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A Theory of Framing and Opinion Formation in Competitive Elite Environments

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Public opinion often depends on how elites choose to frame issues. For example, citizens' opinions about a Ku Klux Klan rally may depend on whether elites frame the event as a free-speech issue or a public safety issue. Past research has focused largely on documenting the size of framing effects in uncontested settings. By contrast, there has been little research on framing in competitive environments in which individuals receive multiple frames representing alternative positions on an issue. We take an initial step toward understanding how frames work in competitive environments by integrating research on attitude structure and persuasion. Our theory of framing identifies the key individual and contextual parameters that determine which of many competing frames will have an effect on public opinion.

In fall 1999, the Brooklyn Museum of Art opened an exhibit called "Sensation." The works by young British artists included a self-replica bust constructed from nine pints of the artist's own frozen blood, a sculpture that incorporated a dead animal in formaldehyde, and, most notably, a painting of a black Madonna festooned with elephant dung and pornographic pictures. Not everyone regarded these works to be "art." New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani found the exhibit "disgusting" and denounced the Madonna portrayal as being "anti-Catholic" (Herszenhorn, 1999, p. A1). So angered was Giuliani that he took steps to withdraw public funding for the museum (which totaled over $7 million a year) and evict the museum from the city-owned building it occupied. Giuliani declared that government was entitled to regulate distribution of taxpayer dollars for cultural events (particularly those housed in publicly owned buildings); he opposed using public money to support an exhibit that was so offensive to general tastes.

As Giuliani publicly disparaged the museum while entertaining a possible run for the U.S. Senate, representatives of the museum and general art community remained surprisingly mute. *New York Times* reporter, Michael Kimmelman, noted the consequence of this asymmetry: "There is always a moment when the terms of public debate are framed. For nearly a week … the Mayor had been allowed to frame the current issue almost by himself, an extraordinary gift to a politician" (1999, p. B5).

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The museum finally joined the fray when it filed a lawsuit defending its First Amendment right to free expression. Two opposing frames now competed to define the controversy: the artists' free-speech rights versus the right of government to control its public finances and tax dollars. David Strauss, a University of Chicago law professor, described the dispute as "a black hole of First Amendment law. No one really knows how to think about it, including the Supreme Court Justices" (Glaberson, 1999, p. B12). Nearly 6 months later, the two sides settled out of court, with the Museum ostensibly prevailing as it retained its budget and building.

As the controversy over the Sensation exhibit illustrates, virtually all public debates involve competition between contending parties to establish the meaning and interpretation of issues. When citizens engage an issue—be it social security, foreign aid, a hate-group rally, affirmative action, or the use of public funds for art— they must grapple with opposing frames that are intended by opinion leaders to influence public preferences.

Surprisingly, social scientists have little to say about which of many competing frames (e.g., free speech, allocation of public funds, the right to oversee tenants in public buildings) will shape public opinion. Sniderman and Theriault (2004, pp. 141–142) explain that "framing studies … have neglected the fact that frames are themselves contestable. They have instead restricted attention to situations in which citizens are artificially sequestered, restricted to hearing only one way of thinking about a political issue" (also see Entman, 1993; Riker, 1995; Wittman, 1995).

Our goal in this paper is to further understanding of how opinion formation works in competitive mass communication (framing) environments. After situating our inquiry in the literature on framing and public opinion, we develop a typology of competitive contexts and show that most studies of framing effects have restricted their examination to one-sided communications. We then propose a new standard based on a control group for assessing the magnitude of framing effects when studying competing frames. Next, we present a theory that identifies the psychological processes and contextual factors that determine which frames will have the greatest impact on public opinion. We conclude by deriving testable propositions from our theory and discussing the relevance of our theory for other types of media effects.

Framing research

Communication scholars and political scientists generally use the term "frame" in two ways (Druckman, 2001c; Scheufele, 1999). First, a *frame in communication* or a *media frame* refers to the words, images, phrases, and presentation styles that a speaker (e.g., a politician, a media outlet) uses when relaying information about an issue or event to an audience (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, 1989). The chosen frame reveals what the speaker sees as relevant to the topic at hand. For example, in the Brooklyn Museum case, the city's counsel focused on the prerogative of government to withdraw funding on the basis of artistic content: "The city's view of art is

that it's totally inappropriate … because of the nature of the art itself … the actual upsetting, violent, disgusting view of some of these paintings, they shouldn't be supported by taxpayer money" (Koromvokis, 1999).

Second, a *frame in thought* or an *individual frame* refers to an individual's cognitive understanding of a given situation (e.g., Goffman, 1974). Unlike frames in communication, which reflect a speaker's emphasis, frames in thought refer to what an audience member believes to be the most salient aspect of an issue. An individual who felt the Brooklyn Museum had a First Amendment right to choose its exhibitions would be in a "free-speech frame of mind."

Scheufele (1999) synthesizes a quarter-century of framing research by identifying four processes: (a) "frame building," which focuses on the dynamics of how speakers, such as media outlets, choose specific frames in communication; (b) "frame setting," which concerns the influence of frames in communication on frames in thought, and the precise psychological processes at work; (c) "individual-level effects of frames," which refers to the impact of frames in thought on subsequent behaviors or attitudes; and (d) "journalists as audiences," which looks at how citizens' actions affect the initial frame-building process (also see D'Angelo, 2002; Scheufele, 2004).

