

# Media influence in politics: agenda setting, framing and priming



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## **Introduction**

The 2016 Presidential election in the United States is one of the most controversial elections the country has endured. For many people, the results were a considerable shock. For others, the results spoke to a hand in the swaying of the people: fake news. However, everyone agreed that the media had a big influence on the minds of the voters due to the way they took to reporting on the candidates. The way the various forms of media influence the political arena in the United States by swaying the opinions of voters. Agenda setting, framing and priming are the ways that the various forms of media can influence the way that politics and candidates are viewed to voters in America (Ottati et al., 2016, p. 2). Those three concepts provide the way the public receives the message. Agenda setting refers to how the media determines what we are thinking about, not what to think but what to think about it; priming refers to the more prominent the issue, the more it becomes in consciousness so issue will influence people's assessment of politicians and framing tells us how we should make sense of the issue (Moy et al., 2016). Social media, print media, and news media influence the political process inadvertently and advertently. The focus of the paper is the impact of media on the political process, the positive or negative effects, and the outside influences on what the media reports with regards to the political process in America.

## **Mass Media**

The various forms of media help to build or destroy the political figures in democracies. This is done by focusing on certain issues that are considered newsworthy. However, where this news is encountered, the content and the <https://assignbuster.com/media-influence-in-politics-agenda-setting-framing-and-priming/>

educational level of the public viewing the information, plays a role in how the message will be received (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). The media is a way for candidates to connect with voters and is thus utilized in a variety of ways. However, those ways may go for or against any one political candidate or party. There are media outlets that have been known to be either “left” or “right” and whose reporting is reflexive of those views. For the people that are loyal to those stations, the news gives them what to think about. The various forms of media; social, print, and news media each bring their unique factors to the political arena.

## **The News**

For many people, the news is where they get their information about the world. However, the definition of “news” has changed. More than 70% of people are using Facebook for their source of news (Wright, 2017). Facebook has more than a billion users across the world. In the United States, for Facebook to be a news source is something that can be rattling. Twitter and Instagram are also used as primary news sources for 34% and 20% of people (Wright, 2017). The number of people getting their news from one source is a problem with different branches.

The reason this can represent a problem is because Facebook utilizes algorithms that will suggest pages for a person to “Like” based on their interests. A person that is into right-wing-pseudoscience will be suggested pages and people that will only agree with them. This creates an atmosphere where a person will be inundated with only one point of view for any given topic. When it comes to politics, the algorithms help to divide the voters effectively by and only present each side with a self-serving point of view.

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Many people will only believe what is being stated by those with the same viewpoints and will rarely look at what the other side has to say.

## **Real and Fake News**

Another problem with many people getting their news from one source is the source itself. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, are not news websites.

These websites were intended to foster, maintain, and establish connections and friendships using an electronic, internet-based medium. However, people are allowed to share links to websites on their own newsfeed, which is also shared to people on their friends list. When people share things on their wall that is from a news page operating on Facebook, that story is often able to be shared again and again. This can make a particular link go “viral”, which means that it has become trending and therefore has been shared by many people.

Many of the links that are shared by people, especially during the 2016 presidential election, were not real news sites. Many were websites sharing fake stories, with URLs that were made to look like reputable news sites. These sites' stories were shared by people that thought these were reputable sites. The stories were written to divide voters and to mislead people into thinking something that isn't true (Butler, 2017, Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Fake news websites popped up all over the internet and were shared on various social media websites millions of times before people caught on to what they were.

The fake news articles exposed flaws in the way many people scrutinize, or the lack of scrutiny that people place on news articles and their sources.

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More than half of the people that saw the fake news articles believed what the articles stated (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). That speaks to the way that people viewed the articles. Research into how middle-school to college aged adults view news articles showed that they were not able to critically assess what they were encountering (Butler, 2017). Many of those people were old enough to vote. This gives insight into the need for a better educated population. A more educated populace will have been able to understand the influence behind the ads and also be able to distinguish fake news from real news.

The fiasco also showed the massive influence that social media plays in the news circuit. It showed that users of social media played a big part in swaying public opinion in one direction or another. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become de facto news for many people. After the exposure of the fake news websites, social media giants have begun to crack down on the links and ban them from being shared. However, the damage has been done, fake news articles favoring the winning candidate circulated nearly four times (30 million) as much as the opposing candidate (8 million) (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). There will be ways around initiatives that are in place as interventions for fake news articles.

## **How the News Influences Politicians**

The way a person reacts to the news depends on their position in the arena. Everyone has a position in the political arena, either as voters, political leaders, reporters, bloggers, etc. A person can reside in more than one spot, and multiple spots at any given time depending on their income level, occupation, and political ties (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016, p. 166).  
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Therefore, if a person has enough connections and influence, they are able to react to news at a higher level than a person without such advantages. The news, as reported, can influence politicians as well. Politicians in countries like the United States (where news worthy stories influence the political climate), often react to information from the news by, “strategically display simple and unidimensional rhetoric due to newsworthiness considerations,” (Amsalem et al., 2017). This means that they will peddle whatever soundbites that need to be said in order to maintain their position, direct the public attention and the attention of the media. For some politicians, that means to double down on whatever point that is of debate at the time. This goes even if the politician is responding to something that factual from the media, many will double down against the facts that are being displayed.

