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# Partisanship in the Media: A Comprehensive Look at the History and Potential for Bias in News Media

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# **Partisanship in the Media: A comprehensive Look at the History and Potential for Bias in News Media**

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## **Introduction**

On July 10, 2016 Republican Presidential Nominee Donald Trump tweeted, “The media is so dishonest. If I make a statement, they twist it and turn it to make it sound bad or foolish. They think the public is stupid!”<sup>1</sup> On August 10, 2016 Trump’s campaign released a statement titled, “Trump Campaign Statement on Dishonest Media.”<sup>2</sup> The statement itself had nothing to do with media dishonesty, but rather the statement clarified some remarks the candidate made during a speech about gun control. Both of these statements were made due to Trump’s feeling that his words had been twisted and misrepresented by a so called liberal media machine, run by Hillary Clinton. Throughout his campaign Trump has repeatedly stated that the media is out to get him and reports in favor of his opponent Hillary Clinton.

Trump’s dissent with the media does is by no means an outlier. Most Americans, Republican and Democrat, would agree with Trump’s statement, that the media is, in fact, biased. A recent Gallup poll taken in 2014 found that 40% of Americans were not confident in the media's ability to fully, accurately or fairly report news. This distrust is not a recent phenomenon either, since the late 90s a pattern of lowered trust in media has emerged.<sup>3</sup> But is this really the truth? Are media outlets inherently biased towards one group or another and is there substantial proof to back this claim? After all, most people would agree that Donald Trump’s statements are not usually entirely accurate and his tendency to overlook details is well known. In addition, national polls tend to lose some merit when sample size, demographics and other factors come into play.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Trump, Twitter post, July 10, (2016, 11:42 a.m.), <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/752211419634933760>

<sup>2</sup> Jason Miller, “Trump Campaign Statement on Dishonest Media,” (August 9, 2016), <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/trump-campaign-statement-on-dishonest-media>

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Rifkin, “American’s Trust in Media Remains at all Time Low,” *Gallup*, (September 28, 2016), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/185927/americans-trust-media-remains-historical-low.aspx>

This paper seeks to answer the question of media bias through the analysis of quantitative data from a variety of academic studies dedicated to this question. I hope to add to the growing conversation concerning bias in the media's reporting for foreign events. This paper will seek to prove that bias is harder to detect in international reporting rather than domestic events due to lack of firsthand information. Using two major news outlets, CNN and FOX television news as sources I will examine this potential for bias through the sponsorships of CNN and FOX, their use of particular source materials and the psychological methods such as framing each employs.

### **Evolution of News Media**

Before I dive into how media bias can be discerned, I must first define what the political media is. The word media itself is a broad term that encompasses a huge amount of information and sources. From academic journals, to advertising billboards and the drawings of a five-year-old kindergartener, these all take the form of media in one way or another. Media is defined as "the main means of mass communication (especially television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet) regarded collectively."<sup>4</sup> News media specifically is any way that news about politics, world affairs and domestic news is conveyed to the public.

The origins of political media trace back to the Roman emperor Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Caesar placed his head on Roman currency.<sup>5</sup> In a stroke that could be described as political genius he assured that all his Roman subjects, from Rome to Jerusalem, knew he was emperor. The result was something similar to a form of world news. He was able to assure that all Roman citizens, most importantly the foreign ones outside of the city of Rome, knew the face of the emperor.

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<sup>4</sup> "Media Definition," *Dictionary.com*, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/media>

<sup>5</sup> "A New Honor: The Image of Ceasar on Coins," *Macquarie University*, [http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/acans/caesar/Portraits\\_Coins.htm](http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/acans/caesar/Portraits_Coins.htm)

Fast forward two millennia to the United States in the modern era. Political media exists in many forms and news outlets convey it over many mediums. In the last century three landmark changes in technology changed the way people received their news.<sup>6</sup> First the transition from print only and public speeches to radio made politicians and news people appear more personable and changed the way that the public perceived them. In the 1920s, radio disembodied candidates, reducing them to voices. It also made national campaigns far more intimate. Politicians, used to bellowing at fairgrounds and train depots, found themselves talking to families in their homes. The blustery rhetoric that stirred big, partisan crowds came off as shrill and off-putting when piped into a living room or a kitchen. Gathered around their wireless sets, the public wanted an avuncular statesman, not a firebrand.<sup>7</sup> President Franklin Roosevelt famously used his “Fireside Chats” to enter the homes of the American people. Even though he was speaking from the Whitehouse, many Americans felt as if he spoke to them directly, fostering a feeling of reassurance and trust in the US government during uncertain times.

