This passage is adapted from Carlos Maza, "Why You Still Don't Understand the Green New Deal," © Vox, 2019.

When a new large-scale public policy proposal emerges, the media almost immediately separate the substance of the idea from its optics—that is, how the politics of the issue will play out between political parties and their electorates. Related news segments tend to be short on the policy's content but long on its implications for political operators. The result is a populace that is both poorly informed and increasingly polarized.

The tendency of news organizations to focus on the political consequences of policies rather than on the policies' merits and drawbacks is called *tactical framing*—a term coined by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center. In her research, Jamieson has found that print articles and broadcast segments written to include elements of tactical framing not only fail to adequately inform viewers of the issues at hand, but also simultaneously make them more pessimistic about the potential effectiveness of the policy meant to address the given challenges, even though they may lack a basic understanding of what those challenges are or what the proposal intends to do about them.

To some observers of media and politics, this phenomenon comes as no surprise. "By encouraging an 'us versus them' mindset and pushing consumers further into their opposite political corners, news organizations create content that keeps consumers engaged and advertisers paying the bills," says Ken Felderson, a media critic. The daily *battle royale* that takes place between pundits and commentators on cable news and in the opinion sections of the nation's most widely read publications seems to bear this out: the drama of a fight is difficult to resist. "It's not that news organizations deem the issues unimportant—" Felderson adds, "it's that they push us to see the tactical frame as more important."

To study just how tactical framing affects news consumers, Jamieson and her colleagues performed a series of experiments in which they provided their subjects with three different news articles that covered a city's mayoral election. The first article focused on the issues of the race—the problems the candidates needed to address, and the candidates' proposals for addressing them. The second article emphasized the tactical frame, focusing not on the issues, but on the potential consequences of the candidates' views on their political futures. The third article started with a tactical frame and transitioned to the issues. After reading the articles, the subjects were asked to comment about the race, and to answer questions that tested their retention of the information they had read.

The results of the experiment were striking. In their comments, the subjects who had read the second and third articles were much more likely than those who had read the first article to express hopelessness or pessimism (e.g., "The candidates are making false promises"), and far less likely than those who had read the first article to accurately recall the basic policy details that were presented in the articles.

Both parties—news makers and news consumers—bear some responsibility for the rise of tactical framing. After all, it takes two to tango, and the media will push what it perceives its audience wants. The difference, though, is the awareness of what is going on. Media organizations plan their segments meticulously, calibrating their story selection and spate of talking heads to create specific news narratives. Consumers, though certainly not entirely ignorant or passive, may not realize that tactically framed "news" isn't straight information, but is content that is strategically adjusted to suck them in. If we are to stop the endless feedback cycle of tactical framing and ensuing polarization, the onus is on all of us to demand news that focuses not primarily on political wins and losses, but on the substance of the issues that will generate them.