## **Agenda Setting**

As mentioned above, agenda setting refers to the way the media determines what the public is thinking about. With regards to the political process, this is a vital aspect. There are many issues that face the United States and need to be handled. News and print media can report on any aspect of this process and make it seem as if that is the main story. For the citizens, that may not be the best way to give information. However, it helps to set the tone for elections, propositions and other political outcomes that are decided democratically.

## **Media and Political Agenda Setting**

The credulous viewer will not question many things in regard to what they are being told. This makes manipulating the media a part of political agendas. <https://assignbuster.com/media-influence-in-politics-agenda-setting-framing-and-priming/>

Media agenda setting refers to the media creating the news to issue to think about. The information for the media, with regards to politics, originates from various sources; both confidential and on the record. When it is a source that is considered to be reputable, the information is considered credible and so it is presented to the public. The public is then thinking about what it is supposed to think about based on what the media deems important.

There are specific actors in this process of media agenda setting. The media, the source of the information and the viewers and readers of the information (Ottati et al., 2016, p. 2). These come together to set the agenda for whatever the target of the set-up is for. This process can be hijacked and is subject to outside sources.

Political agendas can take advantage of the media agenda setting by giving the media information that will sensationalize another situation which may be favorable in drawing public attention from something else (Thesen, 2013). For instance, opposing parties will respond to bad news that can be the fault of their opposition. Increasing the visibility of the issue will help bolster their own position and agenda. This, in turn, will help sway the public's attention to faults of the opposition. Depending on the side the storm one stands, there will be a loser and a winner in that specific political battle. Voters will express how they view each candidate at the ballots, while each side uses some of the same tools to achieve different outcomes.

## **Elite Rhetoric**

When a politician responds to information distributed by various media channels, there can be a few outcomes; the political party or politician can

take responsibility and rectify the information or they can bring something new to the light that the media may take advantage of. The impression and use of elite priming to bring specific topics to the attention of the media which puts the issues into the awareness of the public (Baybars & Baruh, 2011). The way politicians respond to the media's agenda has an effect on what issues to bring forth or double down on. The elites focus on certain issues in discourse to influence public opinion and rhetoric.

## **The Goal of Agenda Setting**

The main goal of media and political agenda setting is issue prioritization. This prioritization will help campaigns keep focus, give the public something to focus on, and also give voters issues to think about. The media agenda and political agenda setting are focused on the same goal but for different aspects. However, the media agenda can be influenced by other agendas and goals which makes the process circular in some instances (Ottati et al., 2016, p. 2). The influence of the media can be directed by the political agendas which makes the media less influential in its own right and more of a puppet tool for political agenda.

## **Priming**

The second, and interchangeable step in this process is priming. Priming, is a label given to the process of an issue becoming more prominent in the public domain to the point it affects the public's assessment of politicians due to the effects of agenda setting (Moy et al., 2016). The issues during the United States Presidential Election in 2016, there were a number of issues that spread like wildfire that did not have much relevance to the candidates'

political stance on many issues. However, there existed many newspaper, <https://assignbuster.com/media-influence-in-politics-agenda-setting-framing-and-priming/>



magazine articles and television news segments that could have directly impacted the way that the voters perceived the issue by distributing the story to the population. Agenda setting is the first step in the process because it gives the audience what to think about, priming follows up by enhancing what the audience has been told is an important issue.

## **Basic Assumptions and Uses of those Assumptions**

Priming is something that is done and it is very subtle in most instances. However, priming works using the brain's tendencies to take shortcuts. The brain stores many things and concepts that we come across in memory. The stronger memories are connected to different concepts with strong connections to other things. For every memory, there is a node which are connected to other nodes using what are called semantic pathways (Katrin-Arnold, 2010). Priming works with agenda setting by activating the entire schema of nodes that were setup through the agenda setting process. The way a specific event is covered in the media can activate the shortcuts created by semantic pathways because it ignores other events (Katrin-Arnold, 2010). In the past presidential election in the United States, one candidate's email fiasco was focused on more than the other major candidates rape allegations, fraud lawsuits, and misogynistic viewpoints in the media so when it came time to vote, the voter's minds were connecting one candidate with the deaths of soldiers and the other candidate with positive change (Patterson, 2016).

## **The Credibility of the Media**

With priming in media being controlled by both inside and outside sources, it is hard to see where the evidence and credibility lies. Political agenda setting <https://assignbuster.com/media-influence-in-politics-agenda-setting-framing-and-priming/>

will influence what is primed to the audience as if there were no influence. This means that the credibility of the media is very questionable. It also shows that the influence of the media is great, but only as great as the information that comes in and that information is controlled by the way the players react and what is on their agendas.

