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### Framing politics

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## Introduction

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### Setting the Scene: Mapping Political Communication Effects

The way the news “frame” politics has been the subject of a great number of theoretical and empirical investigations by political communication scholars over the past two decades. The question how news framing affects citizens’ understanding of political issues and processes has received particular attention. As a result, studies of framing effects have helped to explain in what ways subtle differences in the presentation of a political issue can lead to changes in interpretation, attitudes, and behavior (Chong & Druckman, 2007a). To date, studies have investigated news framing effects for all sorts of issues and events, ranging from social protest (McLeod & Detenber, 1999), to government spending (Jacoby, 2000) and EU integration (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). However, perhaps because news framing effects theory proved to be so valuable for studying different political issues and contexts, many scholars have approached the theory “very inductively and examined framing as a phenomenon without careful explication of the theoretical premises and their operational implications” (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 17). While these case studies have unquestionably provided a solid empirical basis for the existence of news framing effects in political communication, they have also left several fundamental questions unanswered.

This dissertation addresses some of these questions. First, we investigate the intermediary psychological processes that enable or limit a news framing effect on political attitudes. The study of these processes is essential for our understanding of how news framing effects actually work in an individual’s mind, but the literature is still full of debate about the range of mediators a news framing effect can go through. Second, we examine whether a news framing effect depends on the particular issue at stake, and how the importance of an issue alters susceptibility to framing effects. This study enables a more fine-grained understanding of the limits of news framing effects, and also further introduces the socio-psychological notion of “attitude strength” into framing literature. Third, we study how long news framing effects last over time and, fourth, if their persistence depends on whether news framing is repetitive or competitive in nature. To date, only very few scholars have investigated duration and persistence of news framing effects. Yet, testing these leads framing effects theory on the way to understanding how influential news framing effects really are in politics and political communication. In this opening chapter, we discuss some of the basic theoretical concepts that have motivated this dissertation, and then shortly introduce the design of the project.

Like any study in political communication, the research conducted in this dissertation essentially relies on the idea that the media play an important role in how citizens comprehend politics and participate in it (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). However, for the last century or so, the scholarly conception of just how much influence the media really exert on citizens has been oscillating between conceptions of minimal, maximal, and differentiated political

communication effects (for an overview see Bryant & Zillmann, 2009; McQuail, 2005). First steps were taken by studies of propaganda and public opinion at the beginning of the twentieth century (e.g., Lasswell, 1927; Lippmann, 1922). Impressed by the popularity of the upcoming mass media, these studies established the idea that the media could substantially and directly affect citizens' political opinions and actions. Soon after, however, empirical evidence for the limits of this media influence began to pile up, and the idea of the all-powerful media was heavily challenged. Most notably the work of Lazarsfeld and colleagues on *The People's Choice*—that is, the rather modest and partisan reinforcing effect of the mass media in election campaigns—led to a general disenchantment with the study of media effects, and rang in a paradigm of minimal media effects (see also Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Berelson, 1949; Klapper, 1960). During the 1970s and 1980s, the rise of television brought change: Picking up on Trenaman and McQuail's study of the British general elections (1961), McCombs and Shaw's (1972) agenda-setting theory provided evidence for a strong relationship between media and audience priorities. Around the same time, Noelle-Neumann (1973) argued that consonance—the repetitive nature of much of the media content—is likely to result in large media effects, simply because citizens are unable to avoid certain standpoints (see also Noelle-Neumann & Mathes, 1987; Peter, 2004).

Since then, research has adopted a more differentiated understanding of media effects. Scholars still assume a sizeable effect, but depart from the idea of an active citizen who weighs political news messages against extant beliefs or values and then integrates them (e.g., Gitlin, 1980; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). A differentiated examination of media effects also required the use of a more fine-grained theoretical approach to investigate media effects, which gave rise to “framing”, a concept that originated in psychology and sociology.