Televisions brought another change. They merged the intimacy of radio with the importance of appearance and body language, “In the 1960s, television gave candidates their bodies back, at least in two dimensions. With its jumpy cuts and pitiless close-ups, TV placed a stress on sound bites, good teeth and an easy manner. Image became everything, as the line between politician and celebrity blurred.”<sup>8</sup> President John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan utilized these methods most effectively than any other president. During this time, politicians and newscasters alike took on a dual role of celebrity and public servant. Newscasters such as Walter Cronkite became the symbols of journalism in the country, reporting on important issues such as

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Carr, “How Social Media is Ruining Politics,” *POLITICO Magazine*, (September 2, 2015), <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/09/2016-election-social-media-ruining-politics-213104>

<sup>7</sup> Carr, “How Social Media is Ruining Politics”

<sup>8</sup> Carr, “How Social Media is Ruining Politics”

the Vietnam War. A certain element of trust emerged between newscaster and viewer due to viewer's reliance on an accurate reporting of the news to gain information.

The turn of the century brought with it social media and the internet. This forced a complete overhaul of the news process. Rather than people receiving their news at set times throughout the day, people now receive their news in a constant stream and from multiple sources. "Today, with the public looking to smartphones for news and entertainment, we seem to be at the start of the third big technological makeover of modern electioneering. Politics and the news are becoming just another social-media stream, its swift and shallow current intertwining with all the other streams that flow through people's devices."<sup>9</sup> Politicians and news outlets alike utilize multiple forms of media to connect with their viewers. Some of these mediums include: Twitter, Facebook, the internet, television, radio and print news. Today viewers find themselves bombarded with more information than they know what to with from all angles.

### **Political Media Today**

Today political media exists in all of these forms and people are consuming more media than ever and from multiple sources. A study done by the news outlet Quartz found that the average American spends around 490 minutes a day consuming some sort of media. The study also found that television was the dominant form of media consumed, with an average of around 180 minutes devoted to it.<sup>10</sup> In 2014 an American Press study found that 40% of Americans received their news from multiple sources throughout the day and 87% of Americans utilized television to receive this news, followed by the internet/computer at 69%. The same study asked which method people preferred the most and television came in first at 24%. The study also

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<sup>9</sup> Carr, "How Social Media is Ruining Politics"

<sup>10</sup> Jason Kairan, "We Now Spend More Than Eight Hours a Day Consuming Media," *Quartz Magazine*, (June 1, 2015), <http://qz.com/416416/we-now-spend-more-than-eight-hours-a-day-consuming-media/>

found that 60% of Americans preferred receiving their news from direct sources such as CNN or FOX news.<sup>11</sup>

Traditional forms of media have also been replaced by nontraditional as a result of the growth in popularity of internet news sources such as Twitter and Facebook and alternative “news” such as the *Daily Show* and *Last Week Tonight*. While many criticize these mediums as false news sources, a study conducted by the University of Michigan found that “although television shows such as *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart and *Last Week Tonight* with John Oliver often take a satirical or comical approach to discussing world events, the political satire can be just as effective as regular political news in encouraging discussion among audience members.” The research also discovered that while both late-night comedy television and hard news engaged audiences, late-night audiences were more likely to use online interaction as a way to comment on political issues.<sup>12</sup>

### **Where does bias come from?**

The term bias is defined as “prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.”<sup>13</sup> This section of the paper seeks to defined what media bias is and how it comes into effect during the reporting of events.

