PERSPECTIVES ON FRAMING

Edited by

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AND DECISION MAKING

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What's It All About?: Framing in Political Science

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*H*ow do people form preferences? This question is fundamental for social scientists across disciplines. Psychologists seek to understand how people think, feel, and act, and preferences often reflect or determine these activities. Sociologists explore how preferences stem from and impact social interactions. Economists, particularly in light of the trend towards behavioral economics, often study the causes and consequences of preferences that deviate from well-defined, self-interested motives. Political scientists, for whom citizens' preferences serve as the basis for democratic governance, investigate the roots of political preferences as well as the extent to which governing elites respond to and influence these preferences.

In some ways, there is fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration on understanding the causes and consequences of preferences; in other ways, cross-discipline communication is lacking. Both of these perspectives are apparent when one considers the idea of "framing". Framing receives substantial attention across the social sciences – for many, it plays an important role in explaining the origins and nature of preferences. Yet, "framing" continues to be used in different and sometimes inconsistent ways across (and even within) disciplines. For example, some reserve it to refer to semantically distinct but logically equivalent portrayals, such as 95% unemployment versus 5% employment, while others employ a relaxed definition that includes emphasis on any alternative consideration (e.g., economic concerns versus humanitarian concerns when thinking about welfare). In short, although more than a decade old, Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson's (1997b, p. 222) claim that the "heightened interest in frames ... conceals a lack of conceptual clarity and consistency about what exactly frames are ..." still seems accurate (also see Fagley & Miller, 1997, p. 357; Kühberger, 1998).

In this chapter, I attempt to reduce this conceptual ambiguity. I begin by offering a simple model of preference formation that makes clear exactly what frames are and how they might work. This enables me to draw a distinction between prominent usages of the framing concept. I then focus on a particularly

relevant conceptualization used in political science. I review work that shows how political elites (e.g., politicians, the media) engage in framing, and how these frames influence political opinion formation. A brief summary concludes.

WHAT IS A FRAME?

To explain what framing is, I begin with the variable of ultimate interest: an individual's preference. A preference, in essence, consists of a rank ordering of a set of objects or alternative actions. For example, an individual might prefer the socialist party to the environmental party to the conservative party, the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops in Iraq to piecemeal withdrawal, a defined benefit retirement program to a defined contribution one, or chocolate ice cream to vanilla to strawberry. In some definitions, particularly those used by economists, the rank orderings must possess specific properties, including transitivity (e.g., if one prefers chocolate to vanilla, and vanilla to strawberry, then he/she must prefer chocolate to strawberry too) and invariance, where different representations of the same choice problem should yield the same preference (e.g., a person's preference should not change if asked whether he/she "prefers chocolate to vanilla" as compared to being asked if he/she prefers "vanilla to chocolate") (Tversky & Kahneman, 1987).

Preferences over objects derive from comparative evaluations of those objects (Hsee, 1996): for example, an individual prefers the socialist party to the conservative party if he/she holds a relatively favorable evaluation of the socialists (Druckman & Lupia, 2000). Social psychologists call these comparative evaluations attitudes, which is "a person's general evaluation of an object (where 'object' is understood in a broad sense, as encompassing persons, events, products, policies, institutions, and so on)" (O'Keefe, 2002, p. 6). It is these evaluations (i.e., attitudes) that underlie preferences.

A common portrayal of an attitude is the expectancy value model (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Nelson et al., 1997b), where an attitude toward an object consists of the weighted sum of a series of evaluative beliefs about that object (this portrayal is akin to utility theory). Specifically, $Attitude = \Sigma v_i w_i$, where v_i stands for the evaluation of the object on attribute i and w_i stands for the salience weight ($\Sigma w_i = 1$) associated with that attribute. For example, one's overall attitude, A, toward a new housing development might consist of a combination of negative and positive evaluations, v_i, of the project on different dimensions i. An individual may believe that the project will *favor* the economy ($i = 1$) but *harm* the environment ($i = 2$). Assuming that this individual places a positive value on both the economy and the environment, then v_1 is positive and v_2 is negative, and his attitude toward the project will depend on the relative magnitudes of v_1 and v_2 discounted by the relative weights (w_1 and w_2) assigned respectively to each attribute (Nelson & Oxley, 1999).

The general assumption of the expectancy value model, that an individual can place different emphases on various considerations about a subject, serves as a useful abstraction for discussing framing. This conceptualization applies to any object of evaluation (and thus any set of objects over which individuals have

preferences). For instance, a voter's attitude toward a party may depend on whether the voter favors the party on dimensions such as platform issues and leadership, which are of varying importance (e.g., economic issues may be seen as being more important than foreign affairs and leadership experience; see Enelow & Hinich, 1984). The voter might prefer one party (e.g., conservatives) when the evaluations are based on foreign affairs (e.g., foreign affairs receives considerable weight) but another when based on economic considerations (e.g., socialists). As another example, the extent to which an individual assigns blame to a welfare recipient may depend on evaluations of the recipient's personal efforts to stay off public assistance (Dimension 1) and the situational factors that the recipient has faced (Dimension 2) (see Iyengar, 1991). Similarly, one's tolerance for a hate group rally may hinge on the perceived consequences of the rally for free speech, public safety, and other values, with each value receiving a different weight. For these examples, if only one dimension matters, the individual places all of the weight ($w_i = 1$) on that dimension in forming his attitude. Without loss of generality, i can be thought of as a dimension (Riker, 1990), a consideration (Zaller, 1992), a value (Sniderman, 1993), or a belief (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

The dimension or dimensions (i.e., i) that affect an individual's evaluation constitute an individual's *frame in thought*. This is akin to Goffman's (1974) depiction of how frames organize experiences or Johnson-Laird's (1983) mental model. If an individual, for example, believes that economic considerations trump all other concerns, he/she would be in an "economic" frame of mind. Or, if free speech dominates all other considerations in deciding a hate group's right to rally, the individual's frame would be free speech. If instead, he/she gave consideration to free speech, public safety, and the effect of the rally on the community's reputation, then his/her frame of mind would consist of this mix of considerations. The examples given thus far constitute what scholars call "emphasis" frames, "issue" frames, or "value" frames. For these cases, the various dimensions of evaluation are substantively distinct – that is, one could reasonably give some weight to each consideration such as free speech and public safety or the economy and foreign affairs. The varying weights placed on the dimensions often play a decisive role in determining overall attitudes and preferences (e.g., more weight to free speech leads to more support for the rally).