In psychology, the idea of framing is based on Kahneman and Tversky's *prospect theory* (1979; 1984), which assumes that decisions taken by individuals can be altered by presenting information in logically equivalent but semantically different ways. Kahneman and Tversky found that when a decision was framed in terms of losses, individuals tended to be risk seeking, while when it was framed in terms of gains, individuals were risk averse. In sociology, Goffman (1974) constructed the idea of framing on a macro-level. He suggested that individuals organize their daily experiences by means of “frameworks or schemata of interpretation” (p. 21). Most important among these are the so-called primary frameworks, which render “what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful” (p. 21). During the 1980s, framing was quickly adapted in communication research, and both the sociological and the psychological origins of the concept were integrated with extant knowledge in media effects research (see Entman, 1993; D'Angelo, 2002).

But what demarcates the study of framing from working with other effect theories, such as agenda-setting, priming, and persuasion? The relationship between agenda-setting and its' extension priming on the one hand and framing on the other hand has stirred some attention in the literature and is characterized by an ongoing disagreement in the scholarly debate (see

Scheufele, 2000; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009; Weaver, 2007). One group of authors considers also framing an extension of agenda-setting (e.g., McCombs & Ghanem, 2001), whereas a second group argues that there is a fundamental distinction between the two theories (e.g., Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This latter view seems more plausible, based on the psychological processes that underlie the respective effects: Whereas agenda-setting increases the accessibility of an issue and therefore shapes the importance we assign to an issue, framing functions by (re-)organizing and connecting beliefs, which renders these beliefs more likely to be integrated into subsequent judgments. Accordingly, frames can have applicability effects, as opposed to an accessibility effect of agenda-setting and priming (Nelson, Oxley, Clawson, 1997).

The difference between persuasion and framing also hinges on primary psychological processing. As opposed to the conception of framing as an applicability effect—which is based on the assumption that a framed belief consideration must already be accessible and available within the individual’s mind—persuasion is often understood as the addition of previously unavailable beliefs to an individual’s mental stockpile (see e.g., Petty & Briñol, 2008 for an overview). Moreover, framing is usually concerned with the “origin, evolution, presentation, and effects of frames” produced by journalists for an audience that is *unaware* of these mechanisms, whereas persuasion studies “involve the presentation of intentionally persuasive content to audiences presumably aware of that intent” (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 20). However, we must note that the distinctness of framing effects theory from other effect theories is a developing argument, and heavily depends on the further development of the theoretical basis of framing. Therefore, all four chapters in this dissertation are also concerned with the “correct placement” of framing within the cadre of political communication theory.

### **News Framing Effects Theory**

In the following, we present the theoretical assumptions our research is based on. We begin by providing a definition of news frames, and summarize some of the literature on news framing effects. We then give a short delineation of the open questions we aim to answer in this dissertation, and place them within their respective research areas.

#### ***What is a News Frame?***

Although the term “frame” has been used in political communication literature for several decades now, the question of what exactly constitutes a frame is not easy to answer (Kinder, 2007; Matthes, 2009). Frames can be found in various parts of the communication process: within the originating (political) system, the journalists or media institutions, and the recipients (e.g., de Vreese, 2002; Entman, 1993; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Scheufele, 1999). Kinder and Sanders (1996, p. 164) argue that frames “lead a double life,” because they are present in political discourse, as well as in the mind as “cognitive structures that help individual citizens

make sense of the issues that animate political life". In view of that, Scheufele (1999, pp. 106-107) distinguishes between "media frames" in content and "individual frames" that are present in a person's mind as a result of either deep-rooted beliefs or short-term reference changes. The notion of the presence of frames in multiple locations has led to the understanding of framing as a process that stretches across all parts of the communication process (e.g., D'Angelo, 2002; Scheufele, 1999). De Vreese (2002, p. 24) distinguishes this process into frame-building—that is, the "process and factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames"—and frame-setting, namely the "interaction between media frames and individuals' prior knowledge and predispositions."

On a macro-level, a frame "organizes everyday reality" within the media and is thereby "part and parcel of everyday reality" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 193). Frames are "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). In the news, a frame is often described as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143; see also Reese, 2001). Entman (1993, p. 52; italics in original) highlights the selection aspect of frames in arguing that to "frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described". Based on these definitions, we argue that frames in the news can be defined as patterns of interpretation that are used to classify information and that aid audiences in processing information efficiently. News frames stress certain aspects of reality and push others into the background: they have a selective function. In this way, certain attributes, judgments, and decisions are suggested. Yet, this conceptual frame definition does not give much indication of the distinct elements that constitute a news frame or *how* to actually identify a frame in the news (see e.g., Matthes & Kohring, 2008). The goal of this dissertation is the study of framing effects and not the analysis of frames in the news. We therefore let two common classifications guide our operationalization of news frames.