The question of bias in the media is an issue that stirs up trouble in many circles. Both liberals and conservatives alike believe the media is positioned against their beliefs. The issue remains extremely complex and its causes are not always clear. People would tend to agree that there is a certain amount of bias in the reporting done by news outlets, “public opinion surveys

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<sup>11</sup> “How Americans Get Their News,” *American Press Institute*, (March 17, 2014),

<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/how-americans-get-news/>

<sup>12</sup> Hoon Lee, “Communication Mediation Model of Late-Night Comedy: An Examination of the Mediating Role of Structural Features of Interpersonal Talk between Late-Night Comedy Viewing and Political Participation,” *Mass Communication and Society*, (2012)

<sup>13</sup> “Bias Definition” Dictionary.com

have shown that a large number of American citizens perceive an ideological bias within television news. For many Americans, the two television sources that epitomize this are CNN and FOX news.<sup>14</sup>

One study conducted by a University of San Diego researcher states that perceptions of media biases are rooted in people's own beliefs and personal experiences.<sup>15</sup> This would make sense some of why liberals and conservatives alike point fingers at each other and are able to say with personal certainty that the media is unfairly biased against them. Thus news outlets tend to tailor their stories to their audience, “conservative” outlets spin stories to appeal to conservative viewers and “liberal” outlets for liberal viewers. As a result “media effects tend to be much more complex in nature, and tend to result from people's homogenous networks and selective informational diets, which reinforced their preexisting views rather than changing them.”<sup>16</sup> As found in a survey, “Conservatives tend to believe that there is a liberal bias in the media, while liberals tend to believe there is a conservative bias. While many would simply conclude that ‘bias is in the eye of the beholder,’ (Hamilton) makes the astute point that individuals are more likely to claim bias, the further the slant of the story is from their own personal views.”<sup>17</sup> Balanced messages can even be perceived as biased by certain audiences due to a certain psychological phenomena.

This phenomenon, can be best described with the term, hostile media effect. The hostile media effect is a psychological effect where viewers believe that a media outlet that they believe to be reporting in favor of either liberals or conservatives is inherently biased, depending on their

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<sup>14</sup> Joel Turner, “The Messenger Overwhelming the Message: Ideological Cues and Perceptions of Bias in Television News” *Political Behavior*, (April 27, 2007 v. 29), p. 441, 10.1007/s11109-007-9031-z

<sup>15</sup> Haylee Devaney, “Perceptions of Media Bias: viewing the news through ideological news” *University of California San Diego*, (April 1, 2013), pp 6

<sup>16</sup> Dietram Scheule, David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” *Journal of Communication*, (2007), v. 5, p. 10, 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00326.x

<sup>17</sup> Tim Groseclose, Jeffrey Milyo, “A Measure of Media Bias,” *Oxford Journals: The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, (November 2005), v. 120 no. 4, p. 1195, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25098770>



own political leanings. In a study conducted by researchers done at the University of Seoul researchers found that the HME effect was multiplied when clearly slanted news stories were presented to test subject. Subjects were asked whether news stories were congruent or incongruent to their political beliefs and then asked if they felt the outlet had portrayed the story in a biased way. The results showed a strong correlation between the two. People who found a story to be congruent to their beliefs did not see bias against them while those who reported a story as incongruent were more likely to see bias against them. Meaning, the more a story differed from their original belief, the more the subjects were convinced that the media was biased against them.<sup>18</sup> For these reasons the questions of bias in domestic news stories becomes entirely subjective. This effect offers some explanation in regards to how both sides of the aisle can see bias even when a story might be considered moderate.

The media also shows its bias through its sponsors. “In terms of shaping content, researchers argue that a number of privileged groups contribute to the production of media accounts, including social and political institutions and other interest groups such as lobbyists and the public relations industry. These different groups intersect to shape the issues open to discussion, but the outcome can also severely limit the information to which audiences have access.”<sup>19</sup> Lobbyist, special interest groups, think tanks, private citizens and many other groups actively campaign and donate to news sources to ensure certain things are reported on while certain issues are downplayed. While most media outlets claim journalistic integrity to a certain degree, meaning, they will not alter a story to benefit one groups private goals, this is just one more lens that the media must be scrutinized through to discern bias.