Another type of frame is "equivalency" or "valence" frames. In this case, the dimensions of evaluation are identical; this typically involves casting the same information in either a positive or negative light (Levin, Schneider, & Gaeth, 1998, p. 150). The most famous example is Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) Asian disease problem. This problem – which is described in detail in Chapter 1 – shows that individuals' preferences shift depending on whether equivalent outcomes are described in terms of the number of lives saved out of 600 (e.g., 200 are saved) as opposed to the number of lives lost (e.g., 400 are lost). Analogous examples include more favorable evaluations of an economic program when the frame (dimension) is the employment rate rather than the unemployment rate, a food product when the frame is the percentage fat free rather than the percentage of fat, and a crime prevention program when the frame is the percentage not committing crime instead of the percentage of criminals (e.g., Levin, Schneider, &

Gaeth, 1998; Piñon & Gambara, 2005; O'Keefe & Jensen, 2006). Related to equivalency or valence framing effects are question wording effects in surveys (for a discussion, see Druckman, 2001a; Bartels, 2003; and Chapter 14).

Unlike emphasis or value frames, the dimensions in equivalency frames are *not* substantively distinct and are in fact logically equivalent. Thus, one's evaluation should not inherently (or ideally) differ based on the dimension of evaluation (e.g., one should not change his/her evaluation of an economic program when he/she thinks about it in terms of 95% employment instead of 5% unemployment). The fact that preferences tend to differ reflects cognitive biases that also violate the aforementioned invariance axiom of preference formation.

In sum, a frame in thought can be construed as consisting of the dimensions on which one bases his/her evaluation of an object. These dimensions involve either substantively distinct considerations (i.e., emphasis frames) or logically equivalent ones (i.e., equivalency frames). In both cases, the frame leads to alternative representations of the problem and can result in distinct evaluations and preferences.

Frames in Communication

The frame that one adopts in his/her mind (e.g., the dimensions on which evaluations are based), and that consequently can shape preferences, stems from various factors including prior experiences, ongoing world events, and so on. Of particular relevance is the impact of communications from others, such as friends and family or, in the case of politics, politicians and the media. In presenting information, speakers often emphasize one dimension or another, and in so doing they offer alternative *frames in communication*. For example, if a speaker, such as a news outlet, states that a hate group's planned rally is "a free speech issue", then the speaker invokes a "free speech" frame (emphasis frames). Alternatively, in describing an economic program, one can emphasize its consequence for employment or unemployment (equivalency frames).

Frames in communication and frames in thought are similar in that they both concern variations in emphasis or salience (see Druckman, 2001b). However, they differ with the former usage focusing on what a speaker says (e.g., the aspects of an issue emphasized in elite discourse) and the latter usage focusing on what an individual thinks (e.g., the aspects of an issue that a citizen thinks are most important) (also see Entman, 1993). In this sense, the term *frame* refers to two distinct, albeit related, entities; as Kinder and Sanders (1996, p. 164) explain:

> Frames lead a double life . . . frames are interpretative structures embedded in political discourse. In this use, frames are rhetorical weapons . . . At the same time, frames also live inside the mind; they are cognitive structures that help individual citizens make sense of the issues. . . .

When a frame in communication affects an individual's frame in thought, it is called a *framing effect*.

When it comes to studying frames in communication and concomitant framing effects, a few clarifications are in order. First, it makes sense to define a frame in communication as a verbal or non-verbal statement that places clear emphasis on particular considerations (for non-verbal frames, see Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Iyengar, 2010). Other types of communication that do not explicitly highlight a consideration (e.g., a factual statement such as "a hate group has requested a permit to rally") may still affect individuals' frames in thought, but such an effect does not make the statement a frame in communication (i.e., the speech act should not be defined based on its effect; see Slothuus, 2008, for a more general discussion). Frames in communication sometimes will and sometimes will not influence individuals' frames in thought. For example, a free speech activist or a journalist who possesses strong beliefs in free speech is unlikely to be influenced by a public safety frame when it comes to a hate group rally – in other words, such individuals have clearly defined prior beliefs that prevent a frame in communication from exerting an effect (also see Furnham, 1982, on how values condition attributions).

Second, many scholars employ the concept of frames in communication to analyze trends in elite discourse. For example, Gamson and Modigliani (1987) show that, over time, opponents of affirmative action shifted from using an undeserved advantage frame to a reverse discrimination frame. That is, the discourse changed from questions such as "have African Americans earned or do they deserve special rights?" to the question of "is it fair to sacrifice the rights of whites to advance the well-being of African Americans?". Analogous examples include studies on support for war (e.g., Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, & Trammell, 2005), stem cell research (Nisbet, Brossard, & Kroepsch, 2003, p. 48), cynicism toward government (Brewer & Sigelman, 2002), and the obesity epidemic (Lawrence, 2004). These analyses provide insight into cultural shifts (Richardson & Lancendorfer, 2004, p. 75; Schudson, 1995), relative media biases (Tankard, 2001), and public understanding (Berinsky & Kinder, 2006). For now, however, I turn to a discussion of how frames in thought exert their effects on attitudes, as this provides insight into when a frame in communication will influence one's preference. (In what follows, I do not regularly distinguish frame "in thought" from those "in communication" as it should be clear from the context to which I am referring.)

