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Breaking Down Breaking News: Television's Institutional Failures and Today's Ramifications

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Breaking Down Breaking News:
Television's Institutional Failures and Today's Ramifications

By

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Introduction

> I'm worried about that age old adage about those who don't learn from history being doomed to repeat it. There was never much of a learning process after the election, with media outlets finding various scapegoats for the surprising result — the polls! fake news! Clinton's strategy in Wisconsin! — instead of examining whether there was some deeper problem with their reporting methods. And now, Trump's screaming, hyperbolic attacks on the press have the potential to drown out any constructive attempts at figuring out what went wrong (Silver 2017).

Media coverage of the 2016 campaign has been widely condemned for being horserace focused and light on issues. The media narrative, it can be argued, helped propel Donald Trump — a non-politician, celebrity candidate — to the White House. And scholars and citizens have been very critical of this role. Today, pundits, networks and CEO's need to take time to look at what went wrong and decide how best to move forward. However, Trump's attacks on the media, his allegations of mainstream media bias against his campaign, and his obsession with labeling legitimate news sources as fake news has the potential to upend serious discussion about necessary reforms. That is why it is more important now than ever to discuss the media's position as an institution and how it should move reform. The media must learn from history and find a way to handle Trump's presidency, alternative facts and post-truth narratives, and learn how to defend itself against allegations of dishonesty. The media must take a hard look at itself in order to discover how it can better inform viewers in 2020.

Today, discussion of television media's impact on presidential elections is at an all time high. And that is why it is necessary to look impartially at the events of 2016, about the historical trajectory of media coverage, and about the news values that guide what gets aired on ABC, NBC, CBS and cable news outlets. It is important to discover what went wrong, where the media failed the voters, and what can be done to stop the television news nightmare. Many factors played a role in the circus that was the 2016 election, but the media's decisions on what to report, what to emphasize and how to present candidates undoubtably played a role.

In looking at Trump's victory, one can see several ways in which the media failed the American electorate. A majority of people were unsatisfied with the media's coverage of the election, and came away from the election feeling disillusioned or disaffected by the way that the

media reported on Mr. Trump. Indeed, acclaimed filmmaker Michael Moore stated that "Trump's victory should come as no surprise. He was never a joke. And treating him as one only strengthened him. He is both a creature and a creation of the media" (Mazzoleni 2016). The media, then, should take on their share of the blame for amplifying his message, for underreporting Trump's competitors and for airing his live speeches and rallies for hours on end.

Many members of the media have begun to accept their role in the process. Nicholas Kristof (2016), a columnist for the *New York Times* stated that reporters were wrong about Trump. In fact, they were more than wrong. "We were laughably oblivious" he said. "The entire Washington political-media complex completely missed the mark. Not by inches or feet, but by miles" (Kristof 2016). They evidently did not realize the nerve that Trump had struck within the American electorate. Reporters, in general, made egregious errors in covering his campaign. They allowed him to appear in dozens of phone interviews, spent hours covering his outrageous Tweets, and created false equivalencies between Trump and his various opponents.

After Trump's election, and even more so since his inauguration, the media has been self-reflecting and probing into their own role in the process. Several organizations have already stated their fervent commitment to the objective truth going forward, and have admitted their "shared shame" over their role in Trump's election. The New York Times' new motto, unveiled in 2017, is that "the truth is more important now than ever." Dean Baquet, the New York Times Executive Editor, stated in an interview with CNN on February 26th, 2017 that the Times' "mission is clearer than it has ever been" (Silver 2017). Their mission, he said, is to cover a dramatic revolution in government and how the country is governed, and to supply the most informative, fact-based coverage possible.

But this will not be easy. Trump has spent the first several weeks of his presidency bashing CNN, NBC and *The New York Times* as fake news, and warning the American public that the media is their enemy. Both of these developments have potentially disastrous consequences for the state of the news media and for the state of our democracy. By leveling the playing field between legitimate media outlets and hyper partisan fake-news blogs, Trump has eliminated any semblance of honesty from the media. And since people already have low levels of trust in media institutions, this could be a fatal blow.

As of March 2017, President Trump has made several questionable claims. He wrote on Twitter on March 4th, for example, that President Obama had wire tapped his phones just before the election. He compared the scandal to Watergate while providing no proof whatsoever. For a sitting president to claim something so severe about his predecessor is incredibly serious business. And the fact that he provided no proof shows how far into the post-truth world we have come. Additionally, reoccurring references to alternative facts, as well as Press Secretary Sean Spicer's decision to ban cameras from the White House briefing room for an entire week shows the kind of contentious media environment that we are now in. President Trump does not trust the media, and it seems as though that that will not change anytime soon.

But it is still important to talk about the impact of the media. Television media, in particular, is still the source of news utilized and preferred by the majority of Americans. And since most Americans never have the opportunity to interact with candidates or government officials personally, the media is the most prominent way that they learn about candidates for president. And television is the media that broadcasts those images into their living rooms. Therefore, my research will add to growing scholarship on the institutional problems within the television news media and the deleterious impacts that those problems have on the state of our democracy. I hope that the information presented here will help the media self-reflect, reform and prepare to address a changing news media environment. That way, television media can once again become a reliable resource for voters when deciding which candidate to support. And moreover, it will allow the media to combat the new brand of challenges that they will be faced with during the next four years.

Chapter 1:

Television Media Coverage of Presidential Elections

Broad Patterns and Trends in Journalistic Values

        The United States is the only democracy that organizes its national election campaign around the news media. Even if the media did not want the responsibility for organizing the campaign, it is theirs by virtue of an election system built upon entrepreneurial candidacies, floating voters, freewheeling interest groups, and weak political parties. It is an unworkable arrangement: the press is not equipped to give order and direction to a presidential campaign. And when we expect it to do so, we set ourselves up for yet another turbulent election (Patterson 1980, 28)

Indeed, the 2016 campaign was nothing short of turbulent. The number of stories, scandals, sound bites, insults and polls discussed over the eighteen month battle is a testament to that fact. In that time period, the media was a major player, deciding what issues to emphasize, reporting on events and scandals, and highlighting candidate personalities. But there remains a major problem with that role. Scholars throughout the last several decades have argued that the press as an institution is not able to effectively organize campaigns and to deliver salient messages to the public. Walter Lippmann (1922, 229) put it plainly when he wrote that America's organization of press-based politics "is not workable," and when one considers the true nature of news, "is not even thinkable." In fact, the press' relentless search for the riveting story works against its ability to provide voters with a reliable picture of the campaign and to help voters understand complicated societal problems.

The election topics that are promulgated on television — the horserace, strategy, competition and scandal — are evidence of a much broader institutional problem. Stephen Farnsworth and Robert Lichter (2011, 17) argued that network coverage of elections is a "nightmare" and amounts to a "devastating failure" of news outlets to serve a necessary democratic function. Thomas Patterson (1993), arguably the most referenced scholar in the field of media and elections, argued that over time, something had become radically "out of order" with network news. Journalists were acting more like theatre critics or olympic announcers than

political resources (Baym 2010; Patterson 1993). This is because — according to both sets of authors — the press was fulfilling a role it was never meant to have. And it was failing.

> The press is no substitute for institutions. It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. Men cannot do the work of the world by this light alone. They cannot govern society by episodes, incidents, and interruptions (Lippman 1922, 228).

The media is indeed a restless beacon, turning from story to story, trying to find the most interesting and dynamic narratives. This "exhilarating search after the Now" does not allow for viewers to form broad opinions on issues or teach them politically viable information (Patterson 2002, 99). The media is not able to educate the populace on a broad range of issues including the economy, health care, immigration, climate change, and foreign policy concerns. Journalists decisions to focus on themselves, poll results, and "the game" have elevated those issues to unimaginable heights, and have allowed elections to cease being understood as important moments in the governing process. The candidates are now understood as "contestants in the ritualized competition of electoral politics" rather than government officials in their own right (Baym 2010, 65).

Indeed, this has important consequences for our democracy and for the public's trust in their political system. Government cynicism as a whole is growing, as is discontent with the media. And since television is still the format that most American adults receive their news, it is important to understand and respond to that discontent. In a Pew Research Center survey taken shortly after November 8th, 2016, only one in five respondents gave the media a grade of a B or above. Four of five granted the media a C or below, with more than half giving the media an F for their performance (Pew 2016).

This first chapter will outline research done by scholars over the last six decades regarding television's coverage of presidential elections. Its tendencies, trends and pitfalls will be discussed, alongside an explanation of why these tendencies are indeed so prevalent. The discussion will begin with an outline of current viewership and how the press has found itself in its current miscast role. The majority of the chapter will then be spent discussing what voters get from televised election coverage. I will review scholarship about the ever-dominant horserace

schema, the idea of politics as sport, and the media's preoccupation with declaring a front runner in the earliest races. I will then move to a discussion of journalistic mediation, and the press's development of broad "metanarratives" regarding candidate traits and personalities. Scandal coverage, negativity, bias, and a general lack of substance will also be explored in an effort to uncover more about the "nightly news nightmare" and the press's inability to live up to what voters want from their so-called fourth branch of government.

Current Viewership

Today's television environment is far different from the time in which Theodore White (1972) called television news a primordial power. He paints a picture of 50 million Americans gathering each and every night to watch national newscasts on the three major networks (NBC, CBS, ABC). He describes the trust that Americans had in television news, and the joy with which they welcomed Huntley, Cronkite, Brokaw and the others into their living rooms. It was in this period that newscasters actually worked to inform the public; they saw themselves "in the business of public information, a distinct enterprise from the networks' wider profit-seeking strategy" (Baym 2010, 11). They spent their time on air talking about issues, working to inform the public, and fulfilling what they believed was their civic duty.

Today the story is quite different; network news is no longer the only game in town. Television news is now available on network, local and twenty-four-hour cable TV channels. Beginning during the Reagan presidency and culminating with the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the government dropped the regulations that called for informative news programming. This act "enabl[ed] the growth of the multinational, multibillion dollar conglomerates that today control information and entertainment providers of every variety" (Baym 2010, 13). This change reduced the amount of true political information that was disseminated on television because corporations were more motivated by profit than by a civil duty to inform the public. Additionally, today's news anchors come and go. Katie Couric was removed after only a few short years due to ratings concerns, and Brian Williams was asked to step down from the NBC Nightly News after he was embroiled in scandal. This generation has no Cronkite.