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<sup>18</sup> Mihee Kim, “The Role of Partisan Sources and Audiences' Involvement in Bias Perceptions of Controversial News,” *Media Psychology*, (2016). v. 19, n. 2, pp. 203-223, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2014.1002941>

<sup>19</sup> Catherine Happer, Greg Philo, “The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change,” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, (2013), v.1, p. 322, 10.5964/jspp.v1i1.96

In addition to the influencers of media, media bias can also be examined by categorizing the itself as a lobbyist of sorts. CNN is a news network owned by the Turner Broadcasting Network which is a subsidiary of the Time Warner company. Since 1989 Time Warner has donated upwards of 1 million dollars to the Clinton Foundation and supported a variety of democratic and conservative super pacs.<sup>20</sup> Similarly FOX news, and its parent company 21st century FOX has been listed as the 13th biggest contributor to the Clinton Foundation and has also contributed to a variety of both liberal and conservative super pacs alike.<sup>21</sup> Again, journalistic integrity must be taken into account. There is no way to draw a direct line between the donations and inherent bias.

It is also important to acknowledge that news outlets operate as private businesses, with their success hinging upon viewership and revenue. The media exists as a private entity bound to the rules of capitalism and capitalism favors the consumer and demand. We do not live in a country with a state run media. In a similar way to how a company makes money by selling a good or service, news outlets make their money by selling advertising space. Advertising revenue accounts for a large portion of news outlets profits. The value of advertising time is a direct reflection of viewership. For example, CNN's prime time news channel makes up only 7% of the company, but accounts for a good chunk, around 40% of their advertising revenue due to the fact that they have viewers in almost 90% of television owning households.<sup>22</sup> This hold true across the board, Primetime — across all television networks, not just CNN — is still the most valuable real estate for media companies and advertisers, because of its reach and the ease of

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<sup>20</sup> "Time Warner Cable," *Follow the Money*, <http://www.followthemoney.org/entity-details?eid=2612&default=>

<sup>21</sup> "21st Century FOX," *Follow the Money*, <http://www.followthemoney.org/entity-details?eid=2612&default=>

<sup>22</sup> Trefis Team, "Time Warner's CNN Will See Steady Growth In Subscription & Advertising Revenues In Coming Years," *Forbes Magazine*, (2015),

monetizing it.<sup>23</sup> In addition FOX news ad revenue accounted for 736 million dollars.<sup>24</sup> With this information in mind, it does not seem absurd that a news outlet would attempt to tailor their news for certain groups in an attempt to boost viewership with the end goal of generating more revenue via advertising.

### **Why Foreign News Is More Susceptible to Media Bias**

Shifting the view from domestic to foreign news simplifies things a bit while at the same time raising the potential for bias that comes directly from the media. People tend to create their own lenses of what is going on domestically and allow personal experience to influence their perspective of domestic news, while foreign news often remains uncolored. For example, in a survey done by UK newspaper, the Daily express, people were asked about a domestic issue, disability benefits and where they received their information about it. 70% of participants reported that they based their beliefs on the topic in personal experience, i.e. they knew someone who was receiving disabilities benefits or they were receiving the benefits themselves.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Unless a person goes abroad and experiences something firsthand, the bulk of a person's information comes from media sources. It can safely be said that for issues such as terrorism that the majority of Americans have not experienced it directly. As a result, their views on a topic such as that largely rely on the reporting done by the media.

News outlets have a certain amount of control over the information about the world that viewers see. News outlets such as CNN and FOX serve as filters for the massive amount of activity going on in the world on a day to day basis. One author describes the role of the media as such, “An effective flow of information between the various distinct groups in the public

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<sup>23</sup> Alex Weprin, “This is Where CNN Makes its Money,” *TV Newser*, (2010).  
<http://www.adweek.com/tvnewser/this-is-where-cnn-makes-its-money/25426>

<sup>24</sup> “Ad Revenues” *SNL Kagan*, (2013)

<sup>25</sup> Catherine Happer, Greg Philo, “The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change,” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*” p. 327

systematically editing and interpreting the mass of information, making some sense of the world for audiences.”<sup>26</sup> Thus the media exists as a barrier to information overload, selecting what they think is important and essential for people to view. The media plays a central role in communicating to the public what happens in the world, especially in cases when the public do not possess direct knowledge or experience what is happening, they become especially reliant on the media for information. As a result, media outlets reporting on international matters, matters that people do not have direct experience with, can tailor their stories in a way that would come off as biased to a viewer.

