

Political Discourse Between Presidential Candidates and the Media

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Abstract

The foundation of framing theory is to serve the public in illustrating what kind of messages the public receives from actors in authority, such as government officials. This article is an analysis of the interpretations of various media organizations regarding specific policies belonging to the candidates running for the presidency in 2020, incumbent President Donald J. Trump and Democratic nominee Joseph R. Biden. Based on the quantity of media organizations discussed and the different ways which the candidates' policies have been included in press coverage relating to the candidates, this article teaches that the extent to which framing reaches is ongoing between the press and the public and will remain a factor in the public's reactions to selected presidential candidates for elections to come. Access to the media organizations will be provided at the end of this paper.

Introduction

Framing is the manner in which how “the presentation and communication of a message in a particular way influences our perception of it.” (Pavlik and McIntosh 42). It is an attestation of what people and organizations, such as advertisers and journalists and social media users, aim to signify. For example, Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed in a 1950 speech that he had a list of 205 names of State Department employees alleged to have ties to communism; through titling the speech “Enemies From Within.” and directing public attention to the U.S. State Department ¹, McCarthy framed the existence of communism to be a threat to the country's national security,

¹ McCarthy, Joseph. “Enemies From Within.” Wheeling, Virginia. 9 February 1950.

thus signifying that communism was evil. Think of framing as you putting a label on something with the intent of having the label reflect either positively or negatively about that something.

Another historical example of this definition is a specific action completed by President Richard Nixon. Linguist George Lakoff begins his book *Don't Think of An Elephant!* with the following passage: “While under pressure to resign during the Watergate scandal, Nixon addressed the nation on tv [...] and said, ‘I am not a crook.’ And everybody thought of him as a crook.” (Lakoff 1). Here the argument for the manifestation of that public perception stems from “a basic principle of framing: when you are arguing against the other side, do not use their language. [...] Framing is about getting language that fits your worldview.” (Lakoff 1-2). In this example, Nixon’s self- labelling himself as having done nothing illegal reflected negatively on his reputation, the consequences of which included his resignation in August of 1974.

A 2005 New York Times magazine article credited the Republican party for “having invented and polarized loaded phrases like ‘tax relief’ and partial-birth abortion.”²; upon reading that statement, one may conclude that the article argues Republicans have a better grasp on framing than Democrats. To further demonstrate, attached on the bottom of page two are tables exhibiting framing techniques used by liberals and conservatives in the modern era.

TABLE 2-1 Reframing Political Issues for Conservatives

NEVER SAY	INSTEAD SAY
Tax cuts	Tax relief
Inheritance tax	Death tax
Undocumented workers/aliens	Illegal immigrants
Drilling for oil	Exploring for energy

Source: Frank Luntz, *Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear*.

TABLE 2-2 Reframing Political Issues for Liberals

ISSUE OR CAUSE	DISCUSSED AS
Tax subsidies	Corporate welfare (Ralph Nader)
Gay marriage	Same-sex marriage
Tax increases for the wealthy	Paying a fair share
Abortion debate	Pro-choice or women's rights

² Bai, Matt. “The Framing Wars” *New York Times Magazine* 17 July 2005, Section 6, pp. 38.

Source: Pavlik, John V. and Shawn McIntosh. *Converging Media: A New Introduction to Mass Communication*. 5th edition, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 42-43.

In the instance of media coverage, what factors into framing is agenda-setting theory, the theory in which the press is able to choose what topics to discuss, inadvertently determining the topics which the public considers to be significant³. The theory that the media establishes what news you find worthy enough to discuss among family or friends reflects the social perception of the press operating as a fourth estate, another “branch of government [that] watches the other branches (executive, legislative, and judicial).” (Pavlik and McIntosh 325). Along with agenda-setting theory, media coverage also emits something known in the discourse of communications as the third-person effect, which is the ability “for people to underestimate the effect of a persuasive message on themselves while overestimating its effects on others.” (Pavlik and McIntosh 365). For example, you are not swayed into signing a petition to ban plastic bags in your hometown, but you expect the petition to receive enough signatures and support that it becomes the main subject of next week’s town hall meeting. Under the notion of a fourth estate, the purpose of this paper is to conduct exploratory research on the topic of political discourse between presidential candidates and the media.

Research Methodology

This paper will investigate and analyze various press perceptions of several policies belonging to the main two candidates running for the presidency in 2020: Donald Trump, leading the

³ Pavlik, John V. and Shawn McIntosh. *Converging Media: A New Introduction to Mass Communication*. 5th edition, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 375.

Republican ticket as the incumbent, and Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee and former vice president. To preview the framing ahead, consider how the New York Times (NYT) described the comparison of the candidates' talking points on the campaign trail as a "back-and-forth over darkness and light... which the two parties have cast this year's election." (New York Times; August 22nd, 2020)⁴ during the week of the Democratic National Convention. What questions do you have after reading the following quote or the entire article (see link attached to the bottom of the page)?

The policies of Trump and Biden which will be discussed are their policies pertaining to issues in the order of 1) healthcare, 2) immigration, 3) environment, and 4) economy. These policies were selected based on the results of a Fox News Poll (Fox Business; September 18th, 2019) and a CNBC survey (CNBC; November 26th, 2019) from fall 2019⁵; each outlet respectively found that their sample sized populations believed other issues preceded the issue of the economy.

Thirty-one different media outlets were examined and referenced in the conducting of this research. The variety of the media outlets are demonstrated in the following chart; the chart was created by this author to categorize the news organizations into a scale of liberal-mainstream-conservative. Those listed in the columns of liberal and conservative were done so due to their tone, whereas the media organizations listed as mainstream were placed as such due to the nature of their presence in the public eye. For example, NBCUniversal Media oversees both NBC News and CNBC, outlets that are accessible through cable television and the internet.