The first one divides news framing into equivalency and emphasis frames (Druckman, 2001b). Equivalency frames refer to content that is similar or even identical in its logical message, but is presented or phrased differently (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). Emphasis frames are closer to "real" journalistic news coverage and present "qualitatively different yet potentially relevant considerations" of an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007a, p. 114). The concept of equivalency framing stems from Kahneman and Tversky (e.g., 1984), who, by altering the wording of two similar scenarios that outline the consequences of a fatal illness, were able to explore differences in subsequent decision-making. Equivalency frames are not often used in political communication research, because this rather narrow conceptualization of framing limits its applicability in a political context. For that reason, many studies—including

the ones reported on in this dissertation—have made use of emphasis frames as more realistic translations of political news coverage (de Vreese, 2002; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004, but see Iyengar, 2009).

Second, studies have identified two types of emphasis frames that have been used in effects studies: issue-specific frames and generic frames. Issue-specific frames are built explicitly for a topic and have a limited scope. Generic news frames are a set of frames that are said to be applicable to a wide range of topics and were thus pre-identified and used in a number of studies (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; d'Haenens & de Lange, 2001; Iyengar, 1991; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Issue-specific frames are defined by a very open approach to the relevant news coverage and enable the generation of apposite frames for different issues and contexts. However, as these frames may only be applicable to a specific topic, their creation is time-consuming and under risk of capturing more of the “authors’ frames” than actual patterns in media coverage. In using generic frames, researchers might be in danger of omitting potentially important factors in news coverage. Nonetheless, generic frames signal patterns in news coverage that were previously identified by empirical study. This renders generic frames highly appropriate for effect-based studies that cannot draw on news frames from content analysis, and that also recoil from simply “thinking up” a news frame. Thus, the use of generic news frames decreases the risk of testing implausible frame scenarios, and all studies in this dissertation do therefore test the effects of generic news frames.

### ***What is a News Framing Effect?***

A news framing effect is the influence a news frame has on an individual’s frames in mind. To date, the study of framing effects mainly focuses on studying cognitive framing effects, as the question of how the news can affect our thinking of an issue is at the very center of political communication research (Scheufele, 1999). Some framing studies investigate cognitive framing effects by studying information processing and how citizens interpret and “understand” a political issue or event (e.g., Price et al., 1997; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Shen, 2004; Nabi, 2003). However, an increasing number of studies conceives this process as only a “mediating step on the way to some other effect” (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 26) and focus on attitudinal variables, most notably political opinions (e.g., Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Jacoby, 2000; Slothuus, 2008). For instance, Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson (1997, p. 237) present a model of news framing effects on opinion, where the framing process affects attitudes and opinions by lending “additional weight to an already accessible concept by influencing its perceived relevance or importance.” Jacoby (2000, p. 763; italics in original) investigates framing effects on opinion about government spending, finding that “[d]iffering frames produce widespread *changes* in the ways that people respond to a single issue.” All four chapters in this dissertation investigate similar attitudinal framing effects, aimed at tapping individual-level opinion towards a specific issue.

Framing scholars have also examined other cognitive variables, such as cognitive complexity (e.g., Shah et al., 2004), political cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), knowledge (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006), and trust (Valentino et al., 2001). Moreover, there is a variety of studies that have investigated behavioral or emotional framing effects. For instance, behavioral framing effects have received a considerable amount of attention in the study of social movements, where scholars have studied how frames can enable mobilization and protest (e.g., Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Snow et al. 1986; Snow & Benford, 1992). However, Scheufele (1999, p. 113) notes that these data are “of only limited use when examining the potential impact of individual frames on political participation or action,” due to their “aggregate-level” nature. On an individual level, behavioral framing effect studies focus on campaigns and the effects of news frames on voter mobilization or turnout (e.g. de Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Valentino et al., 2001). For example, Valentino and colleagues (2001) found that framing with a focus on strategy demobilizes less sophisticated citizens. However, in most cases, behavioral effects are measured by tapping “behavioral intention” rather than actual behavior, and the level of attitude-behavior consistency for framing effects is in need of further empirical investigation (Scheufele, 1999). There is also an emerging field of studies that deal with the emotional effects of framing (e.g., Nabi, 2003; Gross & Brewer, 2007; Druckman & McDermott, 2008; Schuck & de Vreese, 2009). For instance, Gross and Brewer (2007) examined the impact of specific news frames on anger and disgust, and found a conditional effect of framing on emotion, limited by the nature of personal beliefs connected to the framed issue.