### **Framing and other psychological methods**

The methods used by the media to tailor news stories have been widely examined and discussed academically for some time. A comprehensive look at the three main methods of influence, priming, agenda setting and framing will be examined in this section, the focus mainly being on framing and its application to real world news stories.

The media employs a variety of tactics to influence its viewers. These methods are by no means a secret. These methods were first directly connected to shaping people's world and political views in 1997, when republican publicist Frank Luntz released a 222-page memo with a simple message, “It's not what you say, it's how you say it.” Drawing on focus groups and surveys, Luntz had zeroed in on keywords and phrases that resonated with conservative voters. He had discovered that by phrasing issues a certain way, even liberal ones, he could make a message more appealing to his viewers.<sup>27</sup> Although the methods he described were founded in decades old research and ideas relating to sociology, psychology and communication, he was the

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<sup>26</sup> Dietram Scheule, David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” p. 11

<sup>27</sup> Dietram Scheule, David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” pp.1-2

first to directly relate them to campaign strategies. Democrats caught on and followed up with a memo titled, “Don’t think of an elephant,” a short manual that instructed liberal on how to frame their own messages.<sup>28</sup>

The three main methods used by the media are agenda setting, priming and framing. Agenda setting refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis the media places on a topic and the importance attributed to an issue by the audience.<sup>29</sup> One example of this would be the coverage of recent terrorist attacks around the world. Media outlets, especially CNN and FOX have come under fire for covering terrorist attacks in Europe more heavily than terrorist attacks in the Middle East. The reason is simple, it boils down to empathy, “Basically, when attacks happen in Paris or Brussels, many people in the developed world can easily imagine themselves becoming a victim -- can see themselves watching a concert in France or boarding a train in Belgium.”<sup>30</sup> When people can identify with something, they feel a connection. This translates to more viewership, and prime time news needs viewers to keep the ship afloat. In my opinion, this does not equate to bias in any way. Rather it is the media giving the audience what they believe will resonate best and draw in the largest amount of viewers.

Priming occurs when news outlets suggest benchmarks for evaluating certain situations.<sup>31</sup> For example, the media constantly references 9-11 as a benchmark for terrorist attacks abroad. Rather than treating cases as individual accounts with their own situations, it is easier to reference something that people are familiar with. This often leads to misunderstandings and simplifications of situations. In a similar way to agenda setting, priming does not necessarily

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<sup>28</sup> Dietram Scheule, David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” pp. 1-2

<sup>29</sup> Dietram Scheule, David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” p. 11

<sup>30</sup> Jessica Roy, “Why you Probably Didn’ Hear Everyone Talking About These Major Terrorist Attacks” *Los Angeles Times*, (March 31 2015)

<sup>31</sup> Dietram Scheule, David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” p. 11

account for bias. Rather it serves as a way to more easily understand complex situations. In general news stories live for about 24 hours unless the story develops significantly after that period. It is far easier to compare a situation to something that people are familiar to rather than spending a long period of time explaining a new situation.

Framing differs significantly from priming and agenda setting. This is the method that I will focus on for the rest of this paper. The reason why framing presents the highest potential for bias is because “It is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences.”<sup>32</sup> The methods of framing originate from both sociology and psychology. The psychological origins of framing lie in experimental work by Israeli psychologist Kahneman(1979, 1984) In his experiments he proved that presenting nearly identical information in different ways influenced people's decision making and evaluations of a situation.<sup>33</sup> The sociological work done by Goffman will be discussed further later in the paper. As a result, how a story is framed is entirely up to the source. Framing explains how different media sources, in this case CNN and FOX, can take an event and spin it to appeal to both liberal and conservatives. The resulting effect leads to people seeing foreign media reporting as inherently biased.

An assumption of framing lies in the ideas that Erving Goffman researched, he found that people cannot fully understand the world around them both due to lack of personal experience and an abundance of information. In an attempt to help people, understand new information, news outlets will tailor stories to fit into a framework of what people are able to understand easily. After all, the evening news is not an academic research paper. Goffman stated this about

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<sup>32</sup> Dietram Scheule, David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” p. 11

<sup>33</sup> Dietram Scheule, David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” pp. 11-12

framing, “This does not mean, of course, that most journalists try to spin a story or deceive their audiences. In fact, framing, for them, is a necessary tool to reduce the complexity of an issue, given the constraints of their respective media related to news holes and airtime.”<sup>34</sup> Framing is a necessary tool in news but it can also be used as a biasing tool. In addition to how a story is framed, repetition also plays an important role.