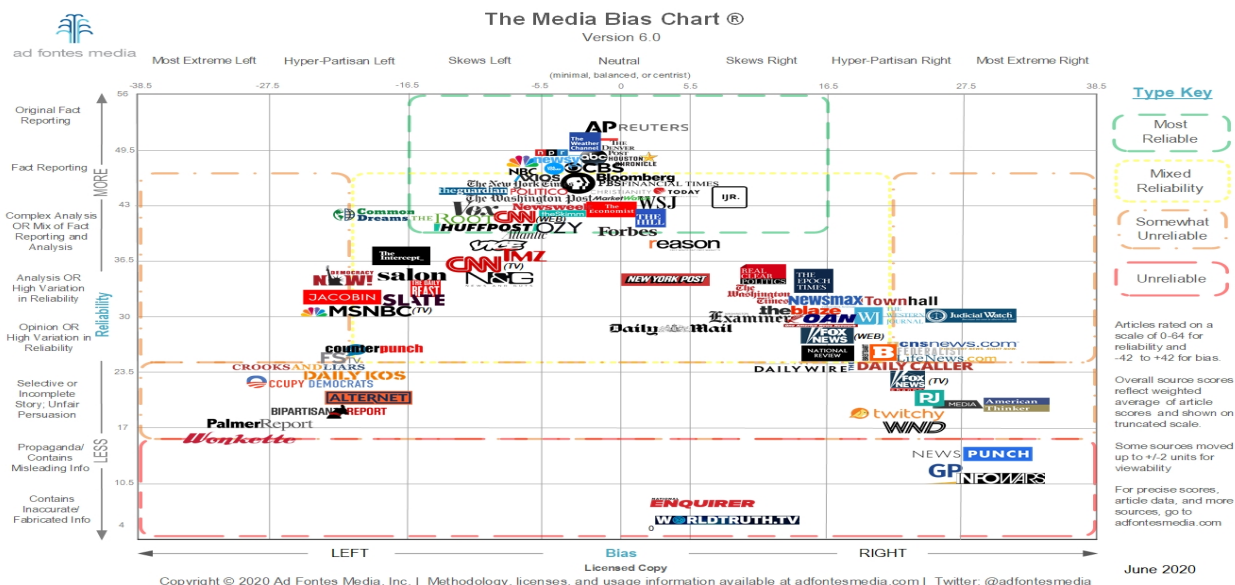
⁴ Cooper et al. "Biden and Trump use stark terms to describe the choice between them." *The New York Times*, 22 August 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/08/21/us/dnc-convention-election> Accessed 23 August 2020.

⁵Full source information included in this paper's notes section.

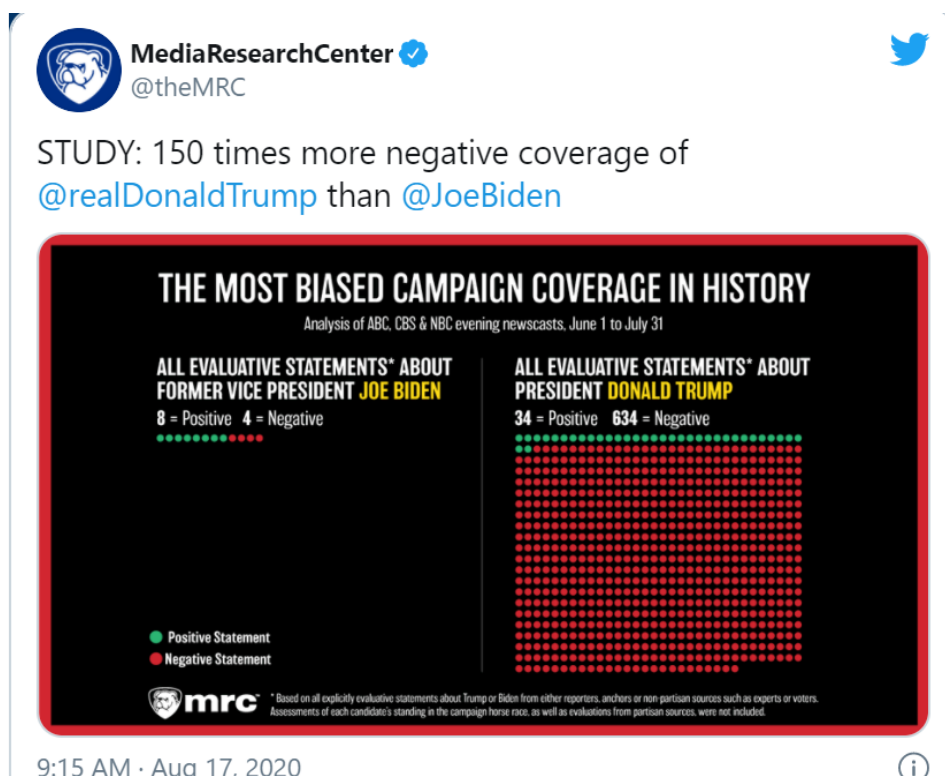
Establishing multiple formats of the same news source allows for the news source to receive more recognition in media discourse than a news organization working with one format, such as the economic-news based website Business Insider.

Liberal	Mainstream A	Mainstream B	Mainstream C	Conservative
Vox	ABC News	NPR	The Baltimore Sun	Fox News and Fox Business
CNN	Washington Post	WBUR	Los Angeles Times	National Review
Teen Vogue	The New York Times	Forbes	BBC	The Hill
Inside Climate News	USA Today	CNBC	PBS Newshour	Business Insider
The Guardian	Politico	NBC News	U.S. News & World Report	Breitbart
The Nation	Axios	Reuters	The Miami Herald	American Priority

What helped contribute to the making of this chart was the sixth edition of a media bias chart generated by Ad Fontes Media, a company which analyzes the rate of biases in news organizations (see <https://www.adfontesmedia.com/> for more information). For comparison and to lay the framework for further research, the media bias chart in reference is attached on page six.



An example of media bias charts solidifying their message (that media bias exists in different forms) is a recent study conducted by conservative think tank Media Research Center (see <https://www.mrc.org/> for more information). Ninety-one days before Election Day, Media Research Center revealed its take on the tone in which CBS, NBC, and ABC nighttime television newscasts have discussed the presidential candidates from June 1st to July 31st of 2020. In searching for any biases present in Media Research Center's work, one may question the reasoning behind dissecting only CBS, NBC, and ABC and the legitimacy of the study's title. Fox News published a photo of the study uploaded to the Media Research Center's Twitter account; the study in reference is attached on the top of page seven.



Source: Flood, Brian. "Evening newscasts 150 times more negative toward Trump than Biden, study says." *Fox News*, Fox Corporation. 17 August 2020.

<https://www.foxnews.com/media/evening-newscasts-150-times-more-negative-trump> Accessed 19 August 2020.

Findings

A) Joe Biden on Healthcare

Biden is campaigning on lowering the age of eligibility for Medicare and providing a public health insurance option similar to Medicare that differs from the health insurance offered from employers ("Healthcare", <https://joebiden.com/joes-vision/>, 2020).