The role of multiple competing frames in each of these processes has gone largely unexplored. For example, how do journalists decide which of their audience's frames to incorporate in the frame-building process? What is the influence of competing journalists and politicians on these choices? Although these are important questions, our focus here is on how the presence of multiple competing frames in mass communication—a defining element of most political contexts—affect the audience's frames and, in turn, their attitudes (i.e., we focus on frame setting and individual-level effects; these two processes are often called an emphasis *framing effect*; see Druckman, 2001c).[1]

Our focus on competitive framing effects also means that we do not explicitly address priming (issue salience) and agenda-setting effects. That said, to the best of our knowledge, work on these related effects also have paid little or no attention to competitive situations. We thus believe our general framework ultimately could be extended to studies of priming and agenda setting.

What determines the public's preference for one frame over another? Past work provides little insight into this question. The typical framing-effect study is an experiment that employs a one-sided design in which individuals are randomly assigned to receive *one* of two or more alternative representations of an issue. For example, in studies of people's willingness to allow hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) to conduct a rally, the issue is construed *either* as a matter of free speech *or* as a threat to public safety, and the relevant comparison is the difference of opinion between individuals in the two conditions (Druckman, 2001b; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). If this approach were used to study the main competing frames in the Sensation controversy, individuals would receive either the city's argument for regulating cultural content or the Museum's First Amendment defense of its exhibit before being asked to choose sides.

Most one-sided studies have found that contrasting frames have a statistically significant impact when compared to one another. For instance, individuals exposed to the free-speech frame are significantly more willing to allow Klansmen to stage a rally than individuals who receive the public safety frame. This research therefore suggests that if one side can establish the relevant terms of debate over an issue, it can successfully persuade individuals to support its position.

But politics is typically competitive, fought between parties or ideological factions, and issues that are debated are framed in opposing terms. Individuals receive multiple frames with varying frequencies. In one of the few experiments that has tested the effect of simultaneous exposure to opposing frames, Sniderman and Theriault (2004) found that individuals favored the frame that was consistent with their values. On the hate-group issue, when individuals were exposed to both the free-speech and public safety frames, those who placed a higher priority on freedom than law and order were inclined to be tolerant, but those who subscribed more strongly to law and order tended to be intolerant. Sniderman and Theriault concluded that framing might be less influential in politics than experimental studies have suggested because competing frames may cancel each other and fail to move public opinion (however, see Brewer & Gross, 2005).

Although competition likely improves the odds that citizens will resist framing strategies—as Sniderman and Theriault suggest—it does not guarantee that the opposing sides will be equal combatants or that audiences will receive equal and simultaneous exposure to equally persuasive alternative frames. Pan and Kosicki (2001, p. 45) aptly state, "Resources are not distributed equally. Actors strategically cultivate their resources and translate them into framing power." Campaigns that have greater resources to conduct public opinion research may be better able to identify the frames that appeal most to the public. Unequal resources may also permit one side to advertise its themes more frequently (and to a wider audience) and to enlist representatives and endorsers that can more credibly deliver its messages to the public (Chong & Wolinsky-Nahmias, 2003).

Therefore, the effectiveness of any framing strategy will depend on its design and implementation within a particular competitive environment. To assess whether it is possible for one side to gain a framing advantage over the other requires that we study framing effects under various competitive conditions.

A typology of research designs

The design of experimental research on framing can be abstractly conceptualized along two dimensions. One dimension represents the *relative quantity* of competing communications received by individuals in the experiment. Studies typically examine only one frame per side, but we also include cases in which each side puts forth several different frames promoting its position. Therefore, the relative quantity of frames equals the total number of exposures to every frame communicated by each side, respectively. If we assume two competing parties, we can reduce all possible combinations of relative frequencies into three discrete categories (see Table 1): (a)

Table 1 Prior Framing Effect Experimental Studies

	Asymmetric One-Sided (exposure to just one frame)	Competitive Situations	
		Dual (exposure to both frames in equal quantities)	Asymmetric Two-Sided (exposure to both frames in unequal quantities)
Strong frames	Conventional framing-effect studies that show that individuals' opinions are significantly affected by exposure to a frame (e.g., Iyengar, 1991; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Price et al., 1997).	Sniderman and Theriault (2004), Brewer and Gross (2005).	None
Weak frames	Studies that explore moderators of framing effects, such as source credibility, political knowledge, and prior beliefs (e.g., Brewer, 2001; Druckman, 2001b; Gross, 2000; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997).	None	None
Strong and weak frames	Not applicable	None	None

asymmetric one-sided studies, in which individuals only receive one frame (one or more times); (b) *dual* (or symmetric) studies in which individuals receive opposing frames in equal quantity;[2] and (c) *asymmetric two-sided* studies in which individuals receive opposing frames in unequal quantities. Asymmetric one-sided studies are therefore "noncompetitive" because individuals are exposed to only one side of a controversy, whereas dual and asymmetric two-sided designs model different "competitive" environments.