As anyone working in marketing will say, the content of a message is almost as important as the number of times someone sees something. Seeing a message multiple times increases the chance a person will remember what they saw, and in the case of the media, influence how what they think about something. What is interesting about framing methods however, is that the objective of media outlets is not change someone's mind about an issue, but rather to reinforce a preconceived notion. Two researchers found that repetition of frames should have a greater impact on less knowledgeable individuals who also are more attentive to peripheral cues, whereas more knowledgeable individuals are more likely to engage in systematic information processing by comparing the relative strength of alternative frames in competitive situations.<sup>35</sup> People's knowledge of a situation also played a role in how framing repetition affected them. One such study found that “Individuals with lower levels of general political knowledge might be most susceptible to immediate news frame exposure, but these individuals are not motivated or able to integrate the frame into long-term memory. High knowledge individuals were also affected in our study, but they are also more likely to encounter other information over time and have a higher ability of rejecting a political argument. Thus, the most durable effects are found with individuals of medium political knowledge, “a group

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<sup>34</sup> Dietram Scheule, David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” p. 12

<sup>35</sup> Brendan Nyhan, Jason Reifler, “When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions,” *Political Behavior*, (June 2010), V. 32, N. 2, pp. 303-330, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40587320>

characterized by a certain level of cognitive engagement, but without access to a plethora of possibly competing considerations on the issue”<sup>36</sup> The bottom line, being politically educated mitigated the effect of media framing. In addition the first impression of a story played a strong role in people's understanding of a story, another study found that once people developed a belief or perception of a story they were unlikely to change their opinion even if the new update came from a “credible” news source.<sup>37</sup>

Lastly, how a story is presented visually plays a role in framing. People spend more time than ever consuming media, but this also leads to an overstimulation of the brain. For example, when I scroll through a social media feed or watch the evening news I am bombarded by a barrage of headline and images and often time these are the only things I see. The same applies for newspapers, magazines and print sources, there is so much media available today that often times all people are able to do is scan headlines and images to receive their news. Thus news outlets use this to their advantage and tailor headlines and images so viewers are more likely to click or stay and watch. A study done the American Psychological association found that headlines played an important role in what people remembered about an article. The study found that people were more likely to remember what the headline stated rather than the content. For example, one article was titled “Crime rates plunging in a record year,” they article went on to talk about how crime dropped by .2%.<sup>38</sup> When readers were asked at a later time about the article and they stated that crime rates had dropped significantly when in fact that was not the case. The

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<sup>36</sup> Sophie Lecheler, Mario Keer, Andreas R.T. Schuck & Regula Hänggli, “The Effects of Repetitive News Framing on Political Opinions over Time”, *Communication Monographs*, (2015)v. 82 n.3, pp339-358, 10.1080/03637751.2014.994646

<sup>37</sup> Brendan Nyhan, Jason Reifler, “When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions,” p. 323

<sup>38</sup> Ecker, Ullrich K. H.; Lewandowsky, Stephan; Chang, Ee Pin; Pillai, Rekha, “The effects of subtle misinformation in news headlines,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, (Dec 2013), V. 20 n. 4, pp. 323-335, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/xap0000028>



same idea applied to the images associated with articles. One such example for this would be during the recent RNC and DNC when reporting was done on Chelsea Clinton and Ivanka Trump. The conservative sites I looked at portrayed Ivanka in positive images, her looking calm and composed while they showed Chelsea in images of her shouting, and mid-sentence. The same logic can be applied to news stories when they portray international issues to certain American viewers.

### **Case Study: Egyptian Revolution**

This section of the paper examine framing methods used in the media reporting done on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.

In 2011 a peaceful protest began in Egypt against the semi authoritarian president Hosni Mubarak. This protest received a good amount of media coverage in the United States due to our relationship with the Egyptian government. During this coverage the media speculated on who would come to power, and what would happen if certain groups emerged as the new government. One such group was the Muslim Brotherhood. However, a different picture of the Muslim Brotherhood was painted to viewers, depending on which news outlet a person received their news from. When examining the depictions of the Muslim Brotherhood from FOX News and CNN, an astute viewer could discern an obvious bias in their reporting. Using a framing analysis one can clearly see this bias.