Media organizations including Vox and The Hill are subtly implying that employer-based health insurance will remain an issue during a potential Biden presidency. Vox described Biden's policies as a tool for "low-income Americans in states that refused to expand Medicaid" (Vox; April 9th, 2020) and also "a backstop to reinforce the current system, [as] individuals can't use the money their employer is spending on private health insurance to buy into the new public option" (Vox ; April 9th, 2020). Vox is framing the policies as a health insurance plan that does not realize its full potential, indicating that the bulk of affording Biden's public option falls on the employees. Likewise, The Hill wrote Biden's public option plan "would do far too little to lower high health care costs for Americans or lower the number of uninsured. That doesn't mean Biden needs to support single-payer 'Medicare-For-All' [...] Employer coverage does not mean affordable coverage." (The Hill; April 22nd, 2020). The Hill is framing Biden's healthcare policies as needing to be moderate rather than being an endorsement of Medicare-For-All, in turn suggesting such an endorsement by Biden risks alienating establishment Democratic party members. By alluding to Biden having to create healthcare policies which appease all sides of the Democratic party, Vox and The Hill are highlighting a source of division within the Democratic party; Vox pinpoints the contention to fall upon middle class workers (a demographic Biden touts as part of his base; see <https://joebiden.com/joes-vision/>), whereas The Hill pinpoints the contention to spill over within the Democratic party. Should Biden become the country's 46th president, the two media organizations in mention represent any press speculation as to if this contention will either be rectified or expanded come November.

To conclude this section, National Public Radio (NPR) described Biden's approach to healthcare as a "blueprint [that] would uncap federal subsidies for plans purchased through the Affordable Care Act's marketplaces" (NPR; April 11th, 2020). Here NPR is considering Biden's approach to expand upon the Affordable Care Act which was passed and legalized during his tenure as vice president. In comparison, Forbes Magazine called Biden's healthcare policies an expansion of "government- subsidized health insurance coverage" (Forbes; April 12th, 2020). This news outlet is framing Biden's healthcare stance as a component of debating the role of government subsidies in the United States' socioeconomic hierarchy. Seemingly alluding to the debate of government subsidies, NBC News so far has categorized Biden's healthcare plan in columns of "what's in" and "what's out". By reporting the return of the individual mandate, the allowance of undocumented immigrants buying into Biden's public option plan, and the lowering of drug prescription prices as "in", NBC is framing Biden as campaigning on "Affordable Care Act 2.0" (NBC News; July 14th, 2019 and updated May 22nd, 2020), a stark counterargument to President Trump's healthcare plan. The organization classifies the spending rate in individual marketplaces as "out" because Biden's public option plan "will only allow consumers to spend 8.5 percent of their income on insurance" (NBC News; July 14th, 2019 and updated May 22nd, 2020). This framing indicates that the consumer's financial status is overlooked in the overall gist of Biden's public option plan; meanwhile, NPR and Forbes are arguing Biden's public option plan takes pressure off from individuals navigating which healthcare plan works best for them.

B) Donald Trump on Healthcare

Trump is campaigning on combating the opioid crisis and repealing the individual mandate in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) (“Healthcare: President Donald J. Trump Achievements, <https://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/healthcare/#>, 2020). In his 2020 State of the Union address, Trump said the following on live television: “The American patient should never be blindsided by medical bills.”⁶ .

Trump declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency in the fall of 2017. The Baltimore Sun explains the declaration “means the Department of Health and Human Services can waive regulations that some say have hampered the response” (The Baltimore Sun; October 27th, 2017). The newspaper is framing the move to ultimately be failing the expectations of the public, describing the declaration as a step below “what had been proposed by a commission the president created to study the problem. That group... called for a designation of a national [state of] emergency [rather than a public health emergency] as a way to free up federal money to expand treatment.” (The Baltimore Sun; October 27th, 2017). The frame of the newspaper is to portray the faults in the White House’s approach to the opioid crisis thus far. Meanwhile, Reuters headlined an article last spring with what Trump told the 2019 Rx Drug Abuse and Heroin Summit; Trump said, “We are holding big Pharma accountable.” (Reuters; April 24th, 2019). Reuters followed up with the following passage: “little has come of Trump’s earlier calls to execute drug dealers. But [...] Trump has used the crisis to support his call to build a wall on the border of Mexico, saying it would keep out heroin” (Reuters; April 24th, 2019). This media

⁶ Transcript of the 2020 SOTU remarks provided by the New York Times.

organization is framing Trump's position on the opioid crisis as a strategy to fulfill a 2016 campaign promise; on the contrary, US News & World Report is framing Trump's position on the opioid crisis as an aid to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The article states "130 Americans [on average] lose their lives to a drug overdose involving opioids every day, according to the CDC" (US News & World Report.com; September 4th, 2019) and that "[in 2019] HHS will have allocated more than \$9 billion in grants to state and local communities to expand access to drug treatment and prevention services since January 2017" (US News & World Report; September 4th, 2019). The frame here depicts the Trump administration as being financially secure to guarantee putting work into confronting the opioid crisis.

The BBC wrote that the repealing of the individual mandate from the ACA leaves insurance companies "charging more to the sick or medically vulnerable patients" (BBC; March 29th, 2019), yet the article argues the individual mandate was not effective in enticing "younger, healthier into the healthcare marketplace" (BBC; March 29th, 2019). The BBC is framing Trump's removal of the individual mandate as neither a legislative defeat nor a victory for the public; rather, it implicates Trump has completed part of his 2016 campaign promise to dismiss the ACA and replace it with a different healthcare plan. In another instance of completing 2016-touted plans, Trump signed a presidential proclamation⁷ on October 4th, 2019 ordering all legal immigrants to acquire health insurance before entering the United States. USA Today

⁷ *Presidential Actions*, The White House.gov:
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-suspension-entry-immigrants-will-financially-burden-united-states-healthcare-system/> Accessed 27 May 2020.

included the following passage in a report on the proclamation: “Migrants would not be able to use Medicaid plans or the subsidized plans offered on the state markets under the Affordable Care Act... According to a September report from the Census Bureau, 6.8% of those born in the U.S. were uninsured in 2018, compared with 18.9% of those born in another country.” (USA Today; October 5th, 2019). Here the newspaper is framing the proclamation to burden those legally migrating into the United States, undermining the consequences it could carry on those illegally entering the country, the group which is categorized in what Trump’s border wall is meant to target.