Within any particular noncompetitive or competitive research design, the frames used to represent contending positions will vary on a second dimension defined by their relative (perceived) *strengths*. We will later elaborate on what we mean by strength, but for now we loosely define a frame's "strength" as increasing with the persuasiveness of a given frame. Weak frames are typically seen as unpersuasive, whereas strong frames are more compelling. For example, presumably most people would see "public safety" as a strong or persuasive frame for why a hate rally should not be allowed, whereas "preventing litter on the streets" would be a weaker frame.

Although strength lies on a continuum, in Table 1, we simply distinguish "strong" from "weak" frames. This is typically assessed empirically by asking pretest participants to rate the persuasiveness of a message or frame by characterizing it as either strong or weak (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Wegener, 1998). The rows in Table 1 identify three combinations of strong and weak frames that can correspond to any given competitive or uncompetitive environment. An experiment can employ strong frames exclusively, weak frames exclusively, or a mixture of strong and weak frames.

Taken together, variations in the relative quantities and strengths of frames combine to yield eight possible research conditions or competitive contexts (a ninth cell is not applicable). Table 1 indicates that almost all previous work investigates asymmetric one-sided designs using either strong or weak frames. The main exception is Sniderman and Theriault's (2004) balanced study using (apparently) strong frames (also see Brewer & Gross, 2005). The most noteworthy feature of the table is the five study designs of competitive situations that heretofore have not been implemented. These include dual studies in which opposing frames are received in equal quantity but are of unequal strength and asymmetric two-sided studies that expose individuals to opposing combinations of strong and weak frames in unequal quantities.

We find remarkable that the voluminous literature on framing effects has ignored perhaps the typical framing situation in which competing sides promote alternative interpretations of an issue. How do individuals respond to competitive frames of varying quantities and strengths?

The literature suggests two possibilities. One hypothesis, focusing on the relative volume of competing messages, posits that whichever frame is *loudest*—that is, repeated most frequently—will have the greatest influence on an individual's opinions, all else constant. Chong (1996, p. 222) summarizes this perspective: "Models of information transmission imply that the ideological faction that expends sufficient resources on propaganda and manipulation, and that sends sufficiently loud signals, can always prevail in defining the terms of debate." Similarly, Zaller (1992, p. 311) states that citizens "are blown about by whatever current of information manages to develop with the greatest intensity" (also see Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Iyengar, 1991; Nabi, 2003). In this view, the relative strength of the frame is not pertinent because (as we will elaborate shortly) individuals are assumed not to evaluate strength consciously but simply to embrace the frame they hear most often and that most easily comes to mind.[3]

An alternative hypothesis is that the *strongest* frame will exert the greatest influence on individual opinion, regardless of repetition, all else constant. This prediction follows from work on strong and weak frames, which has generated a partial list of factors that contribute to a frame's strength. This research suggests that a frame's strength increases, for example, when it comes from a credible source (Druckman, 2001b), resonates with consensus values (Chong, 2000), and does not contradict strongly held prior beliefs (Brewer, 2001; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Shah, Domke, & Wackman, 1996).

To date, we are uncertain how these hypotheses compare. As summarized in Table 1, there has yet to be an explicit test of strength against repetition. Moreover, we have little theoretical insight into the conditions when either factor will matter, or more generally, which frame will prevail in various competitive situations.

Measuring framing effects

Past work on framing has not offered a consistent strategy for measuring the magnitude of effects. Before offering our theory of effects, we evaluate existing methods and then propose a new standard that can be applied to the variety of competitive contexts outlined in Table 1.

The most common approach to measuring the impact of a frame on opinion is to judge its influence relative to an alternative frame. A frame is *effective*—that is, it influences individuals' opinions—if it stimulates a significantly different distribution of opinions than an alternative frame when individuals are exposed to them separately in one-sided conditions.[4] In the KKK experiment, the free-speech and public safety frames are judged effective if those who are exposed to the free-speech frame are significantly more tolerant than those who receive the public safety frame.

This approach is problematic if we want to evaluate the influence of a particular frame because by this standard, a frame's effect depends on its competition. For example, if two frames push opinion in the same direction, both frames may influence opinion, but there may be an insignificant contrast between them to constitute a framing effect (e.g., Kinder & Sanders, 1990). Although two opposing frames may be unlikely to push opinion in the same direction, it is possible that one of these frames will have the unintended consequence of causing recipients to counterargue with the frame and form an opinion that goes against the position advocated by the frame—thus rendering the frame *countereffective*. In such cases, both frames may have a significant influence on opinion yet not have contrasting effects. On the other hand, two frames may produce significantly different effects when only one of the frames is influencing opinions. In the case where one frame is effective and the other is *ineffective*, the contrast method of gauging framing effects requires that we judge both frames to be equally effective.

The contrast method is also problematic when applied to competitive situations involving two-sided combinations of frames. When individuals receive mixed combinations of frames on an issue, it is not clear what should be the relevant set of comparison frames. For example, if an individual receives two weakly presented prorally frames and one strong antirally frame on the KKK tolerance issue, what is the cluster of alternative frames to use as a point of comparison? In asymmetric research designs involving single frames, the comparison of two opposing frames often serves as a useful standard for defining effectiveness, but the method has blind spots and cannot be readily extrapolated to studying framing effects in competitive situations involving multiple frames.