The audience for television news is shrinking — and graying — because of changing lifestyles and more media choices. The "competition [has grown] fiercer for larger slices of a smaller pizza" (Hickey 1999, 36). Older folks who came of age in the network news era are accustomed to tuning in for the nightly news every day at 6:30. Most younger people, however, never acquired the habit, are still working at that hour, or are just plain less interested in news (Baym 2010, 20). A growing number get their information online, on their cellphones, or from alternative television programs on HBO, Comedy Central or other cable networks.

TV, however, continues to be the most widely used news platform among adults. 57% of U.S. adults often get TV-based news, either from local TV (46%), cable (31%), network (30%) or some combination of the three. And when people are asked which media platform they prefer – TV sits at the top, followed by the web, with radio and print trailing behind (Pew 2016). That is why, despite the increase in discussion about the role of the internet and social media in the election process, it is still necessary to study the role that television media, and nightly news in particular, has on the United States' electoral process.

As of 2016, average viewership for the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts was 24 million people, according to Pew Research Center analysis (Pew 2016). This has remained relatively stable over the last 5 years, although it is still a far cry from the 50 million of the late 1980's and early 1990's. Additionally, combined viewership rose for the three major cable news channels (CNN, Fox News and MSNBC) by 8% to 3.1 million, according to Pew analysis (Pew 2016). The cable viewership increase was largely due to CNN, which experienced an especially sharp increase, growing its evening viewership 38% to an average of 712,000 viewers. MSNBC was down 1% to 579,000 while Fox remained the evening leader with 1.8 million. The increase in viewership for Fox News over the last decade and its increase in economic and political clout has been a major topic of discussion in the media and elections field, especially as its pundits have become increasingly ideologically conservative and its audience has become a more vocal part of the electorate (Alterman 2003; Jurkowitz et. al 2013).

Despite this uptick in cable news, the Big 3 networks — ABC, NBC, CBS — still have "three of the loudest voices in the mass-mediated public sphere" and continue to play a "disproportionate role in shaping the national news agenda" (Baym 2010, 63; see also Schiffer

2008). That is why, despite all of the new media outlets on the market today, scholars continue to research the role of network news in the electoral process. And that is why my research will continue to investigate the television media's ability as an institution, and the ramifications that that role has on our election process.

Billion Dollar Business

News networks are inherently in the business of making a profit; indeed, the large conglomerates that have owned television channels since the 1980's are expecting a fruitful return on their investment (Clawson and Oxley 2017). Many scholars argue that this corporate dominated media environment has "reduced news to hollow spectacle, gutting the democratic vitality of mass-mediated journalism" (Baym 2010, 15). Indeed, it is often argued that reporters and editors have sold out journalistic values for business ones (Hickey 1999). The turn towards these so-called business values can be reflected in the media's dissemination of "infotainment."

> As we have seen, the networks' high-modern democratic labor, pioneered by Murrow and polished by Walter Cronkite, ha[s] developed into a distinctly postmodern effect — a corporate product pitching drama, story and character, and no longer willing, or perhaps unable, to meet the responsibilities of the fourth estate (Baym 2010, 62).

In an effort to stay competitive and turn a profit, news networks feel that they need to entertain as well as cover events. They now cover more lifestyle stories of celebrity gossip, outrageous crimes, sex scandals and tabloid rumors in an effort to appeal to the largest audience (Hickey 1999). It is in this hybridization — this perversion — of news that television has lost much of its power in educating the populace.

> As editors shrink from tough coverage of major advertisers lest they jeopardize ad revenue; as news executives cut muscle and sinew from budgets to satisfy their corporate overseers' demands for higher profit margins each year; as top managers fail to reinvest profits in staff training, investigative reports, salaries, plant and equipment — then the broadly felt consequence of those factors… is a diminished and deracinated journalism of a sort that hasn't been seen in this country until now and which, if it persists, will be a fatal erosion of the ancient bond between journalists and the public (Hickey 1999, 29).

In many of today's media companies, the focus is so heavily on financial and marketing imperatives that editors and owners are no longer concerned about the quality of journalism (Hickey 1999). A top executive at CBS during the 1990's stated anonymously that "the emphasis is so much more on money than content in every decision that's made" (Hickey 1999, 30). And that has clearly affected the quality of stories that can be pursued on television. Stories about the competitive game and candidate scandals are cheap to cover, quick to research and appeal to viewers' desires for all things "new." Therefore, those types of stories are the ones most often seen on television networks whose desire is to make a profit. The question to be asked, however, is whether media companies' desire to increase their profit margins year by year should be more important than their role of educating voters. Indeed, in the pursuit of profit, the media seems to have "lost its professional soul" (Hickey 1999, 43).

It is in this billion-dollar business frame that cable news networks have thrived. Economic analyses have demonstrated that in today's multi-channel, multi-media environment, channels that appeal to either end of the ideological spectrum can attract devoted niche audiences and advertisers and succeed economically. This does seem to be the case with Fox News and MSNBC, who have both managed to "narrowcast" their way to the top (D'Alessio 2012, 29). While their audiences are still far smaller than NBC, ABC and CBS, they have managed to create economically viable models for partisan news.

How Did We Get Here?

In earlier elections the press acted as a conduit for the candidates' messages. Once nominated, the two candidates "were thus assured of roughly equal exposure and, since the facts usually were defined by the contents of the candidates' prepared speeches and news released, the agenda was essentially theirs to determine" (Patterson 1980, 6). The media simply furthered the messages that the candidates themselves were trying to get across.

Today, however, this is no longer the case. The lengthening of the campaign in recent years has given reporters more discretion in how they choose to report it. The shorter campaigns of the past, involving far fewer candidates, events and scandals, allowed the candidate to

maintain control over the coverage. But today's campaigns — inundated with reporters, messages and topics to address over more than a year and half — make it impossible for the candidate to control the lens of news coverage. And it makes it much harder for reporters to do their jobs. Thomas Patterson (1980, 7) posits that "the lengthening of the campaign has created new opportunities for the press to base news selections on its own values, and only coincidentally will its decisions accord with the preferences of the candidates." This discrepancy between the values of journalists and the values of candidates or viewers has become even more exaggerated with the lengthening of the campaign and with an increase in the number of candidates. It has also become more pronounced with the increase in corporate dominated media focused on turning a large profit.

Today the media is often referred to as the fourth branch of government. Its power in determining the public agenda often seems equal to that of the true three branches of government. "Traditionally in our democracy, the nation's political agenda was the prerogative of the politician seeking and elected to public office. Now the media are [also] assuming that role" (Patterson 1980, 7). Since 1968 and the changes in the election process, the media has taken on a substantial role in the nomination process. The McGovern–Fraser Commission established open procedures for selecting delegates which made it so party leaders could no longer handpick the convention delegates in secret (Cohen et. al 2008; Patterson 1993).

It was then, according to Patterson (1993), that the media filled the vacuum left behind by the party bosses. Journalists decisions on what to air, what to highlight and what to ignore effectively set the public agenda, propelled candidates to the nomination, and forced others to drop out before they could even begin. This role is one that was not intended for the mass media during its inception, but it is one that it has taken on during the past few decades. Ending the era of party bosses in smoke filled back rooms making secret decisions made it so that the everyday voters had a much larger say in their party's eventual nominee. One could imagine that this would cause the media to work harder to educate the populace so that they could make an informed decision. The problem is that, evidently, the opposite trend has occurred (Cohen et. al 2008). The fourth estate, instead, seems to design its own agenda, picking and choosing its front-runners for the nation. Then it can sit back and watch those front-runners, because of the focus

that they receive on television, become the party's nominees. Effectively then, they are the new party bosses; the decision has simply moved from the back room to the newsroom.

What Voters Get

When the 1968 McGovern-Fraser reforms changed the nominating process, the press was given the political party's role of "providing voters with a version of the campaign upon which to act" (Patterson 1993, 208). But as Patterson (1980, 1993) and other scholars have emphatically stated — this role is unmanageable and unsuitable for today's media. "The press has moved into the commanding position as arbitrator of American presidential politics — a position for which it is not prepared, emotionally, professionally or constitutionally" (Patterson 1993, 26). That is why he called the media the "miscast institution" — an institution charged with fulfilling a role it was not originally designed for (Patterson 1993). The role is unmanageable because there is simply too much information for the press to cover, to decipher, and to interpret. Moreover, the media is not designed to be an unbiased arbiter of political happenings. Instead, it is designed to make a profit, to increase viewers, and to 'break news.'

The news that we see on television today is guided by a set of 'news values,' a set of standards that influence what gets reported and how events and issues are portrayed. And these news values are inherently different than political values (Clawson and Oxley 2017; Patterson 1980, 1993, 2016a; Sides et al. 2015). Actually, they aren't just inherently different, they are intrinsically at odds with one another. News values are about boosting ratings, about reporting on events and campaign strategy changes, on comparing and contrasting candidates, and about discussing the daily winners and losers. In that framework "controversy is the real issue of campaign politics" (Patterson 1993, 137). Political values, however, are quite different. They revolve around continuity, on highlighting similarities instead of differences, in crossing the aisle, in compromise. Political values lie in well researched policy positions and fleshed out plans on how to achieve these goals. But once again, that is not what election news promotes.

> Election news emphasizes what is controversial about events of the previous
> twenty-four hours rather than that which is stable and enduring…. It projects
> images that fit story lines rather than political lines. [It] highlights what is

unappetizing about politics rather than providing a well-rounded picture of the political scene (Patterson 1993, 208).

Clearly the political values that belong to seasoned politicians and political institutions are not the ones espoused on television news programs.

Instead journalists who work in television are concerned with images that portray controversy, negativity, and competition. Indeed, "the press's version of election politics elevates competition over substance, outcomes over process, and the immediate over the enduring" (Patterson 1980, 53). The constraints that they are forced to work under: 21 minute air time, the need for advertisements, and profit margins also undoubtedly explain why most television news programs focus on breaking events and concrete actions (Iyengar 1991). Patterson (1993) clearly has a point when he argues that the news media is unsuitable for their current role in our election politics.

These news values began in the era of mass media, and have been exacerbated by the need to compete with more instantaneous sources of news online. Television news has to keep up, so it has to follow some of the same norms that are popular online. And since television networks are in the business of making a profit, they need to stay up to date. This means that television news programs, like other forms of news, are guided by newsworthiness, personality, conflict, skepticism and strategy (Clawson and Oxley 2017; Sides et al. 2015). Winning and losing, strategy and logistics, appearances and hoopla are the dominant themes of election news on television (Patterson 1980, 1993, 2016a). They are not guided by genuine interest in the issues or a desire to educate the populace; networks have to report on what's new, on what's dramatic, and on what's the big story of the last 24 hours to stay competitive. In this manner, the media works to "depoliticize" issues by focusing almost exclusively on the strategic game and conflicts between the opposing parties (Patterson 1993). This explains why reporting doesn't always vary drastically from one network to another; the phenomenon of pack journalism is alive and well.