The Hill called healthcare costs “a key part of [Trump’s] 2020 reelection campaign” (The Hill; June 24th, 2019) on the same day Trump issued an executive order designating transparency in prices pertaining to medical procedures⁸. The Hill writes that the executive order critiques “a healthcare system where patients usually don’t find out how much a procedure costs until they get the bill in the mail... [HHS Secretary] Azar said the rules would drive down prices because it would empower patients to shop around for the best costs.” (The Hill; June 24th, 2019). This news outlet is framing Trump’s executive order to be a justified move, a step that caters to both Trump voters and non-Trump voters because of the assumption that medical expenses are an issue nationwide. Likewise, PBS gives a bullet-pointed list of what the executive order calls for. Compared to The Hill, PBS frames the legislation as sugarcoating the nationwide issue of medical expenses with the following wording: “The idea is to give patients practical information

⁸ *Presidential Actions*, The White House.gov: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-improving-price-quality-transparency-american-healthcare-put-patients-first/> Accessed 27 May 2020.

that they can use to help save money... But insurers said the idea could backfire, prompting hospitals that now give deeper discounts to try to raise their own negotiated prices to match what higher-earners are getting.” (PBS Newshour; June 24th, 2019). This angle indicates that the executive order on medical prices transparency is a miscalculated step in the correct direction.

C) Joe Biden on Immigration

Biden is campaigning on reinstating the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) legislation, aiding undocumented immigrants in the U.S. in securing citizenship, and re-introducing the migrant-based policy known as “Catch and Release” (“Immigration”, <https://joebiden.com/immigration/>, 2020).

Fox News described Biden’s policies as “sharply [against] Trump’s actions on immigration... though many of the conditions that gained attention under Trump existed under the Obama-Biden administration as well,” (Fox News; February 3rd, 2020). Fox is framing Biden’s approach to be hypocritical, in turn suggesting he is more likely to contradict himself while in office than Trump; in the opposite direction, ABC News is framing Biden’s stance on immigration to have softened since his tenure as vice president. ABC News called Biden’s goal to reinstate DACA a piece of his “ambitious to-do list for his first 100 days in office” (ABC; December 12th, 2019), and the use of the adjective “ambitious” indicates that Biden is setting up high expectations for his administration and the federal government to adhere. This communication from ABC News has been echoed by the Los Angeles Times, which reported at

the March 16th Democratic debate, Biden said “he would place a moratorium on deportations in the first 100 days of his administration and then would only look to deport people convicted of felonies.” (Los Angeles Times; March 15th, 2020). The Los Angeles Times is framing Biden’s approach to both welcoming and deporting immigrants as one based in empathy; the noun “moratorium” means the temporary pause of an action, thus the article is portraying Biden to be concerned about the country’s treatment of immigrants. Meanwhile, in terms of immigration influencing relations between the U.S. and Latin America, The Miami Herald wrote that Biden’s plan mandates “grant[ing] temporary legal status to Venezuelan exiles in the U.S. if he becomes president [...] Biden’s proposed Latino agenda is largely aimed at domestic policy and does not mention Cuba.” (The Miami Herald; August 6th, 2020). The article does not suggest Biden’s approach is empathetic a la The Los Angeles Times; instead, the article uses the absence of Cuba’s name in Biden’s policy description towards Latin America to poke a hole in Biden’s overall stance on immigration.

ABC News also included the following phrase: “Biden’s campaign did not offer a price tag on his immigration plan, saying rather a lot of the changes the former vice president is proposing would be paid for within the existing Department of Homeland Security budget” (ABC; December 12th, 2019). The frame here suggests Biden would use pre-existing government spending to tackle the pre-existing topic of immigration, in turn playing with bureaucracy. Adjacent to echoing the theme of bureaucracy, the NYT wrote the following description about Biden’s approach to immigration: “Despite a push on the left to abolish Immigration and

Customs Enforcement, or ICE, Mr. Biden's plan stops short of seeking that or even outlining any major restructuring of the agency." (New York Times; December 11th, 2019). This phrase highlights where Biden stands with progressive members of the Democratic party, as well as suggesting Biden does not want to get involved in a public debate about ICE. However, neither Fox, ABC News, the Los Angeles Times, or the NYT have reported on the extent to which ICE will be shaped based on Biden's immigration policies, leaving their audiences' opinions on ICE to be shaped elsewhere.

Breitbart wrote that during the same Democratic debate referenced by the Los Angeles Times, Biden announced if he won the presidency, "he will restart the catch and release of southern immigrants into Americans' workplaces, neighborhoods, and K-12 schools." (Breitbart; March 15th, 2020). The article continues as such: "By ending catch and release, Trump created an economic deterrent to further migration, causing an immediate crash in migrant numbers. In May 2019, for example, 140,000 migrants paid to be smuggled across the U.S. border. In January [2020], only 30,000 people migrated to the border... Released migrants can also hide from enforcement authorities and use their U.S. paychecks to hire coyotes for their spouses." (Breitbart; March 15th, 2020). The catch and release immigration policy at the U.S.'s borders entails that migrants do not have to wait for their asylum hearing in detention; rather, they can wait for the court date while living and working in the United States.⁹ Breitbart is framing Biden's stance on catch and release as a function of fearmongering over those arriving from

9 Associated Press. "US Expands 'catch and release' practice amid migrant surge at Mexico border" *The Guardian*, 3 April 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/apr/03/mexico-border-us-expands-catch-and-release-practice> Accessed 30 May 2020.

different countries integrating themselves into what Americans consider routine. The article's direct implication that American society is at risk of being taken advantage of by both migrants and immigrants should Biden win the presidency indicates a debate over the capacity to which America is diverse.

Likewise, the media organization American Priority wrote the following about Biden's plan to restart the catch and release policy: "The plan proposed by Biden comes even as public health concerns have circulated around border crossers arriving at the southern border. This week, an illegal alien from India tested positive for coronavirus after he snuck across the border into Mexico with a group of Mexican nationals." (American Priority; May 1st, 2020). The outlet is framing Biden's approach to infringe on the discussion of public health in the country as the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread. The phrase "an illegal alien from India tested positive" (American Priority; May 1st, 2020) becomes a firsthand account that can be utilized in arguing against Biden, proposing that his immigration plan lacks enough checkpoints at the border to confront a worldwide health crisis, as well as an influx of people trying to enter the U.S illegally and legally.

D) Donald Trump on Immigration

Trump is campaigning on transitioning the U.S. to a merit-based immigration system and continuing to fulfill his 2016 campaign pledge to build a border wall ("Immigration, <https://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/immigration/>, 2020). In the era of combating the coronavirus, USA Today reported its latest poll (whom the newspaper

collaborated with research companies Public Agenda and Ipsos) found that “a large majority of Republicans (81%), a plurality of Democrats (49%), and a majority of independents (62%) said the U.S. Government has done right by temporarily enacting immigration restrictionism in an effort to slow the spread of the pandemic.” (USA Today; August 14th, 2020)¹⁰.