### ***Mediators of News Framing***

Framing scholars increasingly focus on the intermediary psychological processes that underlie a news framing effect (e.g., Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Chong & Druckman, 2007a; Matthes, 2007; Slothuus, 2008). Early studies conceived of the framing process as an accessibility effect (Iyengar, 1991), while subsequent research found the effect process to be more complex. A majority of studies today conceive of framing as an applicability effect, where framing functions by “altering the *weight* of particular considerations” (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997, p. 236; italics in original). Thus, framing renders these considerations more important and therefore also more likely to be included in subsequent judgments (see Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009 for a recent overview).

News framing as an applicability effect thus assumes that a frame “operate[s] by activating information *already at the recipients’ disposal*, stored in long-term memory” (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997, p. 225; italics in original). However, some scholars have recently investigated another process that may be attributed to news framing: belief content change (e.g., Shah et al., 2004; Slothuus, 2008). Belief content change refers to the addition of previously inaccessible or unavailable beliefs to an individual’s set. A belief content change model is particularly interesting when investigating the framing of politics, as political news frames may cover information that is remote and complex to the individual, and may therefore regularly

convey new information also. Consequently, Slothuus (2008, p. 7) has proposed a “dual-process” model of issue framing effects that combines applicability effects and belief content change. Results of his experimental study show that frames do indeed affect opinion via both proposed mechanisms. However, we do not know which of the two mediators prevails across issues and frames. *Chapter 1* of this dissertation evaluates the dual-process model of issue framing for a different political issue, and adds to the literature by determining the explanatory power of the two mediation processes.

### ***Moderators of News Framing***

The empirical evidence of strong news framing effects may lead one to suspect that frames affect citizens’ understanding of politics across the board. However, citizens are not “at the mercy of elites’ whims” (Druckman, 2004, p. 233). Rather, in the light of a differentiated media effects paradigm, framing effects are likely to depend on specific individual and contextual variables. The literature suggests a few of these variables on an individual level, such as knowledge (e.g., Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006) and values (e.g., Shen & Edwards, 2005). Beyond that, there is increasing scholarly interest in contextual moderating variables like, for instance, source credibility (e.g., Druckman, 2001a), and interpersonal communication (e.g., Druckman & Nelson, 2003). To date, scholars have only just begun to explore the moderators of framing, which invites further empirical investigation.

A few framing studies have paid special attention to the moderating role of one of the most important variables of political communication: *political knowledge* (e.g., Nelson, 1997; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Jacoby, 2000; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006; Slothuus, 2008). However, the empirical evidence on the role of knowledge in the framing process remains mixed and is thus inconclusive. One group of scholars argues that individuals with higher levels of knowledge are affected to a greater extent, because they possess a larger stock of available considerations that are ready to be “framed” (e.g., Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). However, this evidence does not concur with the assumption that high levels of knowledge usually coincide with strong predispositions towards an issue, which might substantially reduce vulnerability to any media-induced effect. A second group of authors have thus argued that less knowledgeable individuals should display higher susceptibility to news framing effects, because they cannot resist a framed message (e.g., Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Given the central role political knowledge plays in political communication research as well as the unclear mechanisms that define its influence on the news framing process, we investigated the moderating role of political knowledge in *Chapters 1, 3, and 4* of this dissertation.