In their study of dual frames, Sniderman and Theriault (2004) employ an alternative standard for gauging framing effects. They look at the movement of preferences relative to prior values. For example, they examine how individuals who give priority to either "freedom" or "law and order" respond to the hate-group rally after being exposed separately or simultaneously to the free-speech and public safety frames. They find that individuals deviate further from their values when they receive uncontested single frames than when they receive balanced frames.

Sniderman and Theriault recognize that the value standard for measuring framing effects may be most applicable on "traditional" issues on which the association between values and competing positions has been established by past debate. Individuals therefore adopt the position that is anchored by their values as long as they are cued by opposing frames when considering the issue. A problem arises with issues on which there is debate over the relevant value that should be applied, as well as the issue position that is faithful to that value. In the developmental stages of an issue, opposing sides will try to associate their position with popular values and to invoke those values in their frames. For example, President Bush promoted his plan to overhaul social security by arguing that the current system is unfair to African Americans because they have shorter life expectancies compared to other groups and therefore can expect to draw lower total benefits. This was intended to be an effective frame for attracting support from voters who place a higher priority on equality than individualism. If egalitarian voters had responded favorably to Bush's egalitarian frame, and ignored the contention of Democrats that the Bush plan rewards Wall Street investment firms, they would have been acting in accord with their values. But would we want to add that they were immune to framing effects by the Sniderman and Theriault criterion? It would seem more accurate to conclude on the contrary that the Bush framing strategy had worked to perfection in this scenario by appropriating a liberal value for a Republican policy.

Problems arising from both the contrast and value consistency methods of measuring framing effects can be overcome with a third standard that can be meaningfully applied to both one-sided and competitive research designs. Our standard entails comparing each frame condition (regardless of the number and strength of frames) to a control condition in which participants express their preferences without having been exposed to a persuasive communication. For example, in the KKK experiment, control-group participants would receive neither free-speech nor public safety messages. Rather, their preferences would be gauged by a neutral probe that simply described the issue before asking their opinion:

> The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) has requested a permit to conduct a rally at a local park in the fall of 2007. City officials will decide whether to approve or deny the request. Do you think that city officials should allow or not allow the KKK to hold a rally?

Opinions expressed in the neutral control condition provide a baseline preference against which to judge the impact of framed conditions. In experiments

involving exposure to single frames, the effect of each frame is assessed separately by comparing opinion in each asymmetric condition to opinion expressed in the control group (e.g., Iyengar, 1991; Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997). Similarly, in competitive framing experiments, responses to each bundle of frames are compared to responses in the control group. The frames are effective overall if the opinions of those receiving the frames differ significantly from the opinions of those in the control group; an insignificant difference indicates the frames are ineffective.[5]

By our definition of a framing effect, the strength or perceived persuasiveness of a given frame is not the same as its effectiveness or influence on individuals' opinions, because effectiveness depends on the context in which frames are encountered. A frame can be effective in one context but not in another. A strong frame is likely to be effective in one-sided contexts but may not be effective in competition with other frames. A weak frame may be effective among less knowledgeable individuals in noncompetitive contexts.

The effectiveness of a frame will also depend on temporal factors. Diffusion of a strong frame for an issue can increase the chronic accessibility of a consideration. To the extent that this consideration is readily accessible when an issue is raised—without prompting—framing effects will be diminished. Framing effects are therefore less likely on established issues (with clear terms of debate) and among knowledgeable people who are aware of the central considerations on the issue.

A theory of opinion formation in competitive environments

With these conceptual clarifications established, we now present a theory of opinion formation that focuses on how individuals process information in different competitive environments. Our theory employs a conventional expectancy-value conception of attitudes (Fishbein, 1980). An attitude toward an object, in this view, is the weighted sum of a series of evaluative beliefs about that object. Specifically:

$$\text{Attitude} = \sum v_i * w_i,$$

where v_i is the evaluation of the object on attribute i and w_i the salience weight ($\sum w_i = 1$) associated with that attribute.[6]

Given this conception of an attitude, there are two routes to changing one's overall attitude (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993): Either an evaluative component changes or a salience component changes. A framing effect occurs when a communication increases the weight of a new or existing belief in the formation of one's overall attitude (cf. Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Wood, 2000). In the case of an existing belief, the framing effect results from a reweighting of the set of prior beliefs associated with the object; on the other hand, if the communication promotes a new belief about the object, the framing effect is produced by the recipient's accepting the new consideration and giving it priority in his or her overall attitude. Therefore, frames in communication exercise influence by emphasizing the primacy of certain considerations over others.[7]

To explain how and when frames in communication can change attitudes by influencing the salience of the underlying evaluative dimensions, we integrate theories of attitude structure and persuasion. We start with the observation that individuals typically base their attitudes on a subset of dimensions, rather than on the universe of possible considerations (e.g., Ajzen & Sexton, 1999). Individuals use considerations that are *available, accessible*, and *applicable* or *appropriate* (Price & Tewksbury, 1997; also see Chen & Chaiken, 1999; Higgins, 1996). We take each step in turn.

A consideration must be stored in memory in order to be *available* for retrieval and use in constructing an attitude (e.g., Higgins, 1996). For instance, an individual needs to understand how a KKK rally might threaten public safety, or how the First Amendment pertains to unpopular political speech, if these considerations are to become relevant in his or her attitude toward the rally. For a consideration to be available, the individual must comprehend its meaning and significance. Such understanding will increase with an individual's general knowledge of politics and frequent exposure to that consideration in communications about the issue.