The Event Schema and the Horserace

The reason that networks cover the polls and the competitive game is quite simple. Every day, it is new; every day polls are released, standings change, and candidates rise and fall. This

idea is encapsulated in the idea of "the Event Schema," as outlined in Thomas Patterson's *Out of Order* (1993). As previously discussed, journalists are looking for what is new when they decide what stories to air. In their constant quest for what is newsworthy, they tend to focus on events. "The function of the news" wrote Walter Lippman (1922, 22) in his seminal *Public Opinion*, "is to signalize events." And horseraces are events, ones that are defined by specific actions, and ones that change from day to day.

> Journalism has, for a century and a half, defined news as events, as happenings. 'Horseraces' happen; 'horseraces' themselves are filled with specific actions. Policy issues, on the other hand, do not happen; they merely exist. Substance has no events; issues generally remain static. So policy issues, or substance, have been traditionally defined as outside the orbit of real news (Robinson and Sheehan 1983, 148).

The substantive issues that candidates discuss in their stump speech lack any novelty. So covering speeches filled with policy preferences does not fit within journalists news values. Patterson (1980) discusses the example of Jimmy Carter in a visit to upstate New York in 1976. While in upstate New York, Carter made an important announcement about his tax plans. The three major networks, however, completely ignored it. Instead, they discussed his change in campaign style, his schedule, and the week's poll results (Patterson 1980). Once again, events were discussed in lieu of issues.

Since 1968 and the change in the primary election process, the concept of the "horserace" has become the dominant ethos in television journalism. Who's leading, who's trailing, who's gaining ground and who's losing ground? Almost every nightly newscast begins with a discussion of the polls. The horserace thrives in television because it is constantly changing and very visually appealing. It is easy to report on, cheap to cover, and easy for viewers to understand. Stories about the latest polls, delegate counts, and the size of public crowds appear far more frequently than do stories about the ideological stances and policy platforms of the candidates (Iyengar 1991; Patterson 1980, 1993).

Before 1968, the horserace accounted for a much smaller portion of coverage. Today, however, it accounts for almost 60% of election coverage on television (Patterson 2016b). This phenomenon, coupled with several other factors discussed in this chapter, make it almost

impossible for television viewers to understand issue preferences, substantive policies, or candidate backgrounds. Robinson and Sheehan (1983) found that 59% of CBS election news stories for the 1980 election did not contain a single sentence about policy issues. When asked about Gary Hart, a candidate in the 1984 election, for example, 581 of 583 Democrats could discuss his chances of winning, but only 25% could discuss his opinion on one of the dominant issues of the campaign, cutting government spending (Robinson and Sheehan 1983). That study showed that even devoted news followers can lack basic understandings of issues and policies throughout an election.

In this horserace dominated environment, the media tell us more about who is winning and who is losing an election than they do about who is, in fact, fit to be president. That is because a candidate who is leading or gaining ground benefits from positive media exposure associated with a winning candidate (Patterson 1980, 1993, 2016a). Donald Trump, for example, benefited from 80% favorable coverage when the press discussed the horserace and campaign activity during the Republican nomination contest. And coverage of the polls, in the case of Trump, accounted for 56% of his total coverage (Patterson 2016a). Matthew Kerbel (1994, 81) ridiculed this trend, calling campaigns a giant "poll orgy." The ubiquity of polls undoubtedly exaggerates their importance and leads voters to believe that the person who is leading must then be the most qualified candidate for the job. Networks are so obsessed with polls that they actually report on each other's poll results. The CNN tracking poll, to name one example, is referenced on all three major networks along with other cable venues (Kerbel 1994).

The horserace schema fits perfectly within the values of novelty, competition and conflict. People at home get to watch candidates scrambling to the finish, and reporters, in their role as announcers, get to do most of the talking. Only 16% of horserace statements come in soundbite form; the other 84% of statements come from pundits and reporters (Kerbel 1994, 89). The horserace works on television because networks don't have to spend a lot of money on interviews, appearance and images, and reporters get to discuss new developments themselves. Focusing on the horserace also means that journalists don't have to spend time attempting to explain complicated policy proposals or issue positions to viewers of all different knowledge

levels. A series of interviews taken from correspondents at CNN boil down the reason for the horserace into three simple words: "because it's easy" (Kerbel 1994, 169).

Politics as Game Play

The idea of treating elections as sport is nothing new. Journalists, by nature of their positions, tend to frame elections through the 'game schema' (Patterson 1980; 1993). In the idea of sport, journalists tend to come up with a leading and a trailing candidate. The idea of the race, the possibility of the trailing candidate being able to catch up to the presumptive nominee, appeals to people's sense of competition. It is a political version of an olympic marathon.

> The game is a competitive one and the players' principal activities are those of calculating and pursuing strategies designed to defeat competitors and to achieve their goals… Of course, the game takes place against a backdrop of governmental institutions, public problems, policy debates, and the like, but these are noteworthy only insofar as they affect, or are used by, players in pursuit of the game's rewards (Weaver 1972, 66).

Clearly, as Paul Weaver (1972) discusses, the game itself is the dominant framework in elections. Tracking winners and losers is far more interesting than tracking traditional governmental institutions or complicated policy issues. Indeed, those issues are often only discussed as a means of explaining a candidate's position in the competitive game.

This narrative structure tends to be incredibly dismissive of candidates who are trailing. Those who aren't close to the front in a race aren't worth reporting on. Announcers never discuss athletes at the back of the pack; they tend to focus only on the top two or three. This trend is also alive and well in television horserace coverage. During the state primaries, the media "attempt to reduce a large number of candidates to only two role-playing semi-finalists by limiting coverage to only those two candidates" (Dover 1994, 19). By limiting coverage to only two or perhaps three contenders, the media helps to turn those contests into two candidate battles; in this manner, the media effectively creates a self-fulfilling prophecy (Dover 1994; Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Kerbel 1994; Patterson 1980, 1993, 2016a).

In his research, Dover (1994) found another distinctive pattern in journalists coverage of elections from 1960-1992. In each nomination season, the media narrowed the race to three major contenders. One party, either the Republicans or the Democrats, had a two way race, while the other party only had a one way race. Television networks create this process by directing much more of their coverage to the events and personalities of one party while downplaying the other. This was evident in the 2016 election, where the Republican race received 56% of television attention to the Democratic 44% (Patterson 2016b). This helps to perpetuate a competitive contest between the two "role-playing" candidates in one party while also "encouraging the rapid resolution of the nomination of the other party behind the early frontrunner" (Dover 1994, 17). He provided evidence that this was indeed the case in every televised election from 1964-1992. I am interesting in seeing whether this trend has continued since then. Dover (1994) argues that this pattern occurs because a four candidate, two party race simply provides too many contrasting images, stories, and styles for reporters to cover during a 21 minute show. It would be far more difficult, far more time consuming, and ultimately far more expensive to cover a complicated multi-candidate race in both parties.

Because of the media's obsession with conflict, journalists also tend to frame contests as a simple personal fight between candidates. Instead of a horserace, this frame tends to come off as more of a boxing match. Both candidates are going after each other, throwing punches and knocking the opponent down. And the journalists are always keeping score. That is why journalists tend to harp on words like clashes, fights, battles and attacks when describing candidates' remarks (Patterson 1980).

Stories always begin with what Patterson (1980, 32) calls the "intersection of contrasts." In that framework, the reporter's raw material is differences. Therefore journalists tend to focus on events that easily divide the candidates, so that they can report on confrontations and divergences rather than convergences. It would go against news values to talk too much about issues where candidates agree. Even when candidates have similar issue stances, the media tends to force them to clash, peppering them with questions and asking about how they differ from their opponents. Candidates must form a strong contrast from their opponents in order to further public understanding of their candidacy.

Once the media has decided on a front-runner, the press defines him as the central actor of the campaign. He or she is then used as the anchor point for reporting and evaluating political events. E.D Dover (1994, 19) writes that "events acquire meaning through their relationship to the frontrunner." Television news media perpetuate the idea that the entire campaign is essentially a "personal quest by the front-runner for the Presidency" (Dover 1994, 19). All other candidates, events, debates, scandals and poll results then are merely obstacles in their way towards their final goal.

The press also creates a distinctive role for the leading adversary. According to Dover, the television news media depict the leading adversary as the antithesis of the front-runner and as a human road block, "rather than as a candidate in his own right" (Dover 1994, 20). The media considers his or her actions and words important only in their relationship to the front-runner. Since, according to the media's frame, this person does not have a true shot at becoming president, they are only necessary as a comparative figure to be used against the front-runner.

Then there are the candidates who fail to win enough support at the early stages of the campaign to be considered the front-runner of the leading adversary. These candidates quickly disappear from television news coverage altogether. Moreover, "they fail to register in the political consciousness of most voters and depart from the campaign before many television viewers become aware that they are even in it" (Dover 1994, 21). The press can ignore a candidate it considers unimportant, which makes his or her campaign almost certainly futile (Patterson 1980, 1993, 2016a).

The Invisible Primary and Early Contests

The sense of importance that the media bestows on the first two primary season contests is the reason why the "invisible primary" has become such an important part of the election season. The invisible primary is the months or even years before the Iowa caucus and the New Hampshire primary. It is in this period that candidates have to gain name recognition, raise money, and prove themselves as viable contenders for their party's nomination. In order for candidates to become true parts of the discussion, they need to perform well in the first two contests. In order to do well at the start of the race, they need to get a strong start and win

favorable media attention in the year or two before the election. And this all needs to be done before a single vote is cast.

Patterson (2016a, 3) writes that "of all the indicators in the invisible primary, media exposure is arguably the most important. Media exposure is essential if a candidate is to rise in the polls." If a candidate wants to be seen as viable early on, he or she needs to be high up in the polls. Without a high poll standing, it is difficult to gain momentum, raise money, win endorsements or even secure a spot in the early debates. And a high poll standing bestows credibility on a campaign. A candidate who is doing well early on gains a great deal of free media exposure, and is heralded by the press as the candidate to watch (Patterson 2016a; Ridout and Smith 2008).

Donald Trump, for example, benefitted tremendously from the press' role as "the great mentioner" during the invisible primary (Patterson 2016a, 3). Ted Cruz complained, arguing that the media had given Trump more than two billion dollars in free media (Confessore and Yourish 2016). In fact, according to research from Media Tenor, the ad equivalent value of Donald Trump's coverage during the invisible primary was more than $55 million. This amount of positive media attention during the early goings gave Trump a free boost, and helped to lend credibility to his otherwise celebrity campaign (Patterson 2016a).

