

# Media and politics: agenda setting and framing essay



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How has media influenced public perception of political figures, issues, and institutions? Through agenda setting and framing, media has the power to set the agenda for political discussion by providing public attention to political figures, issues, and institutions. In addition, the media can frame political agendas by influencing public perception and interpretation.

(Ginsberg, Lowi & Weir, 1999)

### Agenda Setting and Framing

#### Political Figures and Candidates

In campaigning, media coverage plays a large role for candidates. They use the media to make their name heard and image seen. “ Nearly everything a candidate does is geared toward the media, especially television” (Stuckey, 1999, p. 99) Candidates make appearances on talk shows, televise town hall meetings, and press conferences. Their agenda is not the issues they present or their positions on them, but to gain media attention.

If the candidates do not present interesting visuals or dramatic news, than the media can pull the plug from underneath them. “ The media has a good deal of discretion over how individuals are allowed to portray themselves” (Ginsberg, Lowi & Weir, 1999, p. 298). In addition, the media has control over how they portray an individual. Thus, political figures are framed by the media.

The media can set the image for a political figure or candidate, sealing their approval or disapproval for them and cementing that image toward the audience. The media can make certain political figures or candidates and

their traits more salient or prominent than others. Therefore, the media has great influence on how people perceive political figures.

### Political issues

The media provides the public political issues, which sets the agenda for political discussion. In theory the media tries to attune themselves to the interest of the public, but “ in most instances the media serves as conduits for agenda-setting efforts by competing groups and forces” (Ginsberg, Lowi & Weir, 1999, p. 298). To gain public support, groups and forces need media coverage to promote their ideas. However, the media has great control over which issues they televise. The issues must have media appeal or be considered newsworthy.

The media also influences how the public perceives issues. The placement of political issues during news coverage influences the importance of political issues on society. The ranking of media issues and society’s ranking suggest that the media influence the public (Weaver, 1996). The importance of an issue may rests on its time slot, sequence in the news story, or in the advertisement for the news.

Another way media frames political issues is inserting media’s own position on the issue. The media’s position tends to be more liberal and promotes more democratic policies and issues. This bias coverage stems from a long growing relationship between the media and liberal forces (Ginsberg, Lowi ; Weir, 1999). However, any bias can distort new coverage and influence audiences in that direction.

## Political Events and Campaigns

The media brings public attention to political events and campaigns.

However,

the media influence how events are interpreted by the public. The media's own bias or preference can slant the stories in one direction or another and thus influence how people perceive the events or the results. Some elements are left in while others are left out and some elements are emphasized while others are de-emphasized. All these factors contribute to how we process the story. (Ryan & Wentworth, 1999).

In campaigns, the media does not focus on explaining the differences among candidates and the implications of these differences, focusing instead on style, tactics, and strategy. News coverage is reduced to personality contests and mud slinging. Complicated issues and events often are trivialized into easily dramatized conflicts between personalities, and slanderous ad campaigns. The mediated campaigns have little effect on public opinion about candidate's issues and policies, but influence public perception of candidate's image. (Weaver, 1996)

## Conclusion

The media uses several methods to shape public perception of political figures, events, or issues. However the media cannot directly change public opinion. People obtain political information through other non-mediated sources such as their family, friends, peers, and social groups. Personal

difference including education, socioeconomic status, and political efficacy changes the way people process mediated, political information.

Access to other sources and differences in the public “lessen the media’s ability to force an agenda on an unwilling public” (Stuckey, 1999, 100). The low voter turnout and political participation are indicators of a disenfranchised public who see the “trivialization of politics by politicians and those who cover them” (Stuckey, 1999, 103). For those who seek it, political information is available through alternative mediated sources which are less slanted, bias, and superficial.

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