Accessibility refers to the likelihood that an available consideration will be activated for use in an evaluation (e.g., Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977). Put another way, the available consideration stored in long-term memory is brought to mind when forming an evaluation. Increases in accessibility occur through "passive, unconscious processes that occur automatically and are uncontrolled" (Higgins & King, 1981, p. 74). Just how accessible a consideration needs to be for use, however, is uncertain; Fazio (1995, p. 273) concedes that the "model is limited to making predictions in relative terms."

Accessibility increases with chronic use of a consideration over time or from temporary contextual cues—such as communications—that regularly or recently bring the consideration to mind (Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986; Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988). Repeated exposure to a frame in communication thus induces frequent processing, which in turn increases the accessibility of the frame. This repetition dynamic is the mechanism behind the previously discussed *loudness hypothesis*. The amount of repetition that an individual needs to comprehend the message should be inversely related to his or her level of knowledge (Barker, 2005).

An accessible consideration (that is emphasized in a frame) will be ignored if *other* chronically accessible considerations are deemed more salient (e.g., Shen & Edwards, 2005). For example, judges and lawyers who are trained in constitutional law are more likely than ordinary citizens to set aside security concerns and be tolerant in controversies over civil liberties if there is a constitutional norm that supports their attitude (Chong, 1996). In general, a frame in communication may have no detectable impact on an individual's overall opinion if he or she possesses strong prior beliefs on the issue.

The impact of an accessible consideration also can depend on its *applicability* or *appropriateness* to the object being evaluated (e.g., Strack, Martin, & Schwarz, 1988).[8] For example, concern that a demonstration will tie up traffic may be an available and

accessible consideration, but it may be judged irrelevant and given no weight in determining one's attitude toward allowing the rally. The likelihood that a consideration raised by a frame will be judged applicable and shape an individual's opinion increases with *conscious* perceptions of its strength or relevance (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Nelson, Clawson, et al., 1997). In turn, the perceived strength of a frame depends on two factors. Strong frames emphasize available considerations—as discussed, a frame focused on unavailable considerations cannot have an effect and thus is inherently weak (assuming repetition of the frame itself does not make a consideration available). The other factor is the judged persuasiveness of the frame. This latter factor is akin to what Pan and Kosicki (2001, p. 49) call "framing potency" (also see McCombs, 2004, pp. 91–97 on "compelling arguments").

The amount of *conscious* deliberation (which contrasts with the unconscious accessibility process) behind assessments of appropriateness will vary with individual and contextual factors (Druckman, 2004a; Higgins, 1996). Individuals who are motivated to form an accurate attitude are more likely to address deliberately the appropriateness of a consideration (Fazio, 1990, 1995; Ford & Kruglanski, 1995; Stapel, Koomen, & Zeelenberg, 1998).[9] The information context also matters as the introduction of conflicting information can stimulate (even less personally motivated) individuals to engage in conscious, deliberate assessments of the appropriateness of competing considerations (Jou, Shanteau, & Harris, 1996; Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987; Martin & Achee, 1992; Strack et al., 1988). On the other hand, individuals lacking personal motivation or the stimulus of competition are likely to use uncritically the considerations that have been made accessible through exposure to a message.

If personal motivation or competition promotes attention to the appropriateness of a consideration, then anything that increases one's motivation (e.g., the relevance of the issue, the individual's need for cognition or accuracy) or ability (e.g., knowledge, repetition of the message, increased processing time) will also increase the probability that one will pursue a central or systematic route to evaluating information. Motivation and ability therefore increase an individual's tendency to focus on the substantive merits of a frame in judging its persuasiveness. In contrast, individuals who lack motivation and ability will pay more attention to peripheral or heuristic cues, such as the length and number of arguments, or the credibility and likeability of sources (e.g., Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Petty, Wheller, & Tormala, 2003).[10]

Motivated individuals are further distinguished from those who are unmotivated in being more likely to dismiss a weak frame by moving *away* from the position it advocates (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Herr Sherman, & Fazio, 1983; Martin & Achee, 1992; Stapel et al., 1998). Such countereffects occur when individuals infer that, "if the weak frame is the best argument one side has to offer, its position must be indefensible" (see Shah, Watts, Domke, & Fan, 2002). For example, an individual who hears the argument that a KKK rally should be banned because it will be costly to clean up leaflets and other refuse left behind may find such an argument to be so

weak relative to free-speech concerns that he or she becomes more favorably disposed to allowing the rally.[11] We expect such countereffects to occur more frequently in competitive environments that allow individuals to evaluate directly the strength of opposing frames.

Predictions

Our model suggests that the critical determinants of framing effects are the strength and prevalence of the frame, the knowledge and motivation of recipients of the frame, and the combination of frames presented. Operationally, several questions remain, such as how to measure knowledge and motivation, and how to identify when a consideration is sufficiently available and accessible to permit a framing effect.

Of particular importance are the precise factors that influence conscious assessments of strength. Although some prior work suggests factors such as the extent to which the frame "resonates" with strong values (Chong, 2000; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987) as well as other cultural attributes and symbolic devices (Pan & Kosicki, 2001) and other research isolates what makes for a "compelling" frame on a particular issue (e.g., Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, & Fan, 1998), we continue to have little knowledge a priori of how individuals generally assess a frame's quality. We are thus left with the aforementioned operational approach of asking people directly to evaluate the relative strength of various frames.