The horserace coverage that accompanies modern campaigns tends to treat early primaries and caucuses as decisive, monumental events. Since the early caucuses and primaries are seen as the first "hard news" stories of the presidential race, the media devotes a great time of time and energy to covering these contests. Patterson (1980, 1993) found that stories about the New Hampshire primary during the 1976 preprimary period accounted for 54 percent of television stories about the campaign. And in 1980, the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary received more than a quarter of the total news coverage devoted to all fifty state contests. In 1984, New Hampshire's coverage added up to more than the coverage of every Southern and border state contest combined (Patterson 1993, 183). In 1988, there were 84 network news stories on the New Hampshire primary, and only 53 total stories about all of the Super Tuesday states combined. And just keep in mind that this type of media coverage is

devoted to states that account for less than two percent of the delegates to the national conventions.

Hugh Winebrenner and Dennis Goldford (2010), in their discussion of the media's creation of the media circus in Iowa, argue that the media's tendency to interpret the Iowa caucus results as hard news is extremely questionable. It leads to false images of a candidate's national viability, and ultimately distorts the momentum of the campaign, especially for those who came in first and second (Brady and Johnson 1987; Fallows 1996; Patterson 1980, 1993, 2002; Winebrenner and Goldford 2010). It seems to be a well established fact that voters in Iowa and New Hampshire are not representative of the rest of the country. New Hampshire especially does not have nearly as many blacks, union members, or moderate constituents as do most other states. It is very polarized, highly white, and therefore fertile ground for "outsider" candidates (Brady and Johnston 1987; Orren and Polsby 1987; Winebrenner and Golford 2010).

These media inflated early contests have the power to thrust people into the spotlight. In 1972, George McGovern was highlighted for his unusually strong performance, and in 1992 Bill Clinton famously proclaimed himself as "the Comeback Kid" after his performance in New Hampshire. Yet both of these men finished not first, but second. The media coverage of both campaigns thrust the two runner-ups into national headlines which effectively overshadowed the two winners, Edmund Muskie and Paul Tsongas. In this manner, the media highlights the underdog — the candidate who has done 'better than expected' (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Winebrenner and Goldford 2010). Stephen Farnsworth and Robert Lichter (2011, 35) lampoon this focus on the expectations game in the early contests, claiming that it has a "profound and capricious" impact on presidential nominations and the subsequent media discussion. Building off of Patterson's work, Winebrenner and Goldford (2010) highlight the importance bestowed on meeting or exceeding the arbitrary expectations created for the candidates by the media. If a candidate does worse than expected, as did Muskie and Tsongas, their campaigns ultimately look like they are losing ground. And if a candidate does better than expected, he or she can quickly become the presumptive nominee.

In this media narrative, finishing an "unexpended second" pays dividends, but finishing a "disappointing" second means disaster (Kerbel 1994, 75). And since New Hampshire and Iowa

are so important for electoral momentum, this media narrative has unequivocal consequences for the rest of the election season. It is the psychological impact of the results — not the results themselves — that truly make the difference for the winners and losers (Patterson 1980).

The problem here is that the media themselves are often the ones who created these expectations. Evidently then, they have the power to influence how a candidate's performance is perceived during these crucial early contests. In the 1992 Democratic race, for example, news workers at ABC suggested that the editorial board decided to concentrate on Bill Clinton as the presumptive nominee even before the New Hampshire primary (Kerbel 1994). And in 1976, the media's decision to focus on Jimmy Carter allowed him to become much more visible to voters. The percentage of voters who could say that they knew something about Carter jumped from 20% in early February to more than 80% in early June. He was suddenly known to four out of every five adults just two months into a campaign that he had entered as "a virtual stranger" (Patterson 1980, 110). Clearly then, the media's decision to focus on a front-runner this early in the race has discernible implications on candidate recognition, candidate awareness and the electoral outcome.

If a candidate can't gain traction early on, their campaign is doomed in the eyes of the media. They become a part of the "likely loser" narrative. Without a strong showing in New Hampshire or Iowa, the media will simply stop reporting on a candidate. And when the media doesn't cover a candidate, it is almost impossible for that candidate to rise in the polls. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy — a Catch-22. A candidate needs a rise in the polls to start getting media coverage, but cannot get that rise in the polls without media coverage (Dover 1994; Farnsworth and Lichter 2011). So their campaign, because of a poor showing in the two first contests, is dead before it can even begin. The media views their candidacy as old news and effectively eliminates them.

This trend is so pervasive, in fact, that a candidate who fails to finish first or second in New Hampshire has never won the party's presidential nomination in the modern era (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011). Scholars argue that this is because of the enormous importance that is placed on New Hampshire and Iowa. A win in the New Hampshire primary buys a candidate far more publicity than a win anywhere else. For example, when Jimmy Carter won

the New Hampshire primary in 1976, he was on the cover of both *Time* and *Newsweek,* and was quickly heralded as the Democratic front-runner. He was declared the "unequivocal winner" even though he won by fewer than 5,000 votes and had received barely more than a fourth of the total vote (Patterson 2016b, 3). Compare this to just one week later when Henry Jackson won the Massachusetts primary. He did not make it onto the cover of any major news magazines, and his victory was diminished by rhetoric claiming that all he had done was slow Carter's momentum (Orren and Polsby 1987, 14). Despite the fact that it was only the third contest, the media had already declared Carter the presumptive nominee. In the period immediately after the New Hampshire primary, Carter received as much coverage as all of his Democratic rivals combined, causing the others to quickly throw in the towel (Orren and Polsby 1987; Patterson 2016b). It is clear that when candidates do well early on — Jimmy Carter in this case — it causes a flurry of media exposure, which then in turn causes undecided voters to jump onto their bandwagon. The positive horserace publicity garnered from a win in Iowa or New Hampshire can quickly propel a candidate to the top of the ticket.

The horserace style of reporting and the media's ability to set that schema as the most important lens within which to view the election leads to what scholars have called the "bandwagon effect" (Patterson 1980). When a candidate is leading in the polls, and therefore receiving more positive media attention, undecided voters tend to move over to their camp. Horserace reporting tends to prime viewers to think about candidates in terms of their electability: Can they get enough delegates? Do they have enough support in battleground states? (Brady and Johnston 1987). Thus, candidates who are deemed viable by the media tend to receive a large upswing in support. Researchers have found that horserace coverage indeed "modifies perceptions of electoral viability," thereby creating a strong favorable "impetus towards the candidates whose prospects appear brightest" (Iyengar 1991, 134).

The bandwagon effect makes it much easier for those 'leading' candidates to stay in the lead because more and more undecided voters come to the natural conclusion that the majority of their fellow citizens or fellow partisans must be right (Patterson 1980, 1993). This can help explain why very few underdogs or dark horses end up being their party's nominee. Indeed, the

media's perception of who will win causes multitudes of people to jump on the bandwagon, ultimately creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Lack of Substance

> If you study the [news]… you will find, very often, that the issues are rarely in the headlines, barely in the leading paragraphs… and sometimes not even mentioned anywhere…. The routine of the news works that way…. The news is an account of the overt phases that are interesting, and the pressure on the [reporter] to adhere to this routine comes from many sides (Lippman 1922, 221).

In today's media environment, reporters have a large degree of choice in what they choose to report on. And since elections happen over such a long period and are so flooded with events, statements and rallies, they have a great deal of subjects to choose from. This press freedom allows journalists to decide to give viewers updates on events and polls, rather than play clips of the candidates' policy speeches, outlines of their Congressional voting records, backgrounds or qualifications to be president.

> Election activity and vote returns constitute the most visible aspects of the campaign and therefore are most likely to be used by the press as election news. Heavily emphasized are the simple mechanics of campaigning — the candidates' travels here and there, their organizational efforts, their strategies — as well as voting projections and returns, likely convention scenarios, and so on. One effect of this is that a large portion of election coverage is devoted to the campaign's contextual aspects and says little about which candidate would make the better president (Patterson 1980, 22).

The press corps mostly ignores campaign statements about policy issues unless it looks like those policy issues might affect electoral outcomes. "The political consequences of issues are what matter to them" (Patterson 1980, 40). Therefore candidates' records and positions are discussed not in terms of their relevance or importance, but as indicators of their strategies and their standings in the polls (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan 2005). Issues in their own right lack novelty and don't change drastically from day to day (Patterson 1980, 1993, 2016c). Television is not supposed to be interested in campaign issues; they are dry, technical in nature, and do not lend themselves to the sort of action footage or crisp quips believed to keep the viewer watching (Kerbel 1994).

According to Pew Research from 2004, only 13 percent of stories during the final weeks of the campaign discussed policy, compared to the 55 percent of stories that were concerned with strategy (Pew 2004). It therefore becomes very difficult for people to be well informed on issues from watching television news alone. The general lack of substance and preference for the horserace over issues means that voters cannot understand the complexity of modern public policy debates. And if this trend is sustained, it will continue to corrode our nation's democracy.

Journalist Mediation

Today, the voices of journalists are heard more than the voices of candidates; events, statements, actions and scandals are all narrated by journalists. So even when commentators and journalists "focus on what the candidates are talking about, they typically subject the candidates' messages to their own analysis" (Sides et al. 2015, 226). That is because television inherently places greater emphasis on the *why* than on the what, attempting to explain events rather than just describing (Patterson 1980, 2016c). And because the average news story is only about 90 seconds long, the reporter must assume "a more active role, sharply defining and limiting the story so that it can be told in 100 or 200 words" (Patterson 1980, 26). Journalists argue that 90 seconds simply isn't long enough for the reporter to tell the news through the words of the public officials; instead they have to do the event framing themselves.

In his analysis of the 1992 campaign, for example, Matthew Kerbel (1994) found that more than three-quarters of all statements on ABC and CNN were attributed to news personnel themselves. The candidates, then, were rarely heard in their own words. In 2008, as examined in a 2010 study from George Mason University, researchers found that two-thirds of all speaking time was allotted to journalists. Thus, roughly three times more discussion on television came from journalists than from the candidates themselves (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011). During the 2016 nomination contests, journalists were the voices behind more than seven out of every ten stories about the candidates; the nominees themselves were heard speaking in less than one in ten reports on television (Patterson 2016c).