Psychology of Frames in Thought

The conceptualization of frames in thought as constituting the dimensions on which one bases his/her attitudes leads straightforwardly to a psychological model of framing (Chong & Druckman, 2007a). The starting point is that individuals typically base their evaluations on a subset of dimensions, rather than on the universe of possible considerations (e.g., Ajzen & Sexton, 1999). At the extreme, they focus on a single dimension such as foreign policy or economic affairs in evaluating a party, free speech or public safety when considering a hate group rally request, or lives saved or lives lost in assessing medical programs. Even when they incorporate more than one dimension, there exists a limit such that individuals rarely bring in more than a few considerations (e.g., Simon, 1955). The dimensions used are *available*, *accessible*, and *applicable* or *appropriate* (Althaus & Kim, 2006; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; also see Chen & Chaiken, 1999; Higgins, 1996). (Recall that I construe frames in thought as consisting of the dimensions of evaluation.)

A consideration must be stored in memory to be *available* for retrieval and use in constructing an attitude (e.g., Higgins, 1996). For instance, an individual needs to understand how a hate group rally might threaten public safety or how the First Amendment pertains to unpopular political speech for these considerations to matter. Similarly, the individual must understand how the unemployment (or employment) rate connects to a given economic program. A consideration is available only when an individual comprehends its meaning and significance.

Accessibility refers to the likelihood that an available consideration exceeds an activation threshold to be used in an evaluation (e.g., Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977). Put another way, the available consideration stored in long-term memory enters an individual's mind when forming an evaluation. Increases in accessibility occur through "passive, unconscious processes that occur automatically and are uncontrolled" (Higgins & King, 1981, p. 74).[1]

Accessibility increases with chronic or frequent use of a consideration over time *or* from temporary contextual cues – including communications (e.g., frames in communication) – that regularly or recently bring the consideration to mind (Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986; Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988). Repeated exposure to a frame, such as frequently hearing someone emphasize free speech or lives lost, induces frequent processing, which in turn increases the accessibility of the frame.[2]

The impact of an accessible consideration can also depend on its *applicability* or *appropriateness* to the object being evaluated (e.g., Strack, Martin, & Schwarz, 1988). For instance, concern that a rally will tie up traffic may be available and accessible, but the individual may view it as irrelevant and give it no weight. 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, & Oxley, 1997a).

Individuals do not, however, always engage in applicability evaluations (as it requires conscious processing) because doing so depends on personal and contextual factors (Druckman, 2004; Higgins, 1996). Individuals motivated to form an accurate attitude will likely deliberately assess the appropriateness of a consideration (Fazio, 1995; Ford & Kruglanski, 1995; Stapel, Koomen, & Zeelenberg, 1998).[3] The information context also matters, as the introduction of conflicting or competitive information (e.g., multiple, alternative frames) can stimulate even less personally motivated individuals to engage in conscious, deliberate assessments of the appropriateness of competing considerations (Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987; Strack et al., 1988). On the other hand, unmotivated individuals who are not stimulated by competitive information rely uncritically on the considerations made accessible through exposure to a message. For these individuals, applicability or appropriateness are non-factors. They base their preferences on whichever frames happen to be accessible.

When conscious processing occurs, the perceived applicability or *strength* of a frame depends on two factors. Strong frames emphasize available considerations; a frame focused on unavailable considerations cannot have an effect (i.e., it is inherently weak). The other factor is the judged persuasiveness or effectiveness 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").

Empirically, frame strength is established by asking individuals (e.g., in a pretest) to rate the effectiveness or persuasiveness of various frames in communication on a particular issue. For example, study participants may view a hate group rally frame emphasizing free speech as effective and one highlighting traffic problems as less compelling. If so, then, when individuals are motivated (by individual interest or the context) to engage in applicability evaluations, only the free speech frame should have an impact since they will assess and follow strong frames only. If, however, motivation to evaluate applicability is absent, then either frame might matter since individuals rely on any accessible frame. While this approach to operationalizing frame strength is empirically practical, since it allows a researcher to isolate strong as opposed to weak frames, it leaves open the important question of why a particular frame is seen as strong. This is a topic to which I will return later.

Equivalency Frames Versus Emphasis Frames

The portrayal of an individual's frame as depending on the availability, accessibility, and, at times, applicability of distinct dimensions applies to emphasis (i.e., issue or value frames) and equivalency (i.e., valence) frames. It also accentuates the difference between them. Equivalency frames have their differential effects when an individual bases the evaluation on whatever dimension (e.g., lives saved or rate of employment) happens to be accessible (see Druckman, 2004; Jou, Shanteau, & Harris, 1996, p. 9; Levin et al., 1998, pp. 164–166). Accessibility can increase due to the description of a problem (which is akin to a frame in communication), as when an individual learns of medical programs described in terms of lives lost. If an individual engages in applicability evaluations due to motivation or contextual conditions, the differential impact of the logically equivalent frames should dissipate. This occurs because the individual will consciously recognize that deaths can be thought of as lives saved or employment equals unemployment, and thus will not focus on gains or losses (e.g., he/she will recognize the equivalency). This renders the framing effect mute. The individual will not be in a "losses" frame of mind, but instead will consider losses and gains.[4]