Our goal here is not to settle these questions but rather to focus on predictions that derive from our theory. We next offer an incomplete list of what we consider to be especially intriguing or novel "all else constant" hypotheses.

1. Framing will have a greater effect on more knowledgeable individuals. This hypothesis follows from our discussion of availability. As explained, a consideration highlighted by a frame cannot impinge on an attitude unless it is available in memory. By definition, this requires knowledge. Although some early framing studies found stronger framing effects on less knowledgeable individuals (e.g., Kinder & Sanders, 1990), most recent evidence supports our first hypothesis (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Nelson, Clawson, et al., 1997; Slothuus, 2005). Druckman and Nelson argue that the earlier results stem, in part, from a failure to control for prior attitudes or chronically accessible considerations, as knowledgeable individuals tend to possess entrenched priors that reduce susceptibility to framing.

2. This observation leads naturally to our second hypothesis that strong prior attitudes will attenuate framing effects. Individuals with strong opinions will draw upon chronically accessible alternative considerations that take precedence over the temporarily accessible considerations contained in a frame (for evidence, see, e.g., Brewer, 2001; Iyengar, 1991). A public safety frame may make safety concerns accessible in considering the KKK rally, but these concerns will be discounted among those with strong attitudes about the right to demonstrate.

3. Frequent exposure to a frame will increase the accessibility and availability of considerations highlighted by the frame. Hypothesis 3 elaborates on the first hypothesis, in the sense that repeated exposure can be a "learning experience" (Bless, Fiedler, & Strack, 2004, p. 61) that increases the availability of new considerations on an issue (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Four implications follow from the premise that an individual's motivation and ability affect the likelihood he or she will consciously deliberate on the applicability of a frame:

4. Motivated individuals will be affected only by strong frames in both competitive and noncompetitive environments because they will identify and disregard weak inapplicable considerations.
5. Individuals with low motivation will be affected by both strong and weak frames in noncompetitive environments (as long as these frames emphasize available considerations). Such individuals will use whatever considerations are accessible and not expend effort to judge their applicability.
6. Individuals with low levels of personal motivation, however, will be stimulated (or motivated) by competitive contexts to discriminate between strong and weak frames. Therefore, all individuals, through a combination of central/systematic and peripheral/heuristic information processing, will favor the stronger frame in competitive contexts. (Less knowledgeable and less motivated individuals will likely follow the heuristic route to this outcome when stimulated by the competitive context.)
7. Conscious deliberation in competitive contexts over opposing frames of sharply contrasting strengths may give rise to a countereffect. The weak frame may backfire especially among motivated individuals by causing their opinions to move in a direction opposite to the position advocated by the weak frame. In such contexts, silence would have been a superior strategy for the side that put forth the weak frame.

The last prediction suggests that the impact of a frame can depend on whether the frame is offered alone or in conjunction with another frame. A weak frame offered in isolation will have no effect on able and motivated individuals, but when joined with an opposing strong frame, it may push these respondents in the opposite direction. This accentuates the importance of considering the competitive environment when studying framing effects and not focusing exclusively on the isolated effects of single frames.

Summary

Most prior experimental studies of framing have gauged the effects of one-sided communications and have all but ignored the more common and theoretically

interesting cases involving political competition between frames. The introduction of competition creates problems with conventional standards of measuring the effectiveness of framing. We show that these problems can be overcome by evaluating the impact of a frame against a neutral control group. Experimental designs that allow for competition among multiple frames also permit direct testing of the relative impact of repetition versus strength of frames, which are the two main hypotheses in the literature on the sources of framing effects.

We built on prior theories of framing, social cognition, and persuasion (e.g., Price & Tewksbury, 1997) to develop a theory of competitive framing effects that takes account of both individual variation and variation in the balance of debate over political issues.[12] Our theory identifies conditions under which repetition and strength will matter and the psychological mechanisms that explain these variations. Repetition of frames should have a greater impact on less knowledgeable individuals who also are more attentive to peripheral cues, whereas more knowledgeable individuals are more likely to engage in systematic information processing by comparing the relative strength of alternative frames in competitive situations. Our theory also identifies circumstances in which a weak frame can backfire among certain individuals, leading them to move in a direction that is opposite to the one promoted by the frame.

Empirical work supports several of the theory's predictions, especially those pertaining to the impact of knowledge and prior opinions on susceptibility to framing. That said, the emphasis of this paper has been on developing a coherent set of theoretical hypotheses, most of which await future empirical evaluation.

Theoretical extensions

An obvious question concerns the implications of our theory for other types of media effects, most notably agenda setting and media priming. Whereas the key independent variable for a framing effect is the description of an issue, an event, or a problem (a frame in communication), the independent variable for both agenda setting and media priming is the priority given to an issue or problem. The dependent variable for agenda setting is one's assessment of what problems or issues are important, whereas the dependent variable for media priming is typically the criteria that underlies one's evaluation of a political leader (e.g., whether people evaluate the president based on his performance on economic policy or on foreign affairs) (Miller & Krosnick, 2000).