Because most news framing effect studies focus on the extent to which news framing affects attitudes, scholars can make use of the concept of “attitude strength” in social psychology. Here, a rich body of literature can provide further insights into the variables that make for strong and stable attitudes and can therefore condition attitudinal framing effects (see

e.g., Krosnick & Petty, 1995; Krosnick et al., 1993; Miller & Peterson, 2004). One key aspect of strong and stable attitudes is the importance of the issue at stake, which indicates that this variable could also affect susceptibility to news framing effects. For example, Iyengar (1991) distinguishes between episodic and thematic framing and finds that framing effects vary according to the particular issue. However, he does not offer conclusive evidence on the conditions under which issue characteristics matter. Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2001) focus on a high salience issue, assuming that attitudes toward this issue and an issue frame are stronger as individuals attach high levels of importance to it. This indicates that issue importance should be fundamental for the framing process, and it is therefore investigated in *Chapter 2* of this dissertation.

### ***How Persistent are Framing Effects?***

Framing experiments can establish causality, but do they also allow conjectures about the real-life impact of news frames in political discourse? When interpreting their results, many scholars draw conclusions about the long-term influences that news frames can have on political attitudes and behavior. However, the reality of this long-term impact is almost never put to the test. An increasing number of authors do therefore point out a “disjuncture between the hypothesized nature of some effect and the limitations of the methods chosen to study it” (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 29; see also Gaines et al., 2007; Kinder, 2007).

The role that news framing effects play in our day-to-day life depends to a great extent on how long they actually last (Gaines et al., 2007). Assume, for instance, that one news frame has more lasting effects than another. Would this not imply that this news frame has a more substantial effect on political attitudes? The study of the *duration* of news framing effects is still in its infancy, with only a small handful of rather straightforward studies available (e.g., de Vreese, 2004; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Tewksbury et al., 2000). These studies all include one delayed measurement of the dependent variable, which is then compared to the immediate framing effect in the study. The results of these studies, however, differ: Some researchers claim long-term effects (Tewksbury et al., 2000), while others advocate the short-term impact of news framing (e.g., de Vreese, 2004). In light of this inconclusive evidence and the limitations of extant study designs, *Chapter 3* presents a systematic analysis of news framing effects across multiple delayed time points.

The significance of framing effects over time also depends on whether the individual is exposed to only one or a *multiplicity* of news frames. The latter scenario is certainly more realistic, given the habitual nature of our day-to-day media use. When it comes to watching, reading, or listening to the news, citizens are likely to be exposed to a whole plethora of repetitive or competitive news frame messages, and the effects of these two types of message combinations are likely to vary (Zaller, 1992; 1996). The effects of repetitive news frames are often only speculated upon (Price & Tewksbury, 1997), while some studies have investigated the impact of competitive frame messages (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007b; Hansen, 2007;

Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). However, nearly all studies expose their participants to multiple frames at the same time, and do therefore not take into account the temporal dimension of political communication flows. *Chapter 4* combines the study of the longevity of news framing effects with exposure to either repetitive or competitive news frames, and thereby offers an encompassing account of the persistence of news framing effects over time.

### Research Design

We investigate news framing effects by means of an experimental research design, and conducted *survey experiments*. A large majority of results on framing effects stem from survey experiments (Kinder, 2007). This is not surprising, given that a well-designed experiment is a primary means of determining cause and effect, and of disentangling the complex processes that account for this effect. Due to the important role that experimentation plays in framing research, this dissertation also evaluates the use of it in the literature and offers two options for improving the external validity of survey experiments: delayed measurements (*Chapters 3 & 4*), and multiple exposure treatment settings (*Chapter 4*).

Survey experiments are attractive to framing effects researchers because of their ability to create a *standardized* environment in which participants receive the same stimulus under comparable circumstances, and are subjected to identical procedures and measures. Doing so minimizes the “likelihood that extraneous factors, of which the experimenter might not even be aware, could influence the results in decisive ways” (McDermott, 2002, p. 33). By allocating participants *randomly* to different groups, a framing effect can be ascribed to the treatment manipulation and not to the composition of the groups (such as differences in age, education, or political beliefs) (see also e.g., Kinder & Palfrey, 1993; Lavine et al., 2002).

The experiments conducted in this study used between-subject designs, whereby the framing effect is established by tapping the differences between two or more groups that have been exposed to different frames (see McDermott, 2002). In doing so, they stand in a long tradition of between-subjects designs in the field which are used to investigate the “effects of alternative news frames on opinion,” rather than test the “effects of framing versus no framing” (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997, p. 579). Moreover, the inclusion of pre-test opinion measurements in over-time designs in this dissertation would also have increased the overall number of measurements further, and therefore also the risks that participants would respond differently to these measurements, or drop out of the experiment. However, to preclude any criticism of our design, we included control groups, which served as the baseline (see also Druckman, 2001a; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Gaines et al., 2007).