Druckman (2004) offers evidence along these lines. Specifically, he replicates traditional framing effects (using four distinct problems[5]) and finds, for example, that those exposed to a negative frame (e.g., money lost) exhibit distinct preferences from those receiving an equivalent positive frame (e.g., money gained) (also see Hsee, 1996). The effects disappear, however, among participants who receive multiple competing frames (e.g., both the gain and loss frames); Hsee (1996) refers to this dynamic as "joint evaluation". The competitive information context presumably stimulates applicability evaluations that lead participants to recognize the equivalency of the frames, making them ineffective. Other work shows that, even in non-competitive environments, motivated individuals – such as those with high cognitive ability (Stanovich & West, 1998) or strongly held attitudes (Levin et al., 1998, p. 160) – exhibit substantially less susceptibility to

1991; Sieck & Yates, 1997; Takemura, 1994). This further supports the idea that when stimulated to assess applicability, individuals recognize alternative ways of viewing the problem (i.e., they appreciate that one can construe the problem as lives lost or lives saved) and the equivalency framing effects vitiate. In other words, motivation leads one to recognize the equivalent ways of viewing the problem.

The effect of applicability evaluations differs when it comes to emphasis framing, where individuals consider substantively *distinct* dimensions (e.g., free speech and public safety, or foreign affairs and the economy). Conscious recognition and evaluations of these dimensions will not lead individuals to view them as identical (as with equivalency frames); instead, individuals will evaluate the dimensions' strengths. As explained, strength involves availability and, perhaps more importantly, persuasiveness: Which dimension is most compelling? In their study of opinions about limiting urban sprawl, Chong and Druckman (2007b) exposed some participants to a communication using *both* a pro community frame (e.g., limiting urban sprawl creates dense, stronger communities) and a con economic costs frame (e.g., limiting sprawl will increase housing prices). As with equivalency framing effects, exposure to multiple competing frames likely stimulated applicability evaluations.[6] However, unlike the equivalency framing case, with emphasis framing the evaluations do not mute the effects. This is the case because thinking about alternative frames does not lead one to conclude they are logically equivalent (since they are not); instead, individuals evaluate the substantive strength of the alternative dimensions.

Chong and Druckman had previously identified the economic frame as being strong and the community frame as being weak (based on the previously discussed pretest approach where individuals rate the effectiveness of various frames). As expected, then, only the economic costs frame influenced opinions; competition did not cancel out competing frames but, rather, led to the strong frame winning. Unfortunately, Chong and Druckman (2007b), like most others, offer little insight on what factors lie behind relative strength.

The effect of individual motivation similarly differs in its effect for the distinct types of framing effects. Unlike with equivalency frames, emphasis frames often have larger effects on motivated individuals. These individuals have the ability to connect distinct considerations to their opinions (i.e., they have a broader range of available considerations; Chong & Druckman, 2007a, pp. 110–111). In the urban sprawl study, Chong and Druckman (2007b) found that a single exposure to the open space frame only affected knowledgeable participants because open space was relatively more available. Chong and Druckman (2007b, p. 647) explain: "less knowledgeable individuals require greater exposure to the open space . . . frame before their opinion shifts. . . . Knowledgeable individuals may be quicker to recognize the significance of a frame."

Conceptual Clarification

Communication scholars distinguish framing effects from priming, agenda setting, and persuasion (e.g., Scheufele, 2000). The value of these distinctions remains unclear (Chong & Druckman, 2007c). The term "priming" entered the field o communication when Iyengar and Kinder (1987, p. 63) defined it (in a way that may seem unfamiliar to many psychologists) as:

> By calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television news influences the standards by which governments, presidents, policies, and candidates for public office are judged. Priming refers to changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations.

Also, Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, and Krosnick (1984) reported that individuals exposed to news stories about defense policy tend to base their overall approval of the President (or some other political candidate) on their assessment of the President's performance on defense. Thus, if these individuals believe the President does an excellent (or poor) job on defense, they will display high (or low) levels of overall approval. If, in contrast, these individuals watch stories about energy policy, their overall evaluations of the President's performance will tend to be based on his handling of energy policy.

As noted, this connotation of priming, in the political communication literature, differs from how most psychologists use the concept. For instance, Sherman, Mackie, and Driscoll (1990, p. 405) state that "priming may be thought of as a procedure that increases the accessibility of some category or construct in memory." The typical "procedure" for increasing accessibility is *not* the same as exposing individuals to continual media emphasis of an issue. Yet, Iyengar and Kinder and many others assume, to the contrary, that media emphasis on an issue passively increases the accessibility of that issue. Miller and Krosnick (2000) present evidence to the contrary in claiming that the effects of media emphasis on an issue do *not* work through accessibility and thus are not akin to priming as defined by psychologists (for discussion, see Druckman, Kuklinski, & Sigelman, 2009b).

In my view, the psychological model of framing presented above can be generalized to political communication priming by assuming that each consideration constitutes a separate issue dimension or image (Druckman & Holmes, 2004) on which the politician is assessed. When a mass communication places attention on an issue, that issue will receive greater weight via changes in its accessibility and applicability. If this is correct, then framing effects and what communication scholars have called priming effects share common processes and the two terms can be used interchangeably (also see Chong & Druckman, 2007a, p. 115). (Again, this argument does not apply to how psychologists employ the term priming.)

A similar argument applies to agenda setting, which occurs when a speaker's (e.g., a news outlet or politician) emphasis on an issue or problem leads its audience to view the issue or problem as relatively important (e.g., McCombs, 2004). For example, when a news outlet's campaign coverage focuses on the economy, viewers come to believe that the economy is the most important campaign issue. This concept straightforwardly fits the above psychological model, with the focus (i.e., dependent variable) lying on assessments of the salience component of the attitude (rather than the overall evaluation of the object). The aforementioned example can be construed as the news outlet framing the campaign in terms of the

economy, and the researcher simply gauging the specific salience weights (w_i) as the dependent variable.