## **Framing**

The final part of the process is framing. Framing is the part of the concept that gives meaning to the information that has been set by the agenda and primed by the media to keep it in the forefront of the minds of the populace (Moy et al., 2015). This is one of the main steps of the concept because it solidifies what is being pushed through agenda setting and what has been primed to be noticeable. Framing is a process like the other steps in the concepts. This means that there are steps in the process.

### **The Framing Process**

How something is framed determines how effective the campaign will be from agenda setting and priming. The process of framing considers to factors; the actors that determine the way to frame the information; frame building; and frame setting (Strömbäck, & Esser, 2014 p. 139). The building of the frame is where the different actors determine how to frame the information in the news. This process can take a while or be abandoned due to the different actors that influence the final product. Once the frame is built, meaning, there is an agreement on publishing a story about a particular aspect of politics or the political process, the next step is to set the frame.

As previously mentioned, the brain has a way of connecting knowledge that we have previously encountered. Once the information is primed, there has to be meaning given to it for the human brain to grasp onto. Once the frame is set, the way that the situation is viewed is going to be controlled by the individual and what schema is set off by the frame. The frame is influenced by the goals of the media agency presenting it and also by the politicians that have their own agendas that may be circular due to sometimes the information being caused by a reaction to something within the political party (Strömbäck, & Esser, 2014 p. 139).

### **The Democratic Process and Media Influence**

The democratic process encompasses the political process because the United States is a democracy. The United States is a representative democracy more specifically. That means that the citizens elect officials that will represent their interests in the political arena (Coffé & Michels, 2014). A direct democracy is slightly different. In a direct democracy, the people vote directly on issues that affect them. These two systems have their flaws but may respond differently to the way that the media interacts with the political process.

### **Direct Democracy vs. Representative Democracy**

Direct democracy seems to offer citizens more freedoms than a representative democracy. This may be due to the fact that citizens get to vote on issues directly without a middle man to drag their feet. However, a direct democracy still has flaws. In the United States, many states have a type of direct vote based system set up. Counting the District of Columbia, there are 24 states with a type of direct majority rules system in place (The <https://assignbuster.com/media-influence-in-politics-agenda-setting-framing-and-priming/>

Conservation, 2016). These states offer various approaches to partake in the authoritative procedure. This incorporates coordinate votes on activities with a procedure called poll activities where voters are able to go vote with clients. However, the voting process can still be influenced by agenda setting priming. This is because there are few ways to stop wealthy citizens or those with political power from affecting the political process to their own agenda (Ottati et al., 2016, p. 2). This is why the direct democracy will not work as a major political concept in the United States. There is also the issue of influencing the political process through.

The current process, using the representative democracy, presents the same problems. There are wealthy people, influential companies and politicians that can wield their influence on the political campaigns. This means that regardless of the form of democracy, agenda setting, priming and framing will be concepts that go along with the media and media influence. With a representative democracy the effects would be longer because the elected officials would add extra steps to the process.

## **Method**

This research is done as a quantitative literature review. The method included using a database (Google Scholar) to find peer reviewed academic articles that support the research questions, and were unbiased were unbiased. The data was compiled and the evidence was used in the paper.

## **Findings**

Through analyzing the evidence from the different recent research articles, it was determined that the impact that the media has on politics is actually a

circular system. The system depends on the reaction of the different actors that participate in each sector; media and politics. This means that as politicians speak, their words are utilized in and out of context. The work is published in a newspaper, in articles, and in the news. When politicians see this, if it is negative, they will either fight it or double down on whatever they are sticking. This prompts the media to put those stories in the front of their media outlet which in turn prompts political rhetoric and the cycle goes over and over, incestually feeding themselves until the political climate is back to normal.

## **Discussion**

The media seems to be a larger influence because it is the people see the most. Through newspapers, internet sites, television and radio, media gives the impression that it has knowledge of all things. This has not turned out to be the case through the findings. The media is something of a scapegoat because politicians use the media to their advantage all the time. By using elite rhetoric, the media can be manipulated to display and report what the politicians want whenever they want to. The media is simply a tool like everything seems to be for political leaders.

## **Conclusion**

The political process and media influence are things that will continue as long as the current political and economic climate exists. However, the effects of agenda setting, priming and framing will lose as the educational level of the population rises. A rising educational level mean that citizens will be able to recognize what, or who is correct (Dutton et al., 2017).

The media influence on politics is circular and requires politicians to feed it, the politicians react to the media's action and then control what the media dishes back. The incestuous cycle is furthermore complicated with the number of businesses that participate. These aspects allowed for the proliferation of information.

The positive effects of agenda setting, priming, and framing can be seen when there is positive motivation for the concepts. However, most news is not news, The media has an influence on politics, but that influence is dependent on who is acting on the side of the fence.

The impact of media influence on the political process is something that has been measured and studied since there has been a political process. Having an educated population and being able to recognize the way influence works will help to evolve passed this stage of society and reliance on outside influences to make decisions that affect society as a whole do not have to deal with.

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