And in this manner, journalists can distort the focus of the campaigns. If a campaign has spent weeks trying to focus on substantive issues like the economy, the media does not always

follow suit. They actively ignore the issues because of their preference for conflict. This preference "makes the battlefield the dominant metaphor of election news" (Patterson 1993, 141). They tend to be much more concerned with personal battles and scandals than substance. And the fact that their voices are the ones doing the talking means that their interpretations and their explanations of personal conflicts and scandals are the ones that the electorate remember when casting their votes. And various studies have shown that the mediated reality that is portrayed on television is indeed the reality that is perceived by voters (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Iyengar 1991; Patterson 1993).

Today's journalist mediated coverage of campaigns is so conflict heavy, so horserace focused and so dramatically based that the unmediated speeches, TV ads, and Internet websites of the "highly self-interested campaigns produce more substantive, more useful and more accurate forms of campaign discourse" than nightly news broadcasts (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 5). And this is an important warning sign for the health of our media based democracy.

Patterson, in his seminal *Out of Order* (1993, 209) argues that "no reform of the press can equip it for this mediating role. This is not to say that the press cannot improve its campaign coverage, [but] it must recognize more fully how some of its tendencies distort the campaign." Twenty three years ago, Patterson compelled the media to self reflect and ask itself if it was necessary to devote so much of their voices to covering the horserace, personal scandals, and negative attacks. But, as will be reflected in subsequent chapters, the media did not heed his warning. Instead, the role of the press as campaign mediator — as the fourth branch of government — has only grown stronger.

The Shrinking Sound Bite

In 1968, the average candidate soundbite was 42 seconds, in 1992 it was less than 10 seconds, and today it is only slightly longer than 7 seconds (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Hallin 1992; Patterson 1993). Seven seconds is barely long enough for the candidate to say "Make America Great Again," "It's the Economy, Stupid," or "Change You Can Believe In."

Michael Dukakis, the Democratic presidential nominee who was defeated by George H.W. Bush in 1988, stated at the end of the campaign that the election was not about

competence. Instead, "it was about phraseology. It was about ten second sound bites and made for TV backdrops" (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 68). Dukakis, unlike his opponent, was not able to boil down his issue focused campaign into a strong sound bite. Bush's campaign understood the shrinking sound bite, condensing his message into the now infamous "Read my lips: no new taxes." Bush uttered this four second sound bite at almost every campaign stop, ensuring that voters understood his main platform, and that his message — because it was so short and to the point — could not be subject to extensive journalistic mediation or distortion. And his son, running for President in 2000, seemed to understand the same media environment. George W. Bush, like his father "gave good quote" (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 72).

In this media environment, brevity is valued over specificity, and stage-delivery is valued over political principles (Hallin 1992). The better a candidate can deliver his or her soundbite, the easier it is for his or her message to be disseminated quickly on television. Journalistic self-obsession, as discussed above, means that candidates need to be concise if they want coverage; they need to capitalize on those seven short seconds. Otherwise, the journalists will continue to do the majority of the talking.

The "Metanarrative"

The idea of the "metanarrative" is one of the more important dominating trends within today's media environment. In an effort to consolidate a great deal of information into images that fit within news values, journalists tend to create large over-arching narratives at the onset of the election. These can come in a variety of forms. It can be portraying a candidate as "a flake who is little more than a sideshow attraction" or about portraying a candidate as dishonest, unorganized, or out of touch (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 84; Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001; Patterson 2016a).

> Framing candidates, then, has great appeal for reporters. Media manufactured frames allow reporters to tell a story about a candidate in simpler terms: this guy is dumb, that guy is out of touch, this guy has a zipper problem, and the other guy is just plain from another planet. Reporting and recycling such simplistic characteristics does not require a great deal of homework or initiative from the reporter (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 85).

Media narratives like these tend to be self-reinforcing; new information can be sorted into these continuing stories. Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2001) found that by stereotyping candidates into predefined roles, journalists are more easily able to cover future events. Once the narrative framework has been developed, reporters can simply plug in a new statement, new development or new gaffe into the pre-existing stereotype (Dover 1994, 19). If it has already been shown that "Bush is dumb" or that "Gore is liar," then all new information can be easily sorted. Indeed, "these patterns of reporting contribute to the trivialization of modern campaigns by encouraging the development of a superficial consensus" around the personality and character traits of individual candidates (Dover 1994, 172). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) also deplored this tendency, arguing that the creation of a metanarrative made it hard for journalists to argue to the contrary or to shine new light on a candidate. The creation of the metanarrative makes it hard for journalists not to play up the trivial developments that line up with a media-cemented stereotype.

Because of television's obsession with events and stories, television journalists look to build a story around a theme. This theme — the metanarrative — allows for facts to be put into pre-defined storylines. Paul Weaver (1972, 67-68) notes that in this thematic structure of television news, "facts become the materials with which the chosen theme is illustrated." Having a narrative structure in place makes it easier for viewers to understand the facts being portrayed and for them to interpret larger candidate trends. It also makes it easier for reporters. Thus, "candidate framing is the news media's gift to itself, and it is a gift that keeps on giving" (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 85).

Campaign Distortion

When journalists talk about candidate appearances or actions, they tend to discuss the strategy or motivation behind that appearance, instead of what was actually said. If a candidate holds a rally in a small city in North Carolina, the media is much more likely to discuss the strategic reasons for that appearance in lieu of the policy positions stated in the speech. In that way, they distort the campaign in their choices to discuss strategy instead of policy. In fact, Patterson (1980) found that 80% of respondents mentioned some aspect of the "game" as the

elections most important feature. Clearly, the media has succeeded in convincing viewers of the authority of their distorted agenda; they effectively took away focus from the issues that campaigns were working to promote. This type of campaign distortion has erroneous impacts on viewers' knowledge and impacts the lens within which citizens view their elected officials.

What is evident in this framework is that the media seems to be out of touch with Americans. Fallows (1999) provides an example of a policy speech given by Bill Clinton during his 1996 campaign. Viewers who only watched television coverage after the speech believed that the speech was unorganized, ineffective and a missed opportunity for Clinton. But viewers who watched the speech for themselves were very impressed with the president's message of inclusion, his detailed proposals and his earnestness. Eight out of ten people who watched the speech for themselves approved of Clinton's speech. But out of those people who listened to the pundits' remarks after the fact, only 3 out of 10 believed that his speech was effective. The others believed that the speech had been a bumbling mess and showed how little he understood about the obligations of leadership (Fallows 1999). Those who listened to what reporters *said* Clinton said and did had very different views than those who listened to his words themselves (Fallows 1999; Farnsworth and Lichter 2011).

This example from 1996 is just one example of the way that journalists seem to have different understandings of campaign events than do most Americans. By overly mediating certain events and words, journalists twist their meanings and impact viewer's overall perceptions. If the media says that a speech or action was a misstep, voters tend to believe it when they aren't able to listen to the candidate's remarks in their own right. This message manipulation seems to be rampant in today's pundit-dominated news environment (Alterman 2003, Farnsworth and Lichter 2011). "The differences between the campaigns' messages and the media's messages are immense" (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 5). In that way, journalists are out of touch with the campaigns, with the desires of ordinary Americans, and with the state of the nation as a whole (Patterson 1993). This causes them to promulgate different priorities than would the average voter, effectively distorting the focus of the campaign away from the concerns of everyday people.

Discussion of the 'Campaign Experience' of the Press

In every election since 1968, there has been an influx in journalists talking about their own experiences and their broader role in the electoral process. Matthew Kerbel (1994), in his examination of media coverage of the 1992 election, found that one-fifth of the stories on CNN and ABC referred explicitly to the media and their campaign experience. More than 20 percent of all election related stories talked about reporters' interactions with the candidates, their experiences on the road, the difficult of covering a traveling campaign, and other issues involving the press' experience on the campaign trail. This important trend was identified by Kerbel (1994) as the "story-about-the-story" coverage. Jeff Greenfield of ABC News stated that "coverage of the process now threatens to drown it" (Kerbel 1994, 35).

One correspond from the 1992 campaign called this tendency "journalistic incest." She continued, stating that reporters' inclinations to discuss themselves were both "egotistical and weird" (Kerbel 1994, 159). But because of journalists' own interest in how the campaign is covered and their own fascination with the "campaign bubble" within which they find themselves, the lines seem to get blurred, and journalists end up covering themselves much more than they cover other events and issues.

> If the media are aware that as they write themselves into the story they alter its content, why do they keep doing so? To follow the "media-in-the-process" soap opera is to wonder whether reporters cannot resist the desire to put themselves and their interests at the center of their coverage, relying on the occasional self-analysis as a cry for perspective, as if to say: Stop me before I broadcast again (Kerbel 1994, 37)

In the 1992 campaign, for example, a great deal of time on network news was spent discussing Bush and Clinton's bus tours across the country. Reporters talked about the local and national media response to the bus tours, as well as the hard-knock daily life of living on a traveling press bus. ABC related the bus tour as a story about the number of reporters the bus could seat, about the affordability of the bus, about why the bus tour gained lots of local media attention, and about why the journalists were bored (Kerbel 1994). In effect, because the story of the bus tour was so non-newsworthy, journalists overcompensated by turning the story back towards themselves. This type of coverage has become even more pervasive since then,

especially during the primary season. Coverage of the media experience, of candidate-media relations, and of the media's role in the election has grown tremendously. Consistent with the practice of covering the coverage, "the story about telling the story is replete with images of reporters and references made by reporters" (Kerbel 1994, 46). But then again why wouldn't it be, since the media is the one reporting the stories in the first place.

Indeed, when journalists have good interactions with the candidates, the candidates tend to receive a great deal of positive coverage. John McCain's "Straight Talk Express" in 2000 is the preeminent example. His campaign worked hard to ensure that the media 'campaign experience' was a positive one, which reflected well on McCain's personal demeanor and his campaign organization — both of which earned him positive news coverage (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Rosenstiel and Kovach 2009). Journalists on board had unprecedented access to the candidate, were well fed and well treated, and ultimately reported well on the McCain campaign machine.

Scandal Coverage

In today's media environment, especially in the 2016 election, scandals seem to take center stage. The media jumped from scandal to scandal, whether that be Hillary Clinton's emails, Donald Trump's Access Hollywood Tape, or his sexual assault allegations. So too was the pattern during Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign. The two most heavily reported scandals of the campaign were Clinton's Vietnam draft record and allegations of an extramarital affair with Gennifer Flowers. Both received extensive air time on nightly news programs, reinforcing thematic questions about Clinton's character and trustworthiness. Even his admonition that he tried marijuana but "never inhaled" remains one of the most memorable moments from the campaign, partly because of the media's obsession with scandals and gaffes (Kerbel 1994). The media, when confronting scandals like these, tends to focus on them for long periods of time. Suzanne Garment (1991, 69) describes the press when dealing with a scandal as "guerilla fighters," who do not stop until the news cycle moves onto another scandal. Journalists and their tendencies to hound their targets work to create further momentum for scandals and sensationalize certain events or actions.