A final conceptual distinction concerns framing and persuasion. Nelson and Oxley (1999) differentiate framing from persuasion by referring to the former as a change in the weight component, w_i, of an attitude in response to a communication, and the latter as a change in the evaluation component, v_i (also see Johnston, Blais, Brady, & Crete, 1992, p. 212; Miller & Krosnick, 1996, p. 81; Wood, 2000). For example, in assessing a new housing project, framing takes place if a communication causes economic considerations to become more important relative to environmental considerations. Persuasion occurs if the communication alters one's evaluation of the proposal on one of those dimensions (e.g., by modifying one's beliefs about the project's economic consequences). This distinction stems from the focus in most persuasion research on the evaluation components of an attitude. The key, yet-to-be answered question is whether the processes (and mediators and moderators) underlying changes in the weight and evaluation components differ; if they do not, then perhaps the concepts should be studied in concert. These are not easy issues to address, however, since separating out the specific process by which a communication influences overall attitudes is not straightforward.

My argument that these various concepts can all be enveloped under a single rubric (and psychological model) should facilitate further theoretical development (also see Iyengar, 2010). It will enable scholars studying priming, agenda setting, and framing to avoid redundancy and focus more on any pressing unanswered questions.

FRAMES IN POLITICS

Politics involves individuals and groups, with conflicting goals, reaching collective agreements about how to allocate scarce resources (e.g., how to fund social security or health care, which candidate to support given that only one can win, and so forth). When it comes to making such political choices, three features stand out. First, the bulk of decisions involve *ill-structured problems* that lack "correct answers," involve competing values, and can be resolved in distinct ways. At the extreme, there is no clarity on what the decision even is (e.g., is a terrorist attack a war?). Purkitt (2001, p. 6) explains that most political problems are "ill-structured . . . typically there is little or no agreement on how to define or frame the problem" (also see Guess & Farnham, 2000, p. 35). Consequently, emphasis framing applies to a broader range of political decisions where parties argue over which of many substantively distinct values or considerations should carry the day (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Schattschneider, 1960).[7] Sniderman and Theriault (2004, pp. 135–136) explain:

> Framing effects, in the strict sense, refer to semantically distinct conceptions of exactly the same course of action that induce preference reversals. A classic example is an experiment by Kahneman and Tversky . . . It is difficult to satisfy

the requirement of interchangeability of alternatives outside of a narrow range of choices. Certainly when it comes to the form in which alternatives are presented to citizens making political choices, it rarely is possible to establish ex ante that the gains (or losses) of alternative characterizations of a course of action are strictly equivalent. It accordingly should not be surprising that the concept of framing, for the study of political choices, typically refers to characterizations of a course of action in terms of an alternative "central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Gamson and Modigliani 1987: 143).

This is an important point insofar as it means that the bulk of studies on political communication, including those discussed below, employ a conception of framing effects (i.e., emphasis framing) that differs from that common in the behavioral decision and psychology literature (i.e., equivalency framing).

Second, the notable material and symbolic consequences of political decisions mean that multiple actors attempt to influence decision making. These actors, including politicians, interest groups, and media outlets, strive to shape the preferences of ordinary citizens whose opinions shape electoral outcomes and often guide day-to-day policy decisions (e.g., Erikson, MacKuen, & Stimson, 2002). This results in a *strategic* political environment of *competing* information.

Third, in most circumstances, and in spite of the importance of many decisions, citizens possess scant information and have *little motivation* to engage in extensive deliberation. Evidence along these lines comes conclusively from the last 50 years of public opinion and voting research (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). In the remainder of this chapter, I expand these latter two points by reviewing selected examples of research on strategic (emphasis) framing and its effects.[8]

Political Frames in Communication

There exists a virtual cottage industry in communication studies that traces the evolution of particular frames over time. While there is value in this descriptive enterprise, it provides little insight into what Scheufele (1999) calls the framing building process of how speakers choose to construct frames in communication. Here I provide three examples from my own work that reveal how strategic concerns shape frame choices by politicians. I then briefly discuss media framing.

The first example comes from Druckman and Holmes' (2004) study of President Bush's first post-2001 State of the Union address (delivered on January 29, 2002). The State of the Union provides a "once-a-year chance for the modern president to inspire and persuade the American people" (Saad, 2002) and to establish his agenda (Cohen, 1997). Bush faced a fairly divided audience; citizens were moving their focus away from terrorism and homeland security towards more of an emphasis on the economy and the impending recession. According to the January 2002 Gallup poll, 35% of respondents named terrorism or related problems as the most important problem facing the nation, compared to 33% who named some sort of economic problem (followed by education at 6%). Prior to Bush's address, analysts predicted that he would focus equally on terrorism/homeland security and the economy. For example, CNN predicted that Bush would "focus on war, econ-

omy", while MSNBC described Bush as preparing for a "balancing act . . . [dealing] with terrorism, recession" (Druckman & Holmes, 2004, p. 760).

While this made sense, given the aforementioned national focus on terrorism/homeland security and the economy, it made little strategic sense. Bush's issue-specific approval on security (roughly 86%) was substantially higher than on the slumping economy (roughly 31%) (Saad, 2002). By framing the country's situation in terms of terrorism/homeland security, Bush could potentially induce people to add weight to terrorism/homeland security in their evaluation of Bush and the nation's overall situation. And, this is exactly what Bush did. Indeed, a content analysis of the speech reporting the percentage of policy statements devoted to various categories shows that, contrary to pre-debate expectations, Bush framed the bulk of his policy discussion (49%) in terms of terrorism/homeland security. He devoted only 10% each to the economy and the war in Afghanistan (with the remaining parts of the speech focusing on various other domestic and foreign issues). This is stark evidence of strategic framing and it had an effect on subsequent media coverage. *The New York Times* headline the day after the address stated: "Bush, Focusing on Terrorism, Says Secure U.S. Is Top Priority" (Sanger, 2002).