CNN summarized Trump’s plan to institute a merit-based immigration system with the following statement: “The plan, which faces an uphill battle for census... calls for replacing longstanding family-based immigration rules.” (CNN; May 16th, 2019). The reference to unifying a vote on the topic and the placement of the verb “replacing” indicates that CNN is framing Trump’s goal of a merit-based immigration system as a lackluster alternative to how the U.S. currently accepts immigrants to enter, undermining tradition. Also reporting on the subject, Politico wrote that Trump’s plan will not alter “the overall number of immigrants allowed in the U.S. legally- only attempt to change the composition of immigration.” (Politico; May 16th, 2019). This phrase, located halfway through the article, subtly warns the readers that Trump is aiming to increase the ratio of white immigrants through a merit-based immigration plan, consequently decreasing the ratio of nonwhite immigrants granted entry in the country.

In comparison, Fox Business Network acknowledged the same sentiment Politico relayed, describing Trump’s plan as “immigration reform... [which will] alter the composition of who is

¹⁰ Gomez, Alex. “Poll shows growing disconnect over Trump’s hard-line immigration policies.” *USA Today*, 14 August 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/08/12/poll-broad-support-trump-covid-19-immigration-restrictions/3340228001/> Accessed 17 August 2020.

admitted into the U.S.” (Fox Business; May 16th, 2019). The photo attached below contains statistics from the left side of the article; the statistics are present because Fox Business wants the readers to speculate what the “before” and “after” of Trump’s plan of merit-based immigration may look like, should the proposal be passed into law.

Trump's Immigration Redo

- NOW:**
 - Skilled Based Visa: 12%
 - Family Ties: 66%
- REVISED PLAN:**
 - Skilled Based Visa: 57%
 - Family Ties: 33%

It would eliminate the visa lottery system, which allows 50,000 visas to be given to immigrants in countries with low immigration rates, and pathways for family members to immigrate.

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Source: De Lea, Brittany. “Trump’s Immigration Plan: Which industries need highly-skilled workers?” *Fox Business*, Fox Corporation. 16 May 2019.

<https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/trumps-immigration-plan-high-skilled-workers> Accessed 2 June 2020.

Fox Business reported that the plan mandates ending “the visa lottery program, which allows 50,000 visas to be given to immigrants in countries with low immigration rates, and ... among the criteria that are expected to be prioritized for applicants are age, education, high-paying job offers, and the ability to speak English.” (Fox Business; May 16th, 2019). The network is framing Trump’s proposal for a merit-based immigration system to be a correction of the workforce, overriding the value of the 50,000 recipients of the visa lottery program in favor of the value of enticing immigrants who have socioeconomic advantages prior to crossing the

border. Whereas Politico makes small commentary on the ratio of white immigrants-nonwhite immigrants in the U.S., Fox Business openly discusses the connotations of Trump's plan.

The Nation describes the construction of Trump's border wall in the following analogy: "The new Wild West of the border wall is an authoritarian dreamscape where the boss man faces no limits and no obligations. It's as though Marshall Wyatt Earp, reborn as an orange-haired easterner with no knowledge of the actual west, were back in charge" (The Nation; January 17th, 2020). The magazine is framing the border wall as if it is the worst-case scenario for America, drawing from history to depict the president as contributing to lawlessness. Parallel to this, Teen Vogue Magazine reported that "declaring a national emergency to build a wall on the southern border would be a big change in the use of power. [...] Unfortunately for Trump, a wall can't undo 100 years of [humanitarian] damage" (Teen Vogue; January 11th, 2019). By conveying the theme of unprecedented-ness to its readers, Teen Vogue is amplifying concern over what a border wall means for contemporary context and decades to come. On the same note, Fox News said that as of March 2020, "the government has filed 24 federal cases against South Texas landowners... [and] the government has built 194 miles of wall along the 2,000 mile U.S.-Mexico border, most of it replacing existing walls or fences." (Fox News; May 27th, 2020).

Both Teen Vogue and Fox News are urging their audiences to consider the effects a border wall will produce domestically and internationally. Teen Vogue directly frames the border wall as a mistake, whereas Fox News indirectly frames the border wall as harming predetermined U.S. residing citizens and property.

E) Joe Biden on the Environment

Biden is campaigning on resorting the U.S. to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and recommitting the country to the United Nations-founded Paris Climate Accord (“Climate”, <https://joebiden.com/climate/>, 2020). The latter pledge stands in direct opposition of the incumbent president, whose decision to withdraw from the accord does not go into effect until November 4th, the day after the 2020 presidential election¹¹.

The NYT wrote the following about the difference in expense between Biden’s environmental approach and the policy of Senator Bernie Sanders, a former contender for the Democratic nomination: “[Biden’s] climate change plan would inject \$1.7 trillion in the economy... Mr. Sanders, in comparison, calls for spending \$16 trillion and completely eliminating fossil fuels from the American economy by 2050.” (New York Times; March 19th, 2020). The comparison implicates that Biden’s goal to reduce greenhouse gas emission to net-zero by 2050 does not translate to an end to the industry of fossil fuels. This frame indicates that combating climate change is an area where Biden and the progressive members of the Democratic Party may disagree. Likewise, according to Axios, Biden’s policy fails to endorse “the formal Capitol Hill GND [The Green New Deal] resolution led by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez that has attracted criticism from some labor officials- a key Biden constituency.” (Axios; June 4th, 2019). Axios is

¹¹ Dennis, Brady. “Trump makes it official: U.S. will withdraw from the Paris climate accord” *The Washington Post*, 4 November 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2019/11/04/trump-makes-it-official-us-will-withdraw-paris-climate-accord/> Accessed 6 June 2020.

framing Biden as juggling the demands of his base and the demands of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, an act that can either convince progressives to reserve their vote for him or show progressives that combating climate change is only a blip on Biden's agenda. The former would unify the entire Democratic party behind Biden, whereas the latter risks alienating progressive democrats.