The press' relentless search for the riveting story works against its intention to provide the voters with a reliable picture of the campaign (Patterson 1993, 29). Journalists of all sorts claim that they attempt to stay away from the scandal story, however, it is difficult to ignore something that everyone else is covering. In the competitive profit-based ratings game that journalists are forced to play, they have to follow the pack.

> Let me tell you this. I think all news organizations are striving to stay away from the sleaze stories. But after it's reported somewhere and people start hearing about it, it's our job to do a story about it. You can't ignore something that people have started hearing about on their radio stations, that they've seen on maybe some talk show, that showed up in the New York Post. At that point, we can't ignore it (Kerber 1994, 156).

In that same vein, journalists also have a hard time ignoring candidate mistakes. These mistakes can turn into scandals or can merely be considered momentary blunders. No matter how brief the gaffe is, news values make it difficult for journalists to ignore it. Indeed, James Fallows (1999, 15) seems right on course when he claims that there is no longer any accusations that are too severe or "too embarrassing to be printed" if those accusations do indeed relate to a candidate's broader character.

> Gaffes fit what the campaign consultant Roger Ailes describes as the "orchestra-pit theory" of news. If you have two guys on a stage and one guy says, "I have a solution to the Middle East problem" and the other guy falls in the orchestra pit, who do you think is going to be on the evening news? (Patterson 1993, 152).

No matter how minor or immaterial to grander policy debates or questions of governing capability, scandals and candidate errors take up a great deal of air time. These are almost entirely negative in tone, entirely lacking in substance, and most often used to attack candidate character traits. These scandals tend to fit within the pre-existing metanarratives, working to reinforce candidate perceptions and media-promulgated storylines (Sabato 2007).

Negativity

The press is often chastised for its negative coverage of elections and of politics as a whole. This negativity seems to lead to more cynicism about government and is one of the

factors used to explain why nearly half of the United States' eligible adults do not turn up to the polls on election day (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011). The question that media scholars raise is to what degree is this negativity created by the press? Are they simply responding to candidate attacks and negativity, or is it of their own production?

Several scholars in the field argue that the amount of negativity is largely related to journalistic news values, especially the horserace. Candidates who fit the "losing ground" or "likely loser" narrative have to contend with consistently bad press because of their poor performance (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Patterson 1993). When a journalist says that a candidate has gone down in recent polls, this news is inherently negative in tone. Much of the negativity in campaign coverage, then, is based on poll standings and electoral viability. That is why candidates like Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz and Bernie Sanders experienced very negative press at the end of their respective runs for office (Patterson 2016a, 2016b).

Only some of the negativity comes from character attacks, issue stances or substantive concerns. It wasn't until the final stage of the 2016 primary season that the media began being more negative towards Donald Trump's character and policies. During the opening contests, Donald Trump received 57% positive coverage because of his position as a gaining ground candidate in the polls. Then once Trump became the Republican nominee, the tenor of coverage flipped. His negative coverage moved to 61% of the total coverage (Wemple 2016). In the final month, negative statements outpaced positive ones by 10 to 1 (Patterson 2016b). But reporters still adhered to the unwritten rules of journalism, allowing other voices to directly criticize Trump instead of using their own (Patterson 2016b).

Biased Coverage?

The media has contended with allegations of bias for decades. Various scholars have found information that shows a liberal bias in the news, a conservative bias in the news, or balanced coverage (for a review of this work see D'Alessio 2012, 62-63). Dave D'Alessio (2012), in examining television news stories from 2000, 2004 and 2008, used a statistical model to show that there was indeed no overarching partisan bias. This conclusion, however, is far from universal (Alterman 2003; D'Allesio 2012; Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Patterson 1993). In

1996, for example, 77% of viewers themselves believed that there was a great deal or fair amount of political bias in television news coverage (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011).

But because there are several types of bias — political bias, situational bias and structural bias — it is difficult to know if certain patterns of reporting cited by voters can truly be considered bias (Cook 2005). Much of the bias that audiences see is a bias towards over-covering certain candidates while ignoring or under-representing others. But can this truly be seen as bias? Or is this simply a reflection of journalistic news values? They are in it for the story, and certain candidates are inherently more story-worthy than others (Patterson 2016b; Cook 2005). Timothy Cook (2005) describes how certain candidates benefit tremendously from what is known as *structural* or *institutional* bias. This is the tendency for the procedures or practices of particular institutions — like the news media — to operate in ways that benefit certain groups or characters while disadvantaging others. Political actors, for example, receive better coverage by meeting the demands of the medium, which includes the search for "timely, clear-cut, easily-described, vivid, colorful and visualizable stories" (Cook 2005, 88).

Even despite this inherent structural bias, the norm of objectivity is still alive and well in many news outlets. "Reporters engage in explicit exclusion of values, by adhering to objectivity…and by ignoring their own personal points of view" (Cook 2005, 90). On network news channels, and CNN, for the most part, reporters work to cover the story in the way that will appeal to the widest segment of voters, and work to stick to the unwritten norms of journalism — which require them to leave their personal political biases at home. But in this process "they end up implicitly including other values, those that… make for a 'quality' story" (Cook 2005, 90). Searching for newsworthiness, according to Cook (2005), contributes to unintentional structural bias in television news. It tends to favor certain candidates, certain issues, and certain storylines over others. More than anything, it tends to create a bias in favor of candidates who are ahead in the polls and who are therefore fundamentally more newsworthy.

Most scholars believe that the press doesn't favor certain candidates because it's engaged in a vast conspiracy. Reality is a lot simpler: reporters like a good story (Patterson 2016; Alterman 2003; Abramson et. al 2012, D'Allesio 2012). It's what their business is based on. Lester Markel of the *New York Times* summarized how impossible it was to claim complete

objectivity. He outlined how in the process of presenting an event, the journalist has to take 50 facts and select perhaps only twelve to include in the final copy (due to the constraint of the 90 second news segment, for example). Then the reporter has to decide which facts will be in the first paragraph of the story, and whether or not the story will come at the beginning or the end of the broadcast (D'Alessio 2012). Markel concludes, "the so-called factual presentation is thus subjected to three judgements, all of them humanly and most ungodly made" (D'Alessio 2012, 79). Judgments such as these allow personal values and other situational biases to come into play. This year, for example, Trump's narrative seemed more novel than that of Clinton or Sanders. This led reporters to choose to report stories about him earlier in the broadcast and more prominently than stories about Clinton or other competitors throughout the race (Childress 2016; Patterson 2016a).

Furthermore, the attempt to fit within the norm of objectivity leads journalists — traditional ones at least — to choose not to cover issues that have more than two sides, or that require a more nuanced understanding of the political scene. These issues, if discussed, could accidentally lead to reporters personal political biases being revealed (Cook 2005). It is easier then to cover simple issues, or — more likely — to ignore issues altogether.

Dissatisfaction with the Media

It is an often discussed fact that citizens are unhappy with the news that they receive on television. Every few years networks respond, vowing to be less negative, more issue focused, and provide less information about the horserace (Sabato 2007). This vow lasts for a few months, and then old patterns emerge. In fact, studies have shown that coverage is actually getting worse (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Patterson 2016a; Rosenstiel and Kovach 2009). No wonder so many scholars blame the media for a lack of political knowledge and an increase in governmental distrust among citizens.

It has been shown that Americans' inability to see interconnections and divergences between issues may well be a side effect of the way in which television news covers politics. The disconnected facts that viewers receive from television news broadcasts make it almost impossible for them to understand the whole of the election, to make sense of the political world,

and actually works to discourage them from voting (Graber 1997). This trend is especially problematic for a democratic society because it does not provide citizens with the information necessary to "'connect the dots' and appreciate the complexities of modern public policy debates" (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 38). That is why it should come as no surprise that Shanto Iyengar (1991, 143), one of the prominent scholars on television's impact on American opinion, stated that "television news may well prove to be the opiate of American society."

Gallup poll data over the years has shown time and time again that Americans are sick of the prominent place of polls in political reporting. Respondents quibble the overuse of polls, lamenting that "we've all been polled to death" (Kerbel 1994, 155)! What they are responding to is the fact that journalistic values do not necessarily line up with the values of citizens. In 2015, for example, the condition of the nation's economy ranked high in polls as an issue of public concern. Yet it was not even among the top ten subjects of election news coverage. At the top were the classic staples of election reporting that irk so many voters: the horserace, candidate strategies and tactics, "the hot-button issues, and the heated exchanges" (Patterson 2016a).

The idea that media is not listening to the desires of voters is reflected in several ways. Whenever voters are given the opportunity to question candidates at local town halls or during televised debates, the questions focus much more on issues than do the questions posed by reporters. Voters tend to ask substantive questions about policy positions on the economy, health care, the environment, and how candidates' policies will affect them and their families (Fallows 1996). On the other hand, reporters are more likely to ask candidates questions about scandals, personality traits, or general campaign strategy. They ask questions that have two distinct sides, are filled with novelty, drama, and provide "pithy sound bites" (Cook 2005, 5; see also Fallows 1999). They are not looking for nuance or subtlety.

Clearly then, there is a legitimate desire for more substantive discussions on the part of many voters. This explains why a *Newsweek* poll from 1988 found that 40% of those surveyed believed that the news organizations covering the campaign were the real problem (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 86). It also casts light on why Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism reveals that voters have given the media a grade of a C or below for every election since 1988 (Pew 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016).

Another aspect of campaigns that the public despise is pack journalism — that all networks tend to report on the exact same things. It means that there is very little discrepancy between networks, and that the same patterns of reportage and stories tend to flood the nation's airways at the same time. The press may not be monolithic in how exactly events are reported, but it is consistent on which events are covered. The events that are covered across all networks — the Big 3 and cable alike — are those that fit within journalistic values of campaign strategy and the game. This corroborates the basic condition offered by Walter Lippmann (1922, 64) in his classic *Public Opinion,* "when all think alike, then no one is thinking."

Conclusion

Today's election coverage on television leaves much to be desired; news values, as they are espoused on television, seem to be a fundamental threat to the vitality of our democracy. If voters are not informed about issues, are brought up to think that the horserace is the best indicator of governing ability, and focus more on scandals than on who's the most qualified, then they will not be able to make informed voting decisions. The press used to work to inform the public, ensuring that it was fulfilling its duties to the American people. Today, however, the media seems to be more interested in the board room than the newsroom. They report on stories that will increase their ratings, attract viewers, and that will not alienate their big advertisers. The norm of objectivity and the decision to steer away from political bias may be more swayed by a desire for profit than by a desire to evenhandedly cover candidates.