Like studies of framing, studies of agenda setting and priming have also largely ignored competition between communications. The typical experiment investigates agenda-setting or priming effects after participants have been exposed to alternative communications that emphasize one issue or another—such as energy policy *or* defense policy but not both (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Nonexperimental work often relies on content analyses of media coverage of a campaign to determine whether the issue that received the most attention also had the largest effect on public opinion (e.g., Druckman, 2004b). But these studies have yet to take into

account that competing candidates have an incentive to emphasize distinct issues and, in most if not all cases, will introduce a collection of salient issues into the public arena through the media.

One possibility is that whichever issue receives the greatest volume of coverage will be the most accessible and have the largest effect, regardless of other issues discussed. Indeed, this is the implicit assumption underlying most extant studies. An alternative possibility, however, is that people engage in more conscious evaluations of the issues by considering, for example, the politicians or interest groups behind the issues and the content of the debate involving these issues (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). For instance, if the issue of crime receives the most attention, but the stories focus mostly on the declining crime rate, will crime be primed in public opinion? Or will people ignore crime because it is no longer as serious a problem (see Miller, 2005)? In our terminology, which matters more—the repetition of an issue or its relevance?

A consideration of how competition affects priming and agenda setting will lead researchers to think more carefully about the psychological processes that underlie each process. This is a necessary step that will help clarify the exact relationship between agenda setting, priming, and framing (e.g., McCombs, 2004; Scheufele, 2000).

Notes

1   We thus do not incorporate interpersonal communication (e.g., Druckman & Nelson, 2003). We also focus on the construction of attitudes rather than other types of responses such as emotional reactions (Brewer, 2001) or open-ended thoughts (e.g., Brewer & Gross, 2005; Price et al., 1997), and we focus exclusively on individual-level processing (on aggregate effects, see, e.g., Kellstedt, 2000). We see our work as distinct from theorizing on valence or equivalency-framing effects (see Druckman, 2001c, 2004a).

2   "Dual" therefore refers solely to equal numbers of exposure to frames on either side. We will reserve the term "balanced" to refer to competitive contexts in which there is equivalence on both dimensions of relative quantity and relative strength.

3   As we will discuss, the underlying mechanism for this hypothesis is accessibility.

4   Some studies focus on differences in the weights given to particular dimensions of an attitude (e.g., the priority given to consideration of free speech vs. consideration of public safety), whereas other studies gauge framing effects according to differences in overall opinion on an issue (e.g., whether to allow the KKK rally). (see Druckman, 2001c, for discussion).

5   This standard makes documenting any effect more difficult than the contrast method in which opinions are usually moving in two opposite directions (see Druckman, 2001a, for discussion).

6   We can, without loss of generality, think of i as a dimension, a consideration, a value, or a belief.

7   Frames in communication can potentially influence the evaluative component of an attitude, but this is not our focus (see Slothuus, 2005). By the same token, other types

of communications, including nonverbal or visual presentations, can alter the salience of a consideration (e.g., Messaris & Abrham, 2001; Druckman, 2003), but our focus is on frames in communication.

8 There is often a distinction drawn between "applicability" and "appropriateness," with applicability referring to the overlap between the stimulus under evaluation and the exemplar and appropriateness referring to judged usability. This distinction is relevant in research on social cognition and judgment where the precise psychological processes are studied. However, we gain little explanatory power by treating applicability as a distinct step (in terms of understanding behavioral reactions to frames) and thus we do not explicitly differentiate applicability (however, see Price & Tewksbury, 1997). (Also, it is often unclear what exactly constitutes a sufficient "fit" or match [Martin & Achee, 1992].)

9 Individuals also need to have the opportunity to deliberate, meaning that they have at least a brief amount of time (e.g., seconds) to consider alternatives.

10 If an unmotivated individual engages in conscious deliberation due to the competitive context, he or she will likely then evaluate the frame using heuristics or cues. In contrast, a motivated deliberator will likely follow the systemic route (R. E. Petty, personal communication, April 11, 2005; R. H. Fazio, personal communication, April 12, 2005; also see Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999). We recognize that the focus of research on dual-process persuasion models has been on the evaluative component of attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993); there have been few, if any, applications of these models to explain changes in the salience component of an attitude. S. Chaiken (personal communication, February 23, 2005) explained that process models "generally focus [on the evaluative component] …. In principle, however, a message could contain arguments that worked mainly to increase (or decrease) recipients' subjective beliefs …. So, in principle … process theories [are not] irrelevant to the salience weight issues … as far as work that pertains to this distinction [between evaluative and salience weight influences], [there is no] explicit work on the issue."

11 As is the case with the "accessibility" threshold, it remains ambiguous when a consideration is deemed sufficiently extreme or weak to generate such a contrast effect.

12 We see our theory as consistent with Iyengar's (1991) and Zaller's (1992) accessibility approach; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley (1997) and Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson (1997) belief importance theory; and Price and Tewksbury's (1997) cognitive model of framing and media priming (also see Brewer, 2001; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Gross, 2000). We simply posit that framing can have an effect at each of these stages, in different ways.