The literature shows that the *stimuli* in framing experiments—the news frames—are operationalized in quite different ways (see Iyengar, 2009). Some researchers create frame stimuli by means of alternative question wordings. For example, Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson (1997) exposed participants to a manipulated opinion measure, which stressed either the

entitlement of poor citizens to receive welfare, or the economic threats posed by welfare spending (see also e.g., Nelson & Kinder, 1996). However, such frame manipulations “do not speak very convincingly to the presentation of frames in everyday life” (Kinder, 2007, p. 158). While alternative question wordings suffice in establishing framing mechanism as introduced by Kahneman and Tversky (1984), they do not adhere to the way political issues are framed in real news coverage and are therefore of limited use when analyzing media effects. Many studies therefore employ emphasis frames that focus on relatively independent aspects of an issue (e.g., a “privacy” versus a “criminal” frame when thinking about internet law enforcement). Yet, such a framing conceptualization also introduces the risk of error into the experimental design, because “different words may convey more than differences in perspective and different individuals may ‘read’ the same words quite differently” (Iyengar, 2009, p. 188; see also Shah et al., 2009). Consequently, the use of independent issue frames could jeopardize the results of studies that are aimed at disentangling the subtle psychological processes of news framing. Because we sought both to minimize this risk of noise in our design, and to expose participants to realistic news frames, this dissertation consistently employs alternative versions of *one* well-established generic news frame, namely the economic consequences frame (de Vreese, 2009; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

The ability to establish causal relationships, paired with high levels of control in measurement and procedure, endows survey experiments with a great deal of *internal validity*, that is, a great certainty that the study design measures what it promises to measure. Yet, the *external validity* of survey experiments is a continuous source of discussion in the literature (e.g., Gaines et al., 2007), which is why the improvement of external validity by means of tests of longevity and multiple exposure is taken up in this dissertation (*Chapters 3 & 4*). The artificial and forced environment created by experimentation has made some researchers wonder whether a more realistic media use should play a role in future framing effects research (e.g., Kinder, 2007; Barabas & Jerit, 2008). Kinder (2007), for instance, emphasizes that framing experiments may have exaggerated the power of the media, simply because such experiments ensure that “frames reach their intended audiences,” instead of being deflected off a typically uninvolved media user. As a remedy, Kinder suggests the use of real-life events to generate natural experiments. However, he also acknowledges that doing so requires a “decisive shift in the deployment of frames in some real-world setting” – a condition that is very rarely fulfilled (p. 157; see also Boomgaarden & de Vreese, 2007; Gerber et al., 2009).

In the absence of such events, how can researchers both retain the qualities offered by a good experimental design, *and* keep track of external validity? In this dissertation, we argue that what is needed is a greater focus on a temporal dimension in framing effects theory (Chapter 3). A time-persistent framing effect allows researchers to draw conclusions concerning the “strength” of a framing effect, and the societal and political implications of their results. If experimental framing effects are short-lived, one must question the applicability of experimental designs. De Vreese (2004, p. 206) argues that longitudinal experimental designs are a

