Nov. 18, 2011, in New York. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

The New York Police Department announced Tuesday that it would disband a special unit charged with detecting terrorist threats by secretly conducting surveillance on Muslims in New York. Applauded by Muslim and civil rights organizations, such a move could actually boost U.S. counterterrorism efforts, according to data from the Muslim American National Opinion Survey (MANOS) of which I am the principal investigator.
The MANOS data reveal that even after accounting for a variety of background features and baseline attitudes about police, the 13 percent of Muslim respondents living in New York are significantly more cynical about how police will likely treat a Muslim criminal suspect, compared to other Muslims across the country.

**Police will Behave Fairly toward Muslim Suspect**

![Bar chart showing 34% in agreement and 14% disagreement in New York compared to the national average.](chart)

*Source: Muslim American National Opinion Survey 2013*

In a paper assessing how Muslim-Americans develop opinions about U.S. law enforcement, I find that those who are most familiar with the American system and its laws are best able to identify when law enforcement is violating its principles of equality and fairness. Using a randomized experiment, I find that U.S.-born Muslims are 17 percent less likely to say that police will behave fairly when dealing with a Muslim suspect, compared to a non-Muslim suspect. This is a striking difference relative to the beliefs of foreign-born Muslims, who like other U.S. immigrants are significantly more trusting of police.
In a related paper, I show using regression analysis that these expectations of fairness are directly related to willingness to help law enforcement. Figure 3 shows that U.S.-born Muslims are significantly less willing to provide police information on a criminal case involving a Muslim suspect.
There Is No Global Jihadist 'Movement'

The world of Islamist fighters is deeply fragmented and constantly shifting.

Reports last week indicated that the Nusra Front, a major anti-Assad jihadist...
There Is No Global Jihad 'Movement'

The world of Islamist fighters is deeply fragmented and constantly shifting.

Reports last week indicated that the Nusra Front, a major anti-Assad rebel group, has split from Al-Qaeda.

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The Islamic State's Relationships in Syria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Al-Qaeda</th>
<th>Jabhat al-Nusra</th>
<th>Hezbollah</th>
<th>Suqour al-Sham</th>
<th>Liwa al-Tawhid</th>
<th>Ahrar al-Sham</th>
<th>Free Syrian Army</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2012</td>
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Legend:
- **Black**: Affiliates or Allies
- **Red**: Rivals
- **Gray**: No Relation
- **Light Gray**: Not Yet Formed
Showing some initiative, ISI set up the Nusra Front as its Syrian affiliate in 2011, attempting to absorb the group fully after renaming itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in 2013. But the leaders of the Nusra Front rejected that merger. By 2014 Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's successor as the leader of al-Qaeda, had had enough of al-Baghdadi's disobedience, including its attempt to take over the Nusra Front without consulting al-Qaeda central, and at that point the split between ISIS and al-Qaeda was final. Asked to choose between ISIS and al-Qaeda, Nusra essentially chose the latter.

The new ISIS was now pitted against the governments of both Iraq and Syria, an array of local groups in both countries, including elements of the Free Syrian Army—the loose coalition of secular, “moderate” rebel groups backed by the West—and the Kurdish pesh merga, as well as the Nusra Front and other al-Qaeda affiliates. Some important Syrian groups that had joined in the Islamic Front, a coalition of seven major Islamist groups whose ideology fell somewhere between that of the moderates and the jihadists, initially pledged allegiance to ISIS but later recanted. (To add to the confusion, rival groups occasionally cooperate on the battlefield, forming the kinds of tactical alliances that are not uncommon in such tangled conflicts.) Despite what seemed to be an unfavorable starting position, ISIS made impressive territorial gains in Syria and Iraq. By the spring of 2014 ISIS astonished the West by sweeping almost unopposed into Mosul, and in June the offensive culminated with the declaration of the caliphate under the aegis of the Islamic State, now no longer limited to Iraq and Syria.
PRACTICE

Cogent Argument

Not Comprehensive Superfluity
Basic Structure

• Lede or Hook
• The Problem or Issue
• Your Motive
• Your Credibility
• Evidence 1, 2, 3 (SWOT)
• Brief Counterargument and Rebuttal (SWOT)
• (Return to) Motive and Theme
• Options for Change
• Recommendations
• The Ask
• Memorable Closing Line
Keep your writing simple and direct

• Imagine the reader as having a basic level of interest in current events and public policy, but no real expertise. You are the expert.