Journalistic values seem to have been overtaken by business values, by entertainment values, and by values of competition. Today's news media environment forces networks to work hard to stay on the cutting edge and report stories that are reported by the rest of the pack. This is why news does not vary much between mediums and why broader trends seem to permeate all over television. A lack of discussion of the issues, an obsession with polls and a personality-based approach have inundated our airwaves from 6:30 to 7:00pm and have taken over all day on 24-hour cable news. Wolf Blitzer, Anderson Cooper, and the team at CNN seem to never tire of reporting on polls, scandals, breaking news and campaign strategy. And MSNBC and Fox News

love appealing to their base with attacks of the opposing party's candidates, discussion of promising polls and focusing on partisan-based appeals.

But none of these venues discuss the issues nearly as much as most Americans would request. Americans consistently quibble that the news media is a large part of the problem with our government, with our electoral process, and with our democracy. And in outlining the various problems with the ways in which television news covers elections, it becomes clear how true those accusations are. I will spend Chapter 2 looking at historical trends and changes over time. I will look at trends regarding the horserace, lack of issue coverage, scandal coverage, and negativity, to see how media coverage has differed across election cycles. This will shine light on the fact that the news we are provided with on television is at risk of drowning the entire democratic process in discussions of winners and losers and a dangerous lack of substance.

That is why after almost every modern election, the news media promises to reform. Journalists promise to focus more on the issues, to spend less time on scandals, and to be less negative in tone. This promise, however, is seldom kept. That is why I will look in depth into the 2016 election in Chapter 3. I want to investigate whether the trends outlined by the various scholars of media and elections are indeed getting worse, have remained stagnant, or have improved. This will shed light on whether 2016 was an unprecedented election, or whether it fit perfectly within past trends. In this investigation, I will compare 2016 coverage to the coverage outlined by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism from past years, as well as compare it to the data outlined in the various scholarship. This will allow me to see quantitatively if the trends truly are getting worse. And since the election just ended, this investigation will help shed light on if and how the media should/needs to reform for the next time around.

Chapter 3 will ask whether Trump's "$2 billion in free media" really drive him to the Republican nomination? It has been argued that the media was Trump's first audience, and that they then delivered his message to the public. It was only then that he began to rise in the polls. I want to work to ascertain whether the media truly did create a self-fulfilling prophecy, and whether their decisions on what to emphasize and de-emphasize had major ramifications in electoral results. Watching television on November 8th, 2016, it was evident that many pundits were shocked by the results. Indeed, much of America was shocked by the outcome. But the

question remains, should they have been? Or should they have known that the miscast role of the media in our elections, and its inability to give order to a presidential campaign, helped propel Donald J. Trump to the White House?

Chapter 4 will then be centered on the agenda-setting model. The agenda-setting model, as outlined by McCombs and Shaw (1972), is a rather narrow look at the impact that the media's discussion of issues has on the public's priorities. Their thesis essentially argues that if the news focuses on the economy during a particular election cycle, viewers will then believe that the economy is the most important issue at that time. I, however, am interesting in expanding that model. Since 1968, the media has increased the number of stories focused on personality, events and broad narratives. The question I will pose is, has the public's priorities when choosing a candidate to vote for followed suit? Does the public also believe that issues of character, scandals, strategy and the horserace are more important than they once did? Has the media's "agenda" — their decision on what to focus on — effectively changed the public's perception of what matters throughout the campaign? Has their focus on candidate personality, for example, made personality a larger component of voter decision making?

The answer to these agenda-setting questions will be difficult to ascertain, but by using various forms of recorded data, I hope to show that the media's reporting does indeed have major impacts on voters perceptions, and eventually their voting decision. I will use the American National Election Studies database to look at candidate mood thermometers, questions of dislike, and understanding of the horserace over time.

Finally, my goal is to end with some hope. Is there anyway that the media can improve to combat Trump's current media attacks? Who is doing it better? How are they doing it better? And is that a model that can be used by network and cable news outlets to better inform the public without lessening its profit margins? This final chapter will focus on other models — including those from National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcast Station (PBS) — to show how the media can perhaps play a different role in elections. If reporters are serious in their desires to reform, then they should head these recommendations and work to change their institutional errors. Yes the media may have been miscast, but at least for now, it's showtime: and they need to perform.

Chapter 2:

Historic Trends in Television Reporting

"The national press is entirely concerned with horserace and popularity… if thermonuclear war broke out today, the lead paragraph in tomorrow's *Washington Post* would be, 'In a major defeat for President Carter'" — Former Congressional Press Secretary (Perloff 2013, 315)

Television news, as an institution, didn't really gain a foothold in the presidential election domain until 1960. The race between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy was the first truly televised race. By 1960, there were 52 million television sets in America, meaning that almost nine in ten homes had access to television. Clearly then, television was a way to reach out to the American electorate. The first televised debates were held on September 26th, 1960, and many have argued that they changed the momentum of the race. Soon after the first debate, Kennedy moved up in the polls and gained a slight lead over Nixon — the incumbent Vice President. Since that moment, television has further enhanced its role in presidential elections. I will analyze that role and the trends that accompany it for the remainder of this chapter.

Analysis of the media's coverage of presidential elections since 1960 show that coverage has changed greatly over the years, moving from positive coverage of candidates to negative coverage of candidates, and moving from substantive discussion of issues to discussion of winners and losers in the ever-constant game. When one looks at the amount of negativity, horserace coverage, scandal coverage, and true-issue coverage, there is some fluctuation from one contest to the next, depending on outside forces, the state of the economy and the candidates themselves. In the larger scale, however, these trends have been getting worse over time. And 2016 was no exception. It was worse in a number of indicators, and was a true continuation of trends from the past several election cycles in other respects.

This chapter intends to build upon the work introduced in my literature review to analyze traits over time. I will use research from various scholars, over various years and decades, to analyze the way that television media coverage has changed, or has remained the same, over time. I will also use data compiled about newspaper and magazine coverage to illuminate

broader media trends when the data about solely television is not available. This will not change the overall conclusion because studies have shown that the network news agenda has more than a .66 correlation with the newspaper agenda (McCombs and Shaw 1972). In this manner, the sources I will be using do not all cover the same networks, the same mediums, or the same periods of time. Some election years have been more extensively studied than others, and will therefore play more prominently in the substantive discussion than other election cycles. I will attempt to fill in the gaps to the best of my abilities in order to best encompass a chronological map of media coverage. And I hope that by combining all of this research together — in ways that have never been done before — a broader consensus about the trajectory of media coverage can and will be ascertained. This will illuminate the ways in which institutions have changed in the ways that they cover candidates and elections on television.

When each study is introduced, I will explain the methodology and scope of the research, quantifying it against other studies compiled by different authors. In many cases, the data cannot be compared directly across sources and across different election cycles because of differences in methodology, rhetoric or purview. When the data can be compared, I will compare it, and when it cannot be compared, discussion of the trends can still be used to understand the nature of news coverage during that election period. I will begin with a brief discussion on those elections before 1972, and then move to more substantive discussion on those elections after 1972, when media coverage began to be studied more extensively. When looking across the various studies, I will look at the amount of horserace coverage, the amount of negativity, the importance of competition and scandal, and the amount of issue coverage. I hope that by delving deeper into the historical trends of those patterns outlined in the literature review, that I will be able to show how much coverage has changed over time.

Early Televised Elections

As a starting off point in discussing the changing role of the media post-1960, it is important to discuss the tumultuous election of 1968. In 1968, the events of the Democratic national convention caused a national uproar. There were demonstrations happening outside of the convention hall in Chicago, the police responded violently, and the Democratic party chose to

nominate a candidate who had not entered a single primary. The party leaders ignored Eugene McCarthy, who had won more votes than any other Democratic candidate. Instead, party leaders nominated Hubert Humphrey, the former Vice President, as the Democratic nominee for President. Because people were dissatisfied with the un-democratic nature of the decision, the McGovern-Fraser Commission was created. Formally known as the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, the commission called for open procedures and affirmative action guidelines for selecting each states' delegates (Nelson 2011).

Effectively, this meant that all delegate selection had to be open; party leaders were no longer allowed to choose delegates to their convention behind closed doors. This meant that states began holding primary elections to select these delegates instead of elite-run state conventions (Nelson 2011). Now that each and every state was holding an open primary or caucus, the field suddenly became much more competitive. Candidates would have to travel to more states to shore up votes and eventual delegates. And in this framework, television coverage quickly became an important way to reach out to these voters. Since candidates would now have to win in each state to receive that states' delegates and secure the nomination, the role of television in amplifying candidates' messages became more much important. John Connally, a candidate in the Republican primary in 1980, stated that in the scope of presidential elections, the media was the most important player. "On a scale of ten," he said, "the importance of the media is at least an eight, everything else is a two" (Robinson and Sheehan 1983, xiii). This does not necessarily mean that the news media began to determine who would win an election, however, it is true that no candidate could succeed without the press. Thomas Patterson (1993, 33) stated that after the 1968 decision, "the road to nomination now [ran] through the newsrooms."

1972 was a turning point election. As the first post McGovern-Fraser Commission election, it was the first with open procedures for delegate selection. Therefore it was the first election where every state held primaries or caucuses to determine their delegates. It was also the first election where media coverage of the election was studied extensively. Thomas Patterson and Robert McClure (1975) analyzed every evening news report on CBS, NBC and ABC during the 1972 general election campaign. The research outlined in *The Unseeing Eye* was the first to look in depth at the impacts of television coverage on American voters. In order to find out what

impacts television had on voters, Patterson and McClure (1975) looked at all network evening news stories between September 18th and November 6th, 1972. It is from this election that most of my comparisons will begin, since it is the first where such data is available.

Before I begin, it is important to keep in mind that during most of the elections I will be discussing historically, television, radio, newspapers and magazines were the only available outlets for news. And television, as Theodore White (1972) called it, was a primordial power. Not just television, but the big 3 — NBC, ABC and CBS. Nearly 98% of homes had a television set, while only 70% of homes received a daily newspaper. And many of these television sets were turned on every night to watch the nightly news. The three New York based networks, via their news programs, had become the principle "arbiters of American opinion… Survey after survey spotlight[ed] television as the most influential medium in the United States" (Patterson 1980, 189).