Additional evidence suggests that Bush's behavior reflects a general pattern. Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier (2004) examine Nixon's rhetorical choices during his first term in office (1969–1972). The authors measure frames in communication by coding a large sample of Nixon's public statements and counting the amount of space devoted to distinct issues (e.g., welfare, crime, civil rights). As with the Bush study, this coding captures how Nixon framed his administration and the nation's general direction. Linking the rhetorical data with polling results from Nixon's private archives, Druckman et al. find that, on domestic issues, Nixon carefully chose his frames in strategically favorable ways. For example, if public support for Nixon's position on a particular domestic issue (e.g., Nixon's tax plans, which a large percentage of the public supported) increased by 10% over the total average, then, holding other variables at their means, Nixon increased attention to that domestic issue by an average of 58% (Druckman et al., 2004, pp. 1217–1218). Nixon did not, by contrast, significantly respond to changes in issues that the public saw as "important" (e.g., he would use a tax frame even if most of the public did not see taxes as an important problem). In short, Nixon framed his addresses so as to induce the public to base their presidential and general evaluations on the criteria that favored him (i.e., issues on which the public supported him, such as taxes). He ignored the salience of those issues and, in fact, presumably hoped to reframe public priorities so as to render favorable issues to be most salient. As Nixon's chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, explained, using frames that highlight "issues where the President is favorably received" would make "Americans realize that the President is with them on these issues" (Druckman et al., 2004, p. 1218).

Congressional candidates also strategically choose their frames. One of the most salient features of congressional campaigns is the incumbency advantage that provides incumbents with up to a 10% advantage (Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2004, p. 487). The incumbency advantage stems, in part, from three particular candidate characteristics: voters find incumbents appealing because they possess experience in office, they are familiar (e.g., have ties to the district), and they have provided benefits for the district or state (e.g., organizing events concerning a local issue, casework, pork barrel projects) (e.g., Jacobson, 2004). What this means, from a framing perspective, is that incumbents have a strategic incentive to highlight experience, familiarity, and benefits. In contrast, challengers will frame the campaign in other terms, emphasizing alternative considerations that tend to matter in congressional elections, including issue positions, partisanship, endorsements, and polls (e.g., to show the candidate is viable).

Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin (2009a) test these predictions with data from a representative sample of U.S. House and Senate campaigns from 2002, 2004, and 2006. They do so via content analyses of candidate websites for which they coded the terms that candidates used to frame the campaign (i.e., the extent to which they emphasize different criteria). Figure 13.1 presents the results from the content analyses, reporting predicted probabilities of candidates employing the distinct types of frames on their websites. (For some variables, the probability is the likelihood of employing the frame anywhere on their site. For other variables, the probability is the likelihood of using the frame more often than the overall average; details and more refined analyses are available in Druckman et al., 2009a.) The figure provides clear evidence of strategic framing: Incumbents frame their campaigns in ways that benefit them, emphasizing experience in office, familiarity, and district ties, while challengers frame the campaign in alternative terms. The normative implications are intriguing, since campaign frames that often establish subsequent policy agendas (e.g., Jamieson, 2000, p. 17) are driven, in no small way, by strategic considerations that may bear little relationship to pressing governmental issues.

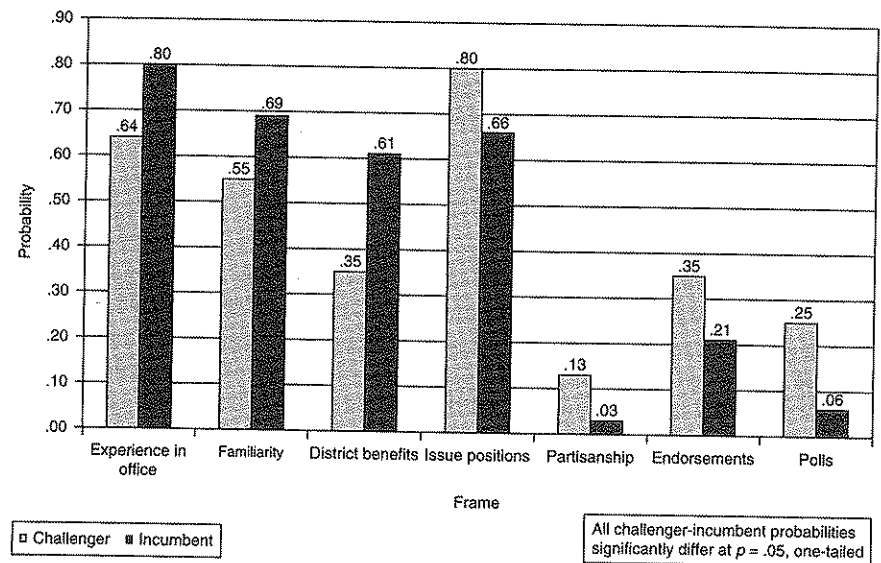Each of the three examples focuses on just one side of a more complex framing

FIGURE 13.1 Candidate status and campaign frame.

economy, and that Nixon's opponents emphasized alternative issues that were less favorable for Nixon. In the case of the Congressional data, attentive voters would be exposed to competing frames from incumbents as opposed to challengers. To see the extent to which competition between frames is the norm, Chong and Druckman (in press) content-analyzed major newspaper coverage of 14 distinct issues over time, counting the number of frames put forth on each issue (as well as other features of the frames).[9] While the data do not provide insight into strategic incentives, the findings reveal a complex mix of frames for each issue.