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Théorie sur le cadrage et la formation de l'opinion dans des environnements
concurrentiels d'élite

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Résumé

L'opinion publique est souvent tributaire de la manière dont les élites choisissent
de cadrer les enjeux. Par exemple, l'opinion des citoyens à propos d'une manifestation du
Ku Klux Klan peut dépendre du cadrage opéré par l'élite, selon que celui-ci montre
l'événement comme un enjeux de liberté d'expression ou de sécurité publique. Dans le
passé, la recherche a focalisé largement sur le fait de documenter l'importance que
revêtent les effets du cadrage dans des contextes dénués de confrontation. Par contraste,
peu de recherches ont porté sur le cadrage dans des environnements concurrentiels où les
individus composent avec une multitude de cadrages traduisant diverses positions en
regard d'une situation donnée. Nous effectuons une première démarche en vue de
comprendre le fonctionnement des cadres dans les environnements concurrentiels, en
intégrant la recherche sur la structuration de l'attitude et la persuasion. Notre théorie du
cadrage identifie les principaux paramètres individuels et contextuels qui déterminent
lesquels des nombreux cadres concurrents exerceront un effet sur l'opinion publique.

Framing- und Meinungsbildungstheorie in konkurrenzbetonten Eliteumgebungen

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Die öffentliche Meinung hängt oft davon ab, wie ein Thema von Eliten geframt wird. Beispielsweise könnte die Meinung der Bürger über ein Ku Klux Klan Treffen davon beeinflusst sein, ob Eliten diese Veranstaltung als eine Thematik der freien Meinungsäußerung oder der öffentlichen Sicherheit rahmen. Forschungsaktivitäten haben sich bislang eher darauf konzentriert, das Ausmaß eines Framing-Effekts in eindeutig zuordenbaren Situationen zu dokumentieren. Im Gegensatz dazu gibt es wenig Forschungsbemühungen, die Framing-Effekte in konkurrenzbetonten Umgebungen untersuchen, in denen Individuen verschiedenen Frames aufgrund unterschiedlicher Positionen zu einem Thema ausgesetzt sind. Mit diesem Artikel unternehmen wir einen ersten Schritt hin zu einem besseren Verständnis von Frames in konkurrenzbetonten Umgebungen, indem wir Ansätze zur Einstellungsstruktur und Persuasion integrieren. Unsere Framing-Theorie identifiziert die individuellen und kontextualen Hauptparameter, die darüber entscheiden, welcher der konkurrierenden Frames einen Effekt auf die öffentliche Meinung haben wird.

Una Teoría del Framing y la Formación de Opinión en Contextos Competitivos de Élite

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Resumen

La opinión pública depende a menudo de cómo las élites eligen encuadrar ciertos asuntos. Por ejemplo, las opiniones de los ciudadanos acerca del mitin del Ku Klux Klan dependen de cómo las élites encuadren esta información, ya sea como un asunto de libre expresión ó como un asunto de seguridad pública. Las investigaciones previas se han concentrado en documentar extensamente la envergadura de los efectos del framing en escenarios incontestados. En contraste, ha habido pocas investigaciones sobre el efecto del framing en contextos competitivos en los cuales los individuos reciben múltiples encuadres representando posiciones alternativas sobre un asunto. Tomamos un paso inicial hacia el entendimiento de cómo estos encuadres funcionan en un contexto competitivo mediante la integración de investigaciones sobre la estructura actitudinal y la persuasión. Nuestra teoría del framing identifica los parámetros individuales y contextuales claves que determinan cuál de los varios encuadres en competencia tendrá un efecto en la opinión pública.

竞争优化环境中的框架理论和舆论生成

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摘要

公众舆论常常有赖于精英怎样选择问题框架。比如，公民对三 K 党集会的观点可能是由精英们将其描绘成言论自由的问题或者是公共安全的问题而定的。以前的研究大多总结在无纷争环境下框架效应的大小。比较而言，研究竞争环境下人们接收到多种不同观点的框架的影响则比较少。我们融和了态度结构和说服研究，第一次研究竞争环境下的框架原理。我们的框架理论指出了重要的个人和环境参数与其在矛盾情况下决定何种框架有作用能力。

경쟁적인 엘리트 환경내에서의 프레이밍 이론과 여론형성에 관한 연구

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요약

여론은 종종 엘리트들이 어떻게 주요 이슈들을 프레임 하는가에 의존한다.

예를들어, 백인우월주의 단체 KKK (Ku Klux Klan)단의 집회에 대한 시민들의 의견은 엘리트들이 이 집회를 발언의 자유를 위한 행사로 프레임하느냐, 또는 공공의 안전문제로 프레임하느냐에 따라 달라질 수 있다는 것이다. 과거의 연구들은 주로 도전되지 않은 상태에서 프레이밍 효과의 정도를 증명하는데 관심을 가졌다. 대조적으로, 개인들이 어떠한 특정한 이슈에 대해 대안적 입장들을 표현하는 다양한 프레임을 받을 수 있는 경쟁적인 환경내에서의 프레이밍에 대한 연구는 별로 없었다. 본 연구에서 우리는 태도구조와 설득에 대한 연구를 통합하는 것에 의해 어떻게 프레임들이 경쟁적 환경내에서 작용하는지를 이해하기 위해 노력하였다. 본 연구에서의 프레이밍 이론은 여러 경쟁적인 프레임들이 여론에 영향을 미치는지를 확인하기 위하여 주요 개인적 그리고 상황적 변수들을 동일시하고 있다.