Echoing the consideration of the Democratic party's progressive members, Massachusetts-based NPR affiliate WBUR described Biden's environmental approach as the following: "Biden's plan is more like comfort food, prepared for consumption in the Pennsylvania suburbs as well as cities on the West Coast. [...] Some observers in the progressive wing of the party... find Biden frankly pro-corporate and not sufficiently radical." (WBUR; March 12th, 2020). The analogy in the first half of WBUR's statement sets up the frame that Biden does not have a plan which encapsulates the effects of climate change on the entire country. Biden's plan instead is portrayed to only benefit the northeastern and western states, suggesting that voters in the southern part of the U.S. could feel left out of Biden's environmental policymaking.

F) Donald Trump on the Environment

Trump is campaigning on legalizing drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWF) and instituting the Affordable Clean Energy rule ("Energy and Environment", <https://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/energy-and-environment/>, 2020).

Opening the ANWF for drilling was a provision added to the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

Inside Climate News reported “a poll conducted by the Yale Program on Climate Communication [in October 2017] found that 70 percent of Americans oppose drilling in the [ANWF] and that only 18 percent of Republicans ‘strongly support’ it.” (InsideClimateNews.org; December 22nd, 2017). The same article also included the following passage: “But those hoping that oil companies will flock to the refuge... might be solely disappointed... [because of] the low price of oil and the fact that not much is known about how much oil is in the refuge.” (InsideClimateNews.org; December 22nd, 2017). The frame here is that the ANWF made available for drilling risks not being as valuable of an asset than previously assumed. Highlighting uncertainty over the economic status of domestic oil companies and the quantity of oil supplied in the ANWF indicates that the purpose of drilling in the ANWF remains unclear, in turn making the lack of public support- increased by the outlet’s audience- justified. The Washington Post wrote the ANWF is a habitat for “polar bears, wolves, migratory birds, and the Porcupine caribou herd [which] has long been closed off to oil and gas exploration despite long-standing interest among members of the petroleum industry. Climate change has made the area more delicate as melting ice has driven threatened polar bears to spend more time in dens along the refuge’s coastal plain.” (The Washington Post; September 13th, 2019). The newspaper is framing the possibility of drilling in the ANWF as an expansion of the environmental changes which the region is forced to endure; connecting the legislation to climate change is meant to gather sympathy from the readers/audience for the animals. Likewise, The Guardian reported that “drilling operations are expected to be problematic for Ingenious people, many of which rely on subsistence hunting and fishing.” (The Guardian; September 12th, 2019) and the Bureau of

Land Management (a sector of the U.S.'s Interior Department) “estimates oil extracted and burned from the area could put the equivalent of between 0.7 million and 5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere each year.” (The Guardian; September 12th, 2019). The United Kingdom-based newspaper is framing the decision to drill in the ANWF as pushing the economic boundaries of both the citizens of the ANWF region and domestic oil companies. Aligned together, media organizations such as InsideClimateNews.org, The Washington Post, and The Guardian are suggesting the Trump administration is willing to exchange the undetermined amounts of oil and animals in the ANWF for determined monetary and carbon dioxide calculations. Whether coincidental or accidental, the same narrative stemming from different fronts raises questions and awareness of the extent to which Trump will receive scrutiny overall on the campaign trail from the media and the public.

The Hill explained the Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) rule “aims to give states more time and authority to decide how to implement the best technology to ease net emissions from coal-fired plants. The rule does not set any standard to cap those emissions. [...] The Trump EPA had long argued the Clean Power Plant rule [which ACE replaced] was too broad, creating an undue burden on industry.” (The Hill; April 27th, 2020). In comparison, Politico stated the ACE rule “requires coal-fired power plants to consider boosting their efficiency- which EPA estimates could reduce their carbon emissions by 1.5 percent. That’s nowhere near the scale... scientists say is needed by mid-century to help the world avoid the worst effects of climate change.” (Politico; July 8th, 2019). The Hill is framing the Trump administration’s ACE rule as a

deregulation which is effective in giving leverage to coal companies nationwide, whereas Politico is framing it as a deregulation which is effective in not enforcing nationwide carbon dioxide emissions reduction. The difference in the outlets' messaging is not acknowledged by the respective outlets, resulting in the respective audiences to attain only one side of the same coin; the lack of a complete presentation covering the causes and effects of the ACE rule represents a lack of judgement of what the ACE rule means on behalf of the public.

G) Biden on the Economy

Biden is campaigning on aiding middle class workers, investing in infrastructure, and adopting Senator Elizabeth Warren's plan for bankruptcy reform ("Joe's Vision", <https://joebiden.com/joes-vision/>, 2020).

Media organizations such as CNBC and the NYT have framed Biden as a moderate Democrat by means of his connections to the middle class, and this framing underscores Biden's economic approach in the post-pandemic world. To elaborate on a live television interview conducted with Biden, CNBC wrote the following: "[Biden would] hike the corporate tax rate to 28% even during a recovery period. [...] Biden has called for short-time compensation, under which companies would keep workers employed with reduced hours and the government would pay for the difference in wages." (CNBC; May 22nd, 2020). Likewise, the NYT last year nicknamed Biden's economic approach "populist" due to his support for "for higher taxes on the rich and on investment income, along with more generous tax credits to the middle class." (New York Times; April 25th, 2019). However, the NYT has called the coronavirus pandemic and the country's rate

of unemployment “not the scenario Joseph R. Biden Jr. anticipated confronting when he competed for the Democratic nomination on a conventional left-of-center platform. Now... he has effectively shed his primary-season theme of restoring political normalcy [in order] ... to assemble a new governing agenda that meets the extraordinary times.” (New York Times; May 17th, 2020). The flipping of the NYT’s framing and the continuation of CNBC’s framing on Biden’s economic policies as the pandemic remains ongoing represents a clash between the public’s conceptions of what is a moderate and what is a populist; a quick Google search shows that Trump has been labelled a “populist” by multiple media outlets, a small commonality between the two men which is seemingly underdiscussed.

National Review headlined a report on Biden’s approach to infrastructure as such: “Biden Introduces \$1.3 Trillion Infrastructure Plan Funded Entirely By Higher Taxes On Corporations and Wealthy” (National Review; November 14th, 2019). The same article wrote that Biden made a public statement which “blamed President Trump by name for failing to deliver on his campaign promises to repair the country’s crumbling infrastructure.” (National Review; November 14th, 2019). The magazine is framing Biden’s infrastructure policy to be an investment based on what the Trump administration has not completed, countering a 2016 Trump campaign promise with the reality of the fallout of that campaign promise in 2020. Paralleling this, Fox Business explained Biden’s allocation of funds for his infrastructure plan would stem from “reversing President Trump’s tax cuts, closing loopholes in the tax code that reward the wealthy and ending fossil fuel subsidies. [...] In August [2019], the U.S. manufacturing sector

contracted for the first time in three years, raising concerns about the health of the economy.”