Chong and Druckman computed a score to capture the weighted number of frames on a given issue, with frames employed more often receiving greater weight. Across the 14 issues, the average number of weighted frames is 5.09 (standard deviation = 1.19). The issue with the fewest weighted frames was coverage of a 1998 Ku Klux Klan rally in Tennessee (with 3.03 weighted frames, including free speech, public safety, and opposing racism). The issue with the most weighted frames was coverage of the 2004 Abu Ghraib controversy concerning prisoner abuse by members of the United States Armed Forces (with 6.9 weighted frames, including military responsibility, presidential administration responsibility, individual responsibility, military commander responsibility, negative consequences for international relations, positive consequences for international relations, negative domestic consequences, positive domestic consequences, and others). Details on the other issues are available in Chong and Druckman (in press).

Importantly, on each issue, many of the frames employed competed with one another, meaning they came from opposing sides. For example, a free speech frame of a hate group rally likely increases support, while a public safety frame decreases it. Similarly, the Abu Ghraib individual responsibility frame suggests that fault lies with the individuals involved, whereas the administration or military commander frames put the bulk of the blame on the culture established by higher level actors. Opposing sides simultaneously employ contrary frames that make their way into media coverage. How individuals process these mixes of frames is the topic to which I now turn.

Political Frames in Thought

The typical (emphasis) framing effect experiment randomly assigns individuals to receive *one* of two alternative representations of an issue. For example, in studies of people's willingness to allow hate groups to conduct a rally, individuals learn of the issue framed *either* in terms of free speech *or* in terms of public safety. In this case, the relevant comparison is the difference of opinion between individuals in the two conditions. The modal finding is a significant effect, such that individuals exposed to the free speech frame are significantly more likely to view free speech considerations as important and consequently allow the rally (compared to individuals who receive the public safety frame; see Nelson et al., 1997a).[10] This is an example of emphasis framing since presumably the overall effect on rally support occurred via an increase in the salience of the free speech consideration.

The above argument suggests that these one-sided designs miss a defining feature of most political situations – competition between frames. Acknowledging this, some recent work explores competitive settings. In their pioneering study, Sniderman and Theriault (2004) demonstrate, with two experimental surveys, that when competing frames are presented alongside one another (e.g., a free speech and a public safety) they mutually *cancel out*, such that the frames do not affect individuals' opinions (e.g., those exposed to both frames do not differ from a control group exposed to no frames). Chong and Druckman (2007a, 2007b, 2007c) build on Sniderman and Theriault (2004); as mentioned above, they show that in competitive settings, a key factor concerns a frame's strength, with strong frames winning out even against weaker frames that are repeated. Indeed, in the urban sprawl experiment described above, when respondents received the community frame multiple times (e.g., twice), it was the economic frame, even when presented only once, that drove opinions.

Another example of the importance of strength comes from Druckman's (2010) study of support for a publicly funded casino. Based on pretest data that employed the previously discussed approach to assessing strength, Druckman identified two strong ("Str") frames: a pro economic benefits frame ("Econ"; e.g., revenue from the casino will support educational programs) and a con social costs frame ("Soc Costs"; e.g., casinos lead to addictive behavior). He also found three weak ("Wk") frames: a pro entertainment frame ("Entert"), a con corruption frame ("Corr"), and a con morality frame ("Moral"). He then exposed a distinct set of participants to various mixes of these frames; a summary of the results appears in Figure 13.2, which graphs the shift in average opinion, by frame exposures, relative to a control group that received no frames (i.e., control group participants were asked about their opinions of a publicly funded casino without receiving any
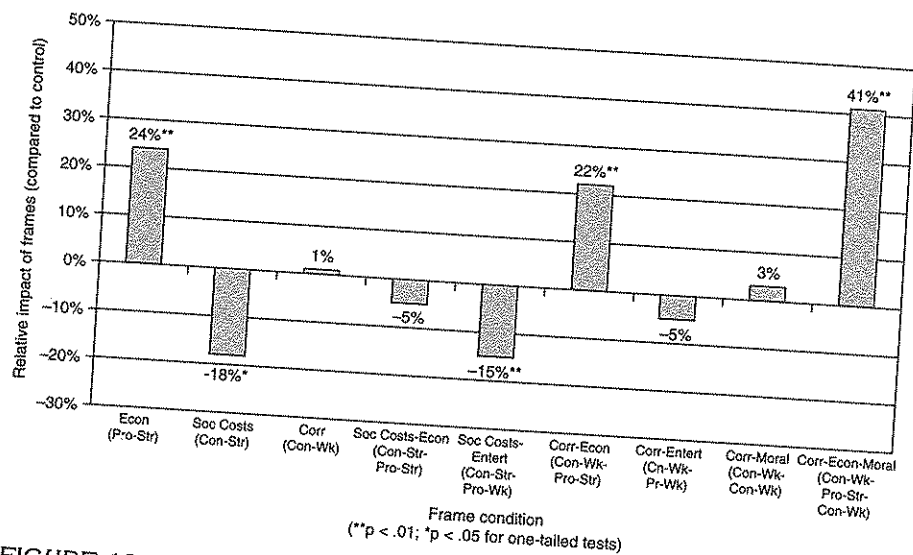

FIGURE 13.2 Likelihood of casino support.

arguments). In every case, the strong frame moved opinion and the weak frame did not. For example, the final condition in Figure 13.2 shows that a single exposure to the strong economic benefits frame substantially moved opinion (by 41%) even in the face of two con weak frames. This accentuates the finding that strength is more important than repetition. (Simultaneous exposure to the two strong competing frames did not significantly move opinion.)