Researchers subsequently conducted a study examining the framing methods used by both FOX and CNN. they found that both FOX and CNN framed the Muslim Brotherhood as a radical Islamic terrorist group and that FOX consistently used rhetoric that would frame the Muslim brotherhood for conservatives while CNN framed the Brotherhood for liberal viewers.

“Between the two networks, 45 instances of co-occurrence were noted with the words

coded as describing the Muslim Brotherhood to be ‘radical’ and the words coded because they associate the Brotherhood with terrorism. For example, Sean Hannity of *the Sean Hannity Show* on Fox News described the Brotherhood as, “a real, clear present danger and the only organized political opposition. I think the odds are that radicals, maybe not immediately, but over time, they will sound moderate then it becomes radical Islam.” On CNN, it was said it compared the Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt’s future to the Iranian Revolution, a historically violent revolution.”<sup>39</sup>

There was also evidence that FOX framed its coverage for conservative viewers, “Of those 45 co-occurrences of coded words falling under ‘radical’ and ‘association with terrorism’ in the same paragraph, Fox News accounted for 30 or three-fourths of those co- occurrences. Additionally, Fox News routinely discussed the Muslim Brotherhood as the enemy of democracy, while CNN provided slightly more moderate comments and discussion of the Muslim Brotherhood amongst its Islamic democracy naysayers and reporting. Moreover, Fox News averaged nearly 98 associations of the Muslim Brotherhood with terrorism per every 100 transcripts whereas CNN averaged only 35 associations for every 100 transcripts.”<sup>40</sup> Both groups failed as a whole to address the situation in its full complexity and did not go into detail about the history of the Muslim brotherhood or its political platform. Rather they took what people already knew about politics in the Middle East and tailored the story to that.

### **Case Study: 2016 Turkish Coup**

On the night of July 15 2016, pro military members of the Turkish army attempted a coup against the democratically elected President Tayyip Erdogan. For a few hours that night military

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<sup>39</sup> Kelsey Glover, “Analysis of CNN and The Fox News Networks’ framing of the Muslim Brotherhood during the Egyptian revolution in 2011,” *Elon University Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communication*, (Fall 2011), V. 2 N. 2, pp 122-127

<sup>40</sup> Kelsey Glover, “Analysis of CNN and The Fox News Networks’ framing of the Muslim Brotherhood during the Egyptian revolution in 2011,” pp. 125

forces captured bridges spanning the Bosphorus straits, attacked the parliament building in Ankara and attempted to take over private media offices such as CNN Turkey. For a time, it appeared the coup would succeed, but Erdogan addresses his people via a facetime message, telling them to take to the streets and help stop the coup themselves. By the next morning Erdogan stated the government was back in control and coup supporters put down. The night ended with a death toll around 300.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout the coup, major news outlets in the United States reported on what was going on, CNN and FOX news being two of the major sources for information on the events taking place in Turkey. However, a different Erdogan, Turkey and coup were portrayed depending on which site a person received the news that night. In consonance with the statements I have previously made about media's reporting about foreign news, both CNN and FOX news employed framing strategies to appeal to their different viewer bases. CNN took a more moderate approach while FOX News took a more conservative stance on the story. I undertook a short research project to prove this. I examined the transcripts from a news report done by both CNN and FOX on the night of the coup searching for keywords such as, "terror, extremism, violence, radical Islam, anti-democratic forces etc." and compared the two sources. CNN exhibited the usage of 19 such keywords in their transcript while FOX exhibited the usage of 39 key words.<sup>42 43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Kani Torun, "Turkey Coup Attempt: What Happened that Night" *Al Jazeera News Group*, (July 2016), <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/>