(Fox Business; November 14th, 2019). Here the network is framing Biden as halting the Trump administration’s tax legislation rather than allocating funding elsewhere, in turn halting one of the legacies of the Trump administration. Both the National Review and Fox Business are countering Biden’s image as a moderate by focusing on how he will fund his proposed infrastructure plan, as the outlets are suggesting Biden could step outside the moderate lane to get what he wants instead of negotiating through bipartisanship. The possibility of this scenario could make the audiences of the National Review and Fox Business, as well as those unsure who they will vote for and members of Trump’s base whom the Biden campaign wants to incite, not vote for a candidate willing to forgo their own message for a political accomplishment.

In spring 2020, Biden officially adopted Senator Elizabeth Warren’s bankruptcy reform plan titled *Fixing Our Bankruptcy System To Give People a Second Chance* (“Bankruptcy Reform”, <https://joebiden.com/bankruptcyreform/>, 2020). The Hill described Biden’s endorsement as an attempt to “unite a Democratic party fractured between centrists and progressives.” (The Hill; March 14th, 2020), whereas Vox reported that “There’s little sign that the American electorate is particularly interested in this subject. [...] [the move] demonstrates a clear desire on Biden’s part to consolidate Warren supporters as part of his coalition.” (Vox News; March 16th, 2020). The Hill is framing Biden’s support for Warren’s bankruptcy reform plan as a continuation of the argument that the Democratic party is divided; Vox is framing the decision as a victory for the progressive wing of the Democratic party on Biden’s behalf rather than the behalf of the

progressive wing itself. The comparison of how these media organizations are respectively framing Biden's stance on bankruptcy reform poses the following question: If Biden wins the presidency in November, would he implement *Warren's Fixing Our Bankruptcy System By Giving People a Second Chance* plan by listening to the Democratic party's progressive members only, or would he downgrade bankruptcy reform on his agenda by listening to his base first? The question here highlights the reality progressive Democrats are risking having to accept Biden as their party's nominee; the article from The Hill suggests the progressive wing will be hesitant to fully support Biden, whereas the article from Vox suggests the progressive wing will eventually embrace Biden's backing of Warren's plan. In continuation of the notion of indecisiveness between progressives and Biden, NBC News wrote the following analysis in the week of the Democratic National Convention: "Biden's ideal coalition includes the Democratic base, swing voters, and some longtime Republicans turned off by Trump's manner. When Biden and his surrogates talk about their disdain for Trump; when they talk about a progressive policy platform, it is more likely to fracture." (NBC News; August 18th, 2020). Should Biden become the 46th president, the qualifications makeup of his administration risk either reflecting his ideal coalition (a phrase left to the public, including viewers of NBC News, Vox, and The Hill, to define) or the coalition produced by outside factors (i.e. undecided voters rather than swing voters, surge of first time voters) the public deems significant.

H) Donald Trump on the Economy

Trump is campaigning on signing the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act into law in 2017 and overseeing an increase of the U.S.'s gross domestic product (GDP) both prior to and during the coronavirus

pandemic (“Economy and Jobs”,

<https://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/economy-and-jobs/>, 2020). He told the

New York Post in a May 2020 interview that despite the pandemic, “we’ll open [the country] up and I think your fourth quarter [of the fiscal year] is going to be very good.”¹²

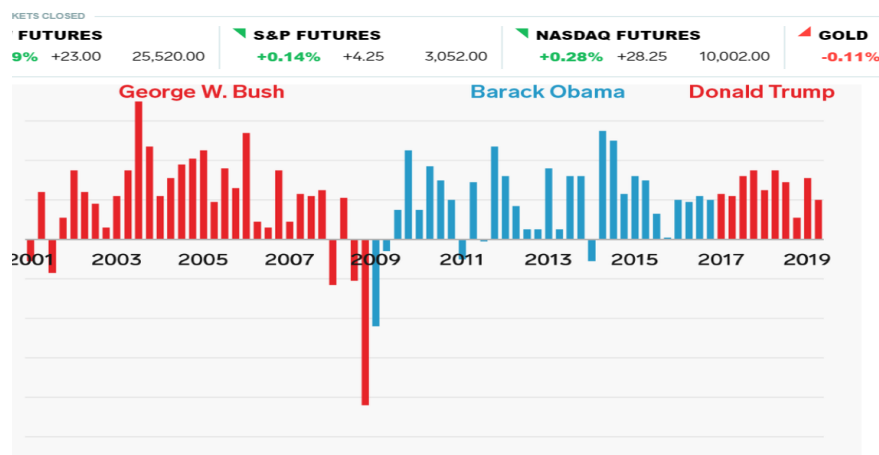
In spring 2020, a Forbes headline read “The Trump Tax Cuts Are Two Years Old, Where Are The Jobs Being Created?” (Forbes; March 5th, 2020); the same article described the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act as having “changed the effective tax rates in all 50 states at once [...] This makes for an interesting economic test, measuring how lower tax states might attract more job-creating capital than their higher tax states counterparts.” (Forbes; March 5th, 2020). Parallel to this sentiment, the Los Angeles Times reported that Trump’s tax legislation “is estimated to cost the federal government \$1 trillion in lost revenue over 10 years [...] [leaving] the country with a big budget hole that just got much bigger from the once-in-a-century economic shock of the pandemic.” (Los Angeles Times; May 19th, 2020). The frame of Forbes is to make the audience speculate the extent to which altering state tax rates was effective, whereas the frame of the Los Angeles Times is to make the audience speculate the extent to which the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act was effective overall. For undecided voters and swing states, the concern for the validity of legislation sponsored and approved by Trump- concern demonstrated in media organizations such as the outlets mentioned- could influence how undecided voters and swing states eventually cast their ballots. A Quinnipiac University poll conducted May 14th-18th 2020

¹² Nelson, Steven and Ebony Bowden. “On The Road To Recovery.” *The New York Post*, 5 May 2020, pg. 2-3.

found that “Of Democrats surveyed, 88% said they would vote for Biden while 5% said they’d vote for Trump. Of Republicans, 87% chose Trump while 8% chose Biden. Independents favored Biden over Trump 47%-36%.”¹³. Should the margins of this data change in the months remaining until Election Day, Trump’s reelection campaign risks encountering a public perception of Tax Cuts and Jobs Act- the policy is listed first on the “Economy And Jobs” tab on the president’s website (“Economy And Jobs”, <https://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/economy-and-jobs/>, 2020)- that differs from the perception the White House portrays.

