



## Media Government Interactions in the United States

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### Abstract

Literature examining Media-Government interactions in the United States is diverse, encompassing a vast range of positions looking at state-media interactions from the mainstream media (MSM) practices such as news framing. While this work will focus on media-state interaction(s), literature relevant to this document, is discussed with the purpose of establish a concise mapping of the existing research in media-government interactions in the United States.

**Keywords:** Media-government; Literature; Media-state interactions; News framing

### Introduction

This literature review seeks to explore media-state interactions, discussed in established literature, from divergent standpoints, for a common aim of examining state-media interaction(s) such as the way(s) in which the U. S. government interacts with news media as a means-to-an-end. The practice of controlling or censoring the news media is discussed in literature pertaining to news framing; where “framing entails selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution”, and this work will explore prominent literature’s findings of the reasons communication institutions such as the media, and in particular, news media engage in the practice of news framing.

This document seeks to examine literature that addresses state-media interaction(s) as a process or activity designed to advance agendas or control (the) discussion(s) for some advantage -political or otherwise. Thus the aim of this document is to establish connections between relating literature which examines state-media interaction as a continuum where news framing accounts for a force relating to state-media interaction(s). Literature is explored to establish a succinct mapping of the existing research in media-

government interactions in the United States, with a particular focus on news framing.

### Literature Review

#### What is news framing?

The idea that messages can be altered or ‘framed’ to achieve an intended perception of the original message is found in various fields of studies. Consider a quote from Orwell’s original preface to his 1946 Animal Farm, “unpopular ideas can be silenced and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban” [1]. Also, “whoever defines the issue controls the perimeters of the debate” and in-turn “whoever is able to define what is and is not culture holds the power” [2]. The common element in these quotes is message control. One major practice by elites to control the message is through news framing, which is often referred to as frame building, and is closely tied to agenda building/setting, see for example Scheufelel and Tewksbury, who notes that “both frame building and agenda building refer to macroscopic mechanisms that deal with message construction rather than media effects. The activities of interest groups, policymakers, journalists, and other groups [elites] interested in shaping media agendas and frames can have an impact on both the volume and character of news messages about a particular issue”. The above citations comprise a brief introduction to news framing, but, in keeping with the central aim of this document, the following discussion on news framing will focus on the way in which elites engage in the practice of shaping news messages through news framing.

#### What is meant by the term elites?

The term elites typically refers to a group or class of people seen as possessing the greatest power and/or influence within a society, in particularly because of their wealth or privilege, however, and in this document this definition is what is referred to by the term elites. Though elites, such as state legislators, comprise a small fraction of the population they govern, they nevertheless enjoy the privilege of widespread message dissemination through mass-media. This privileged position provides a platform to elites to fulfill an essential part

of their function (as public servants), but can also be a means to an end, e.g. controlling (or attempts to control) the discussion(s) around their agenda(s) through the use of mass media. This state-media interaction is observable in democracy, thus elites may interact with mass media in an official capacity (e.g. as elected legislators), “elites presumably care about what people think because they want them to behave in a particular way, supporting or at least tolerating elite activities”. The need for support (or tolerance) from elites, fosters government-media interaction in a particular way -positive portal of the elites to the rest of the society. To this end, government-media interaction may center on the elites or on their efforts, as in telling people what is salient or not. This is political influence, and as mentioned above, is inherent to elites. According to Entman, telling a population within a society what is important, or what to think about “is how one exerts political influence in noncoercive political systems... and it is through framing that political actors shape the text that influence or prime the agendas and considerations that people think about”.

### News framing in literature

Literature on framing includes two main concepts, namely media frames (which is the official story – as presented by the media, and is the main concept in this document), and audience frames (which primarily refers to schemas or bits of information that guide an individual’s processing of information. News frames can be expressed in other ways as well; take for example the visual aspect of the term, where “framing refers to such variables as camera angle and perspective in the styling of a visual message” [3]. Likewise, Ghanem found that “certain framing mechanisms used in the design of a daily newspaper, such as page placement, influenced the degree of concern expressed by Texans about crime” [3].

In contrast, messages can be, and often are, subject to framing, and as such are controllable in terms of the emphasizing of certain aspects of the message over other aspects, where framing is “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality as assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation”. This practice, of emphasizing particular elements over others has been observed in some length in the United States, such as by Lippmann with his argument that the public opinion is a reflection to what we see in the media content, which is not necessarily a reflection of reality, and if not a reflection of reality, a reflection of representative reality. Frame can represent reality as “frames introduce or raise the salient or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way [4].

The central aim of this document is to identify key literature -and their accompanying arguments/observations and/or findings related to state-media relations in the U.S., focused primarily on legislator’s interaction(s) with news media. While this document has provided (albeit briefly) an examination of the definitions/interpretations of the concept of news framing,

and its relevance to potential research projects in the field, the aim here is to note that while there may be several aspects to news framing, framing remains a crucial aspect to government-media interactions as elites seek to assert control through the manipulation of message dissemination [5]. Messages are manipulated for a variety of reasons, and this document is focused on state-motivated reasons. Additionally, literature on news framing supports the notion that elites (including people with wealth as well as those with political and social power) act to protect and expand their interests, and this is a concept that will be explored further in part two, with the Propaganda model.