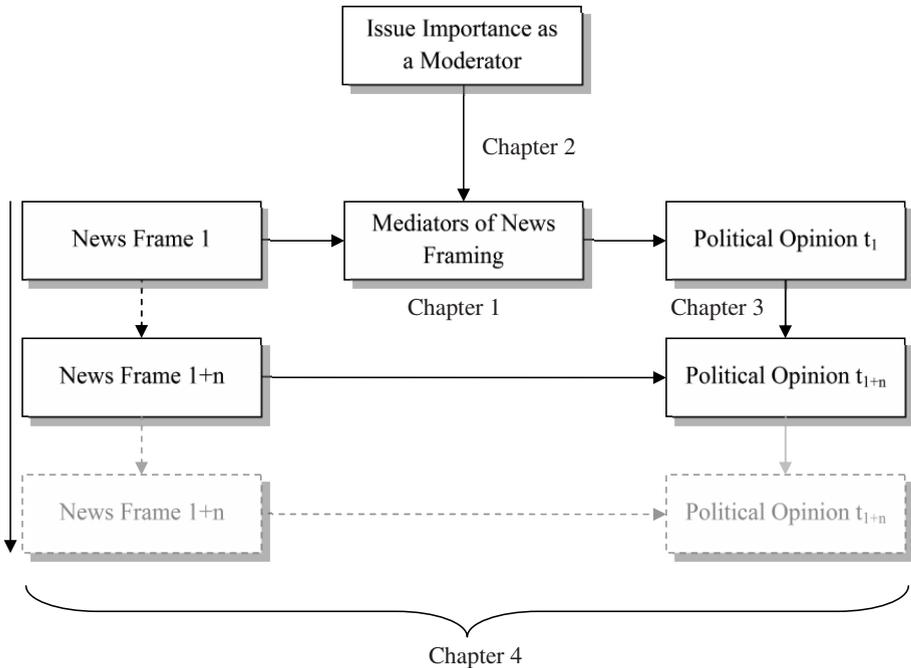
“worthwhile path to pursue in the quest to disentangle the robustness and persistency of effects”. Gaines and colleagues (2007) even point out that “determining the rates of decay of various treatment effects and deriving the political implications could be one of the most informative tasks that users of survey experiments undertake in the future” (p. 6). To fill this imminent research gap, *Chapters 3 and 4* incorporate tests for longevity.

External validity can also be increased by including multiple treatments over time into the experimental setting. Most framing studies expose participants to just *one* relatively obtrusive news frame. However, by providing participants with only one frame, even if this frame is highly applicable, experiments cannot simulate political communication, where media exposure to a particular issue is characterized by a flow of repetitive and competitive messages (Gaines et al., 2007). This interplay between consonant and dissonant media information in political communication has been described by Zaller (1992) and other authors, but not tested sufficiently in experimental research (see also Noelle-Neumann, 1973). Druckman (2004, p. 685) suggests a greater focus on the experimental frame exposure scenario, the “context under study”. Consequently, Chong and Druckman (2007b) presented their participants with competing framing scenarios, but within an experiment. In doing so, the authors created a more realistic setting, and also experimentally showed that the effects of multiple exposure scenarios differ from single exposure measurement (see also Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). Recently, Chong and Druckman (2008) introduced an over-time perspective into their competitive framing design. However, so far, no study has included multiple exposures of both a repetitive and a competitive nature over various lengths of time, which is what *Chapter 4* attempts to achieve.

## Outline of the Dissertation

In the following, we present a short outline of the four chapters in this dissertation. Figure 0.1 provides an overview of these chapters, and indicates where each chapter stands in a model of news framing effects.

Figure 0.1: Overview of “Framing Politics”



To better understand framing, scholars must consider the underlying psychological processes that lie between exposure to a news frame and change in opinion (see effect process illustrated in Figure 0.1). Based on an experimental design, *Chapter 1* presents a mediational analysis of a news framing effect on opinion, testing for two mediators: change in the importance of available beliefs, and change in the belief content by making new beliefs available. The moderating influence of political knowledge is tested.

As Figure 0.1 shows, *Chapter 2* is devoted to the question which variables enhance, limit, or obliterate this news framing effects process. Specifically, we address the fundamental question whether framing effects vary according to the particular issue at stake. Based on two experimental studies, we investigate the extent to which framing effects differ, depending on how important an issue is.

Although most framing studies emphasize the relevance of their results for daily politics, they fail to assess this claim empirically. Thus, based on a survey experiment, *Chapter 3*

systematically traces the duration of framing effects across three delayed time points, namely after one day, after one week, and after two weeks (see vertical arrows in Figure 0.1). We also investigate how political knowledge moderates the duration of a news framing effect.

*Chapter 4* builds on these results, and is one of the first to empirically mimic the dynamic nature of framing effects over time (see over-time model of multiple framing as displayed in Figure 0.1). Based on Zaller's (1992) model of dynamic communication flows, we integrate (1) multiple news frame exposures (repetitive and competitive) and (2) tests for duration of framing effects into an experimental study design. Again, political knowledge is tested as a potential moderator.

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