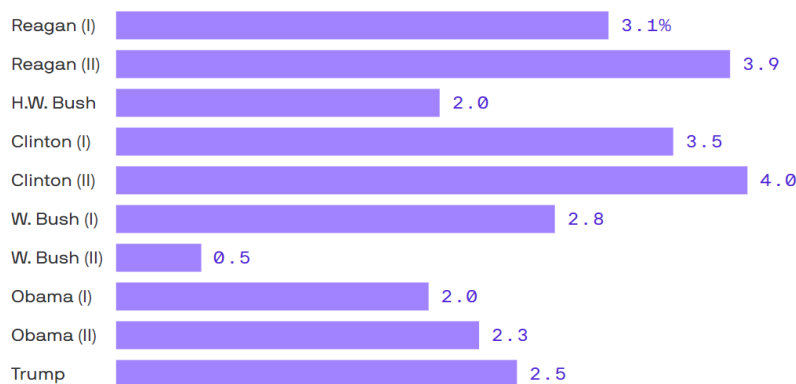
Trump’s campaign website lists the following statement: “GDP has soared under President Trump, topping 3% in 4 quarters under his administration.” (“Economy and Jobs”, <https://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/economy-and-jobs/> , 2020). What counters this claim is Politico’s report that the Federal Reserve forecasts “GDP would contract by a staggering 6.5 percent this year and that the unemployment rate will still be above 9 percent through December.” (Politico; June 18th, 2020) due to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the following graph created by Business Insider. Attached below, the graph depicts the rate at which GDP has increased and decreased between the fiscal quarters of George W. Bush’s presidency and the fiscal quarters, recorded until 2019, under Trump’s presidency.

¹³ Santucci, Jeanine. “Biden Leads Trump By 11 points in new national poll as approval for coronavirus ticks down.” USA Today, 20 May 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/05/20/joe-biden-leads-donald-trump-11-points-quinnipiac-poll/5230880002/>. Accessed 17 June 2020.



The graph was included in an article published in the winter of 2020 where Business Insider also wrote the following phrase: “Job growth is holding steady- but Trump’s ongoing trade wars sapped business confidence [since taking office]. Companies have pulled back on hiring workers as a result.” (Business Insider; January 21st, 2020). Likewise, Politico also noted Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell told the Senate in June that another result of the pandemic was how “Close to 25 million people have been displaced in the workforce.” (Politico; June 18th, 2020). Paralleling this information, Axios published its own graph reflecting on how much GDP has moved since President Reagan, measuring the GDP rate by each presidential term. The graph is attached below; alongside it, Axios reported that “Average economic growth under President Trump has outpaced the growth under President Obama, but not all of his recent predecessors. [...] If history is any guide, any incumbent president isn’t going to have a great shot at reelection if the economy tips into a recession under their watch.” (Axios; February 17th, 2020).

Average annualized GDP growth by presidential term



Source: "Presidents and US Economy", Trump figures through 2019 courtesy of Alan Blinder; Note: Data shows real GDP and Q1 growth in each term is attributed to the previous president; Chart: Axios Visuals

Politico, Business Insider, and Axios are respectively framing the Trump presidency's rein on GDP to be not as steady as the five previous presidencies- though steady nonetheless, media organizations such as these are underlining the fallacy behind the claim that the country's "years of economic decay are over." (see footnote on page seven), a claim made in Trump's 2020 State of the Union address. Such work by media organizations demonstrates how if the media counters a presidential message with simultaneous fact checking, then the public is offered two perceptions of the message: what the White House projects, and what the news outlets individuals choose to tune into say the White House projects. In turn, how GDP and the breadth of the economy during the pandemic are being projected will become an influence on voters, especially those financially struggling from the pandemic and those unsure whom they will cast their ballot for.

Conclusion

It has been predetermined that framing exists- so what? A scholarly article in the 2007 *Annual Review Journal of Political Science* defined the strongest execution of framing as frames “that emerge from public discussion as the best rationales for contending positions on the issue. These frames strike opinion leaders and audiences as being more compelling than alternative arguments.” (Chong and Druckman 116). In identifying and understanding how press coverage regarding the policies of presidential candidates can vary differently from what the writing of the policies themselves entail, figures in authority and in the general public can contextualize their perspective on issues individually *with help from the media* rather than contextualizing their perspective *solely based on what they read in the news*. Written in the same scholarly article mentioned earlier is the following statement: “[Framing] can be viewed as a strategy to manipulate and deceive individuals, or it can refer more neutrally to a learning process in which people acquire common beliefs” (Chong and Druckman 120). How individuals ultimately contextualize their perspective on issues will illustrate the leverage which the theory of framing holds in everyday life. Investigating specific levels of framing can aid individuals interested in further reading; specific levels include micro-framing (when particular language is used to deliver a certain type of content)¹⁴, meta-framing (what kind of story it is)¹⁵, and meso-framing (how the story connects to a large issue)¹⁶.

¹⁴ The Arthur W. Page Center. “Micro-Level Analysis” *Media Framing and Ethics*, Module 11. Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications at Pennsylvania State University.

<https://pagecentertraining.psu.edu/public-relations-ethics/media-framing-and-ethics/medias-agenda-setting-role/micro-level-analysis/>
Accessed 9 August 2020.

¹⁵ Same as above.

¹⁶ “Framing Your Issue and Developing A Plan” *Taking Action: Becoming Politically Involved* Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario, 2015, pp. 15. https://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/Section_3_Framing_Your_Issue_and_Developing_a_Plan.pdf Accessed 9 August 2020.

Based on the analysis made in this paper, teaching how to identify and understand framing in press coverage concerning the 2020 presidential candidates aims to equip the public into becoming more media literate in an era where the phrase “fake news” is common. Media literacy is “the process of interacting with and critically analyzing media content by considering its particular presentation [and] its underlying political or social messages.” (Pavlik & McIntosh 39). Take for example the 1995 movie *The American President*. In the film, Michael Douglas’s fictional President Andrew Shepherd tells reporters that “being president of this country is entirely about character.”¹⁷; the audiences watching the scene are left on their own to process what that comment means. Framing theory operates in the 2020 presidential election by differentiating the images of Biden’s and Trump’s policies stemming from one news organization to another- in turn influencing how the public views those policies, thus influencing how voters decide on their own which candidate maintains the best character to hold presidential office.

¹⁷ *The American President*. Directed by Rob Reiner. Columbia Pictures, 1995.

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Conclusion

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