While news framing has dominated the discussion, thus far, literature on the subject frequently finds associations between framing and priming, agenda setting, and as Etman put it, “... agenda setting, framing, and priming fit together as a tool of power”. Whereas Eadie questions the relationship, and notes that “the controversy lies in weather framing and priming are extensions of agenda setting or whether they are different phenomena. Takeshita has concerns that the link between agenda setting and framing could lead to the theory’s decline, where is others see this link as evidence of this series strength”. For this document, the fact that there exist divergent ideas (as to the relationship between frames, priming and agenda setting) does not detract from the practice within the United States to engage (heavily) in state-media interactions. And the behavior of the state is what this document is interested in, and the relationships noted above serve this literature review as extenders to the central idea that elites (in their various capacities) are purposely interacting with media – weather termed framing, priming, or agenda setting. Indeed, According, the differences between the three are secondary to the close relationship they have between each other [6]. That is to say, the distinctions between framing, priming and agenda setting, are negligible compared to the function each seeks to serve. Take for example, the definitions of each as presented by Edie, that framing deals with salience of attributes in the public judgment of issues, while priming deals with the salience of attributes in the public’s judgments of public officials and candidates for public office, and agenda setting attempts to transfer issue salience from the media to the public. According to McCombs and Ghanem, “agenda setting is a theory about the transfer of salience from the mass media’s pictures of the world to those in our heads”. Thus while news framing strongly relates to priming and agenda setting, there are notable differences as well as similarities, however for this literature reviewer, that unit then is stronger than what separates them. Consider Ghanem’s observation that emphasis between framing, priming, and/or agenda setting “...does not negate the basic agenda setting hypothesis but rather builds on it what already exists” [7].

In contrast, Scheufele notes that framing, priming, and agenda setting are three distinctly different approaches to effects of political communication, and states “specifically I argue against more recent attempts to subsume all three approaches under the broad concept of agenda setting...”. He emphasizes that the above three approaches to media effects

are merely related, and remain to be different approaches media affects incompatible of being combined into a simple theory. He further argues that “McCombs, Llamas et al., based their attempts to combine agenda-setting, priming, and framing into a single theoretical framework on the assumption that integrating theory is always desirable. However if theories are based on distinctively different premises... this strategy might in fact be counterproductive” [8]. Scheufele justifies this argument noting that agenda setting and priming differ from framing with regard to their assumptions and premises. Nevertheless, Scheufele, admits that his arguments are theory driven and his advocating in favor of distinguishing among agenda-setting, priming, and framing as distinct models of media effects, and he admits that future empirical research will need to address this issue further.

Putting aside the debate of where precisely framing, priming, and agenda setting lie – in relation to one another, this literature reviewer maintains that a close relationship exists between the three, and agrees with Entman’s assertion that “there are three types of claims that happen to encompass the core business of strategic framing:

- to highlight the cause of problems,
- to encourage moral judgments (and associated affective responses), and
- to promote favored policies”.

Considering that “the archetypal news story is a crime story”, news media operates within a preferred methodology (or logic) when presenting information, and this logic (see media logic below) is an ever-present factor in news dissemination by the mainstream media (MSM). In conjunction with other potential factors, the public at large is subjected to news framing, and has access to the news void of framing. Thus, news framing functions in tandem with MSM and media logic, and the result is what is shared with the populous.

As mentioned above, the framing practice by news media to first, bring attention to the ‘cause’ of a problem; second, prompting/suggesting a moral dimension; and third, advance a preferred social policy, the reporting on news in the US has limitations such as operating within the boundaries of media logic, which is “a general framework for understanding the nature, impact and relevance of media and information technologies for social life, as well as its use and appropriateness for investigating political communication... and the process through which media transmit and communicate information”. Altheid argues that this kind of logic is not restricted to television or the mass media, but rather “media logic refers to the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium. This includes rhythm, grammar, and format. Drawing on Simmel’s insights about the nature and power of social forms, format, while a feature of media logic, is singularly important-as a kind of meta-communication device--because it refers to the rules or “codes” for defining, selecting, organizing, presenting, and recognizing information as one thing rather than another (e.g., “the evening news”) [9].

In each of the areas discussed above (news framing, media logic, MSM, etc.), media are not simply reporting the news, but rather participating in news ‘shaping’ -see for example McCombs, who states that “media play an important role in setting the public agenda... in their choices of which events and trends to highlight and which to downplay or ignore, media do not simply reflect social reality, but actively shape it. i.e. news media reports are not simply what has occurred, but rather, such reports will need to first be presented as a story of crime, with a perpetrator of the crime, a victim affected by the crime, and some sort of resolution of the crime, -and the reported news is thus portrayed in one of these three areas.

## Conclusion

This supplemental document presents a mapping of the notable relevant literature on the media-government interactions – focused on news framing. News media is operational in what is ultimately selected, altered and/or filtered before reaching the public, and is not simply an account of events that have occurred. This practice serves the interest of stakeholders, as such elites have a vested interest in ‘controlling’ messages that reach the public. While individual journalists are a part of the news media, and the “coverage of politics and policy issues, newspapers aim to conform to the professional ‘canons of journalism’ (Bennett 1988) ... however recent research suggests that slant [framing to promote a position] in news coverage does exist (Groseclose and Milyo, 2005, and that it can influence our thinking about political issues (Druckman and Parkin 2005; Kahn and Kennedy 2002)” (Branton and Dunaway 2009: 257), which is the primary intent of news framing. News framing is a complex issue to examine, and this document seeks to inter into the discussion examining current thought on the subject. The reviewer notes that while this is a concise literature review, the topic of media-government interaction is one that may be changing frequently, but nevertheless holds strong roots in the literature presented herein.

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