• Keep your sentences short, direct, informal, and dramatic.
• Write in a natural voice, as if speaking to a colleague.

• Avoid jargon or academic language.

• Be precise and concise.

• A good style book is Joseph Williams, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*.
7 Where will you publish?
Aid under Fire: Development Projects and Civil Conflict


DOI: 10.1257/aer.104.6.1833

Abstract

We estimate the causal effect of a large development program on conflict in the Philippines through a regression discontinuity design that exploits an arbitrary poverty threshold used to assign eligibility for the program. We find that barely eligible municipalities experienced a large increase in conflict casualties compared to barely ineligible ones. This increase is mostly due to insurgent-initiated incidents in the early
NASA mission will ‘fist bump’ an asteroid to reveal the Solar System’s secrets

OSIRIS-REx spacecraft is about to execute a nail-biting manoeuvre to scoop up rock samples from the asteroid Bennu and send them back to Earth.

Alexandra Witze
NEWS 16 Oct 2020

COVID research updates: Are rapid coronavirus tests effective? It depends

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Chris Funk
WORLD VIEW 15 Oct 2020

What it’s really like to do science amid COVID-19

Quirin Schiermeier, Hcily Else ... Nisha Gaind
NEWS 15 Oct 2020

How anti-ageing drugs could boost COVID vaccines in older people

Cassandra Willyard
NEWS FEATURE 14 Oct 2020

Why Nature supports Joe Biden for US president

EDITORIAL 14 Oct 2020

First room-temperature superconductor excites — and baffles — scientists

Davide Castelvecchi
NEWS 14 Oct 2020
Let’s study gun violence in the Texas Medical Center [Opinion]

By Michael B. Bagg | Aug. 16, 2019

A gun violence prevention research center located in existing centers and analyzing the impact of potent enforcement tools could provide valuable insights.

All-electric building codes for new homes would protect our health - and our kids’ health

BY GUEST COMMENTARY
SEPTEMBER 30, 2020
Many dictators have sought nuclear weapons; some succeeded, some came close, others failed spectacularly. A careful examination of two such regimes illuminates why. Today, many dictatorships are becoming personalist, in which leaders dominate decision-making at the expense of formal state institutions. According to recent research, personalist dictators are more likely to pursue nuclear weapons and are less likely to get them, but they can become increasingly dangerous and unrestrained if they succeed.

In my recent book, “Unclear Physics: Why Iraq and Libya failed to build nuclear weapons,” I revisit the unsuccessful attempts in those two countries. Libya failed badly at its nuclear-weapons program, whereas Iraq came dangerously close to a major breakthrough when its program was interrupted by the 1991 Gulf War cease-fire.
SciPolBites: Voting by Mail

Sep 08, 2020

SciPolBites is a series of reflections from NSPN members about current issues in science and policy. In this SciPolBite, three members share their perspectives on the health consequences, accessibility concerns, and security risks associated with voting by mail.

Kat Cruz (@katherranne)

Vote-by-Mail: A Public Health Issue

Richard Cordray warned that this will be “the worst fall, election day will be right in the middle of it. All of those areas, and touch screens or shared pens
For more background on writing op-eds, use these resources:

- NSPN Op-Ed Accelerator
- Op-Ed Project: theopedproject.org/
- Harvard Kennedy School Communications Program: How to Write an Op-Ed – Classic Structure

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