These results beg the aforementioned question of what lies beyond a frame's strength. Why are some frames perceived as strong and others as weak? Even the large persuasion literature offers scant insight: "Unhappily, this research evidence is not as illuminating as one might suppose . . . It is not yet known what it is about the 'strong arguments' . . . that makes them persuasive" (O'Keefe, 2002, pp. 147, 156). Recall that I previously mentioned that a common, if not defining, element of opinion formation in political settings is that individuals lack information and motivation. An implication is that, when it comes to assessing a frame's strength (or applicability), individuals will often (unless extremely motivated) ignore criteria seen as normatively desirable (e.g., logic, facts) and instead focus on factors that many theorists view as less than optimal.

The little existing research on frame strength supports this perspective. For example, Arceneaux (2009, p. 1) finds that "individuals are more likely to be persuaded by political arguments that evoke cognitive biases." Specifically, he reports that frames that highlight averting losses or outgroup threats resonate to a greater extent than do other, ostensibly analogous arguments.[11] Druckman and Bolsen (2009) report that adding factual information to frames does nothing to enhance their strength. They focus on opinions about new technologies, such as carbon nanotubes (CNTs). Druckman and Bolsen expose experimental participants to different mixes of frames in support for and opposed to the technology. For example, a supportive frame for CNTs states: "Most agree that the most important implication of CNTs concerns how they will affect energy cost and availability." An example of an opposed frame is: "Most agree that the most important implication of CNTs concerns their unknown long-run implications for human health." Druckman and Bolsen report that each of these two frames shifts opinions in the expected directions. More importantly, when factual information is added to one or both frames (in other conditions), such as citing a specific study about energy costs (e.g., a study shows CNTs will double the efficiency of solar cells in the coming years), that information does nothing to add to the power of the frame. In short, frames with specific factual evidence are no stronger (in their effects) than analogous frames that include no such evidence. This may be troubling insofar as one might view facts as an important type of information to consider.

Other work on frame strength suggests that it increases in frames that highlight specific emotions (Aarøe, 2008; Petersen, 2007), include multiple, frequently appearing arguments (Baumgartner, De Boef, & Boydstun, 2008), and/or have been used in the past (Edy, 2006). The initial studies on frame strength make clear that one should not confound "strength" with "normative desirability". What exactly is the meaning of the "normatively desirable" concept lies outside the purview of this chapter, but it is a topic that demands careful consideration as scholars continue empirical forays into frame strength.[12]

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to provide clarity to existing applications of the framing concept. I draw a distinction between equivalency and emphasis framing, but suggest that the two types fit into a single psychological model. When it comes to political situations, emphasis framing likely plays a more important role. Future research is needed to better understand how competition between frames works and how individuals evaluate a frame's strength – that is, why some frames seem effective or compelling to people and others not.

In terms of competition, there are two relevant agendas. The first concerns the production of frames and how strategic actors respond to one another and political actors interact with the media to ensure that their chosen frame receives coverage (see Entman, 2004). This will entail a more explicit consideration of the motivations of different media outlets. This parallels recent work on equivalency frames that explores speakers' choices (e.g., van Buiten & Keren, 2009) and how those choices affect evaluations of the speaker (e.g., Keren, 2007). Second, work on how competition influences information processing and preference formation continues to be in its infancy. While the model offered above provides some insight, much more work is needed. This echoes Bargh's (2006, p. 159) recent call that studies addressing accessibility and the associated processes need to explore the impact of competition. Future work will also benefit from incorporating more explicit political considerations, such as parties competing to define issues and campaigns (Slothuus & de Vreese, 2009). In terms of strength, it should be clear that more work is needed. Understanding what strengthens a frame is perhaps the most pressing question in framing research. Indeed, frame strength goes a long way towards determining who wins and loses in politics.

NOTES

1. Just how accessible a consideration needs to be for use, however, is uncertain; Fazio (1995, p. 273) states that the "model is limited to making predictions in relative terms."
2. As intimated earlier, an accessible consideration (i.e., 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), or an individual who is presently unemployed may not be moved from frequently hearing about the employment rates generated by a new economic program. In these cases, strong prior beliefs and experiences determine the frame in an individual's mind.
3. 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.
4. In such a situation, there is a possibility of a negativity bias where negative information receives greater weight; this bias, while related, is distinct from a framing effect.
5. Problems came from the domains of disease, crime, investment, and employment.

with a theory that posits such stimulation (and is consistent with psychological work on external cues prompting conscious processing beyond accessibility; see Martin & Achee, 1992).

7. Equivalency framing may be relevant in some circumstances (e.g. Bartels, 2003; McDermott, 1998). Equivalency framing likely matters more on structured problems when the descriptions are clearer and consensual but can be construed in distinct but logically equivalent ways.

8. Notice that the identified features of political decision making involve the nature of the choice, the context, and the individual. These dimensions also constitute central elements to theories of decision making more generally (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1993, p. 4).

9. Issues included the Patriot Act, global warming, intelligent design, same-sex marriage in the USA and Canada, social security at two points in time, the *Bush v. Gore* Supreme Court case, the Abu Ghraib controversy, an immigration initiative, a Nazi rally, two Ku Klux Klan rallies, and a proposal for a state-sponsored casino.

10. There is substantial research on the moderators of framing effects in one-sided situations. For a review, see Chong and Druckman (2007c, pp. 111–112); also see Lecheler, de Vreese, and Slothuus (2009). Related to this is the large literature on persuasion moderators in one-sided situations (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

11. He also finds these effects are moderated by participants' level of fear – more fearful individuals find the arguments stronger.

12. One intriguing direction for future work on frame strength is to build on Haidt's (2007) foundational moral impulses.

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