<sup>42</sup> Megyn Kelly, Bill Hemmer, Trace Gallagher, "Military Coup Underway in Turkey; New Details on Terrorist Behind France Attack; Turkish President Speaks to Supporters Amid Coup; Krauthammer on President Obama's Response to Terror Attack; ISIS Affiliated Group Promised More Attacks; Newt Gingrich Calls for Further Screening of Muslims in America; Attempted Military Coup in Turkey; Latest on Nice Attack Investigation; New York Times, Omits 'Terrorism' from Nice Headline; Trump Selects Mike Pence as Running Mate" *The Kelly File*, (July 15 2016). 071501cb.251

<sup>43</sup> Becky Anderson, Max Foster, Arwa Damon, Ivan Watson, BobBaer, Clarissa Ward, Steve Moore Section: News; International, "Attempted Coup in Istanbul and Ankara; Terror in Nice, France.Aired 12-1a ET, *CNN Newsroom*, (July 16 2016), 071617CN.V11

I was not at all surprised by the results. I had watched reports done on the coup and could have figured as much by simply listening to the rhetoric used by the commentators. What did stand out to me particularly in the reporting were the comments made by FOX news commentators Megyn Kelly and Trace Gallagher. At one point during the conversation Megyn stated, “if Erdogan survived the coup, he’s only going to more extreme in his Islam and that not good for Turkey, and that’s not good for the united states, Gabriel reply’s/ that not good for Turkey, the united states or the middle east, if Erdogan wins and comes back to power it is a very very bad, actually it’s a win for ISIS and it’s a loss for the civilized world, we need to coup to succeed because it will be our only way to actually defeat isis and bring some stability to the middle east” In this piece of the commentary it appears that the commentators are actually supporting the military members performing a coup against a democratically elected government because they believe the president is too “Islamic.”<sup>44</sup> This clear alliance with the right wing view that Islam breeds extremism shows the obvious framing FOX news reporters used that night to make this story appeal to their viewers. CNN also commented on Erdogan's consolidation of his government, but stated that he did so in a way that aligned with his rights as president.

I was interested to see what the rest of the world, particularly news outlets in the middle east had to say about the US’s coverage of the night. I found this from the Middle East Eye newspaper, they stated, “CNN provided a measured response to the coup while FOX news predictable offered up a sensationalist propagandist approach.” The article goes on to point out occasions where republican politicians stated their support for the overthrow of Erdogan and his

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<sup>44</sup> Megyn Kelly, Bill Hemmer, Trace Gallagher, “Military Coup Underway in Turkey; New Details on Terrorist Behind France Attack...”

potential to strengthen ISIS in the region.<sup>45</sup> This also proves the point that I made earlier that partisanship is more obvious to people whose viewpoints do not align with a story. A newspaper in the middle east obviously will not agree fundamentally with FOX news, thus their potential to see bias in the reporting increases due to the hostile media effect.

### **Conclusion**

Empirically my results align with a study done by Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milo, researchers at the University of Oxford. They conducted a media survey that counted the number of times certain media outlets cited a think tank tank that was either deemed liberal or conservative and compared it to members of congress who cited or supported those same think tanks and sources. Their findings found that the majority of news outlets such as CNN exhibited liberal tendencies while FOX news fell on the other side exhibiting more conservative tendencies.<sup>46</sup> While this does not do much but tell us more of what we already know, it does give some idea about the audience that each news site is attempting to frame their news for.

While I cannot say with certainty which news outlet gave the “right” side of the story I can say this, without an in depth and comprehensive look at a situation it is impossible to discern where the truth lies. This is the responsibility of the viewer. The media like many things is a commodity in this world and with all commodities, we the consumer hold an intrinsic responsibility to be responsible consumers and hold news outlets accountable to deliver reliable information.

My hope for you the reader is that you take the information I have presented to you today in this paper and use it as a lense when examining news stories. Entirely objective reporting does

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<sup>45</sup> Dr. Mohamad Almasry, “Fox News's support for Turkish coup is true to form” *Middle East Eye*, (August 15, 2016), <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/fox-news-coverage-turkey-coup-attempt-true-form-207441573>

<sup>46</sup> Tim Groseclose, Jeffrey Milyo, “A Measure of Media Bias,”

not exist in this world but armed with the knowledge regarding how the media attempts to frame the news for certain viewers it is my hope that you the reader take a more critical look at how the news is presented on a day to day basis.

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**Disclaimer:**

I am a registered Democrat, if that matters.

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