In the following section, I will go through each election — if possible — chronologically from 1972 until 2016. I have split the section into four broad narrative trends: the horserace, campaign strategy and the competitive game; the lack of policy coverage; negativity; and scandal coverage. During each election I will introduce the relevant literature, their findings, and some brief analysis. At the end of each of the four thematic sections, I will synthesize the findings with some of the broader takeaways. Finally, once all sections have been discussed and analyzed, I will move to a final conclusion regarding the ways media coverage has changed over time from 1972 until 2016.

The Horserace, Campaign Strategy and the Competitive Game

Even in Patterson and McClure's study of the 1972 election, which was the first study to ever extensively code television coverage by subject, the authors quickly found that the media was steadfastly focused on the horserace and campaign activities during the general election. During the last seven weeks of the campaign — which was the length of their study — ABC spent 140 minutes covering rallies, motorcades, polls and strategies. CBS spent 121 minutes on those topics, and NBC spent 130 minutes discussing campaign activity and the broader horserace narrative (Patterson and McClure 1975, 41). When one compares those numbers to the number

of minutes the Big 3 spent covering personal and leadership qualities as well as substantive issues, the difference is quite stark. NBC, CBS and ABC spent almost 4 times as much airtime focusing on campaign logistics and the horserace than they did on the issues. And they had 9 times more coverage on campaign activity and the horserace than they did on personal or leadership qualities.

In the next election, 1976, Patterson (1980) looked at the content of election news by coding 3,465 stories from NBC, CBS and ABC between January 1st and November 2nd, 1976. The 3,465 stories were a random assortment of stories that had been aired from the beginning of 1976 until election day. The timeframe of the study was clearly much longer than the 1972 study and looked at the primary period, convention period as well as the general election. In this study Patterson presented his findings as percentages of total coverage rather than as minutes of coverage. What he found was that more than half of the evening news coverage — 58% to be exact — was about the competitive game. He split the competitive game into three broader categories: winning and losing; strategy and logistics; and appearances and hoopla. Winning and losing accounted for roughly half of that game coverage — 29% — with strategy and logistics, and appearances and hoopla splitting the remainder (Patterson 1980, 24).

Patterson also found that those people who were heavy news viewers were able to very accurately perceive which candidates were likely to win the nomination. This is because messages about a candidates' chances of winning were communicated so often and "were so highly placed in news reports that they were almost certain to get through to most voters" (Patterson 1980, 121). He found a direct correlation between those who paid attention to television news and their perceptions of who was winning or losing at any given time in the race. In April, after the Pennsylvania primary, interview participants were confident in Ford's victory. Then, as the media reported on Reagan's slew of victories, peoples' perceptions changed. Clearly then, the fact that so many people who paid attention to television news were so cognizant of the polls reflects televisions' decision to focus much of its time and energy on the horserace.

Horserace and campaign strategy coverage hit new heights, or new depths, during the 1988 election. Marjorie Hershey (1989) found that election stories on the front page of the *New York Times*, overall, were mainly or exclusively about campaign strategy. Campaign strategy, in

her study, was defined as references to choices of location for campaign stops, style and atmosphere of the campaign, staff activities, polls, fundraising activities, endorsements and efforts to attract the support of groups. Hershey analyzed the stories on the front page of the *New York Times* during the first week of September, the first week of October, and the first week of November for comparison. From September 1st to the 7th, 45% of stories on the front page of the *New York Times* were mainly or exclusively about strategy. From October 1st to the 7th, they were 60% about strategy, and from November 1st to November 7th, 71% of stories were about campaign strategy (Hershey 1989, 97). She found that even in coverage of the three presidential debates, this trend continued. Coverage of the debates was significantly more about which candidate seemed the most-relaxed than which one had the best policy proposals. "Media values" she said, seem to have "completely supplanted the values of governing" (Hershey 1989, 98)

The same pattern held true in 1992. In the 1992 contest, the horserace was the major subject of election news, accounting *directly* for 35% of network evening news stories — up from the 27% of stories that Patterson (1993, 72-73) found during the 1988 election. In addition, he found that news about candidates' strategies and tactics accounted for another 33% of the coverage. This meant that only 32% of the coverage could be devoted to other matters like candidate experience, issue-coverage and the like. The conclusion to be drawn here is that the majority of the coverage — 68% of it — was about the competitive game: 35% horserace and 33% strategy. And this 68% was a 10 percentage point increase in competitive coverage from 1976, the last election that Patterson explicitly studied. It was also an increase from the 1988 election, where George Bush was running against Michael Dukakis, although Patterson does not provide an exact figure in his book. And even when networks did discuss policy issues, Patterson (1993) finds that they were still laced with politics-as-game analysis. This data was compiled by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, who analyzed the evening newscasts on NBC, CBS and ABC, as well as two newsmagazines and four daily newspapers. By random selection, 6,567 political news stories appearing in the nine outlets were chosen for analysis between January 1st and November 2nd, 1992 (for more on methodology, see Patterson 1993, 11).

Now in looking at the elections I have just discussed from 1972-1992, it is clear that the competitive game always seemed to take center stage. Patterson (1993) found this outright by

coding a random assortment of stories on the front page of the New York Times during each general election from 1960 to 1992. While this is not television, it does show the changes in horserace coverage over time more generally. Often, there is very little differentiation between newspaper and television reporting, especially with the lead-off stories at the beginning of broadcasts or on the front page of major newspapers. Indeed, television coverage, while similar to newspaper coverage, is often even more horserace focused. Therefore these newspaper findings can be applied to our understanding of broad media trends. Patterson (1993) found that in 1960, 1964 and 1968, the coverage was almost evenly split between policy and horserace/ strategy coverage. Then in 1972, after the McGovern-Fraser reforms were in effect, the coverage became more horserace heavy. Competitive game coverage moved to 68% of the coverage, with policy moving to only 32%. That trend has only became more prominent in the subsequent elections, with the elections from 1976-1992 averaging 80% of coverage on the broader competitive game narrative and 20% of coverage on issues and policies.

Dover (1998) found that the horserace story of Governor Bill Clinton winning and Senator Bob Dole losing was the major news theme of the 1996 general election. On September 23rd, 1996, for example, a photo of Dole remained on the screen for an entire segment, with his face covered by the word *struggling* (Dover 1998, 137). The horserace didn't take up as much of the news coverage as it had in the past, simply because it wasn't much of a race. But it was still the frame within with most of the election coverage was discussed. Matthew Kerbel, in his characterization of the 1996 election, discussed reporters' obsession with horserace benchmarks, strategy and reporters' self-references.

> For reporters, election coverage was approached as if the only purpose of the electoral process is to pick a winner. Speeches were covered more for their political relevance than for content. Policy proposals were portrayed as tactical elements of a broad electoral strategy. And… reporters made themselves the object of their own news as they covered how effectively the media were covering how well the candidates were playing the political game (Kerbel 2001, 110).

The obsession with the horserace and campaign tactics continued in 2000, where the polls were in a dead heat. Naturally, polls received more coverage in 2000 than they had ever before, undoubtably because the race was essentially a perfect tie for much of the general election phase.

As the race "cascaded unpredictably" through September and October, there was something "out of control about the way everything — issues, character, and nonevents — become fodder for a story of who would be the ultimate winner" (Kerbel 2001, 125). Farnsworth and Lichter (2011, 45) found that 71% of coverage during the general election was about the horserace. And for the coverage that was about issues, it was framed around the competitive game. For example, voters who tuned into the evening news learned that Gore was talking about Social Security reform in order to force Bush's hand on the issue. Reporters stated that Bush was talking more about tax relief in order to make inroads with middle-class voters. In these examples, news reports clearly combined surface level issue coverage with references to strategy and the broader competitive game. A majority of stories were framed with the competitive game in mind.

In 2004, Stephen Farnsworth and Robert Lichter (2008) studied the amount of horserace coverage on television during the primary election season, instead of the general election season that most other studies contended with. By looking at all network news stories aired between January 1st and Super Tuesday (March 2nd), they found that 77% of primary stories focused on the horserace, which was just slightly less than the 79% of primary stories that focused on the horserace in 2000 (Farnsworth and Lichter 2008, 79). This data should come as no surprise, since the primary season is always more horserace heavy than the general election.

In 2008, Pew Research found that 53% of news stories from 48 different news outlets during the 7 week general election period were about the horserace and campaign strategy and tactics. When the network news is separated, researchers found that 56% of network stories were about the political horserace. In the full study, researchers coded 2,412 stories from across all 5 major media sectors: radio, network tv, cable tv, websites and daily newspapers (Pew 2008). When the same study was undertaken in 2012, researchers coded stories from August 27th through October 21st, 2012. Of the 2,257 stories, they found that only 38% of stories were about the broader horserace narrative (Pew 2012). In the two final weeks of the study — October 4th through the 21st — however, the amount of horserace coverage jumped to almost 48%. While still less than the total amount of horserace coverage in 2008, it remained the largest aspect of campaign news during the 2012 race (Pew 2012).

In 2016, Thomas Patterson (2016d) did an extensive study with the Harvard University Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy. Patterson, in conjunction with Media Tenor, coded print and television stories during the general election campaign beginning the second week of August and ending November 6th. The study looked at presidential election coverage in the print editions of five daily newspapers, and the nightly newscasts of ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN and Fox News. What Patterson (2016d) found was that 42% of coverage was about the horserace. In fact, well over a hundred separate polls — more than a new poll every day — were reported during the general election period. In addition, 24% of coverage was about topics including upcoming events, staffing, logistics and strategy (Patterson 2016d). In other studies, this would've been lumped in with the broader framework of the competitive game. If that was done to this study, then the broader competitive game in 2016 encompassed 66% of total election coverage.

Discussion of the Horserace Over Time

In much of the research presented, it is clear that the issue of journalists as "horse-racist" is nothing new (Robinson and Sheehan 1983). Covering the horserace, competitive game and campaign strategy appeals to each and every one of journalists' news values, and appeals to the idea of the event schema outlined in Chapter 1. The major change in the amount of horserace coverage, according to the data, occurred in 1972, after the McGovern-Fraser reforms took effect. This should come as no surprise, considering the new importance that was bestowed on the media for determining each party's nominee. And, although the data is difficult to compare evenly over time, since different authors use different time spans, and different definitions of horse race, strategy and the competitive game, it is still clear that the amount of horserace coverage has continued to grow since then. Certain elections demonstrated less competitive game coverage than others, perhaps because the race was not as close or because there were important policy issues to discuss. Several elections in the 1980's fit this bill, as does 1996, which is why there is very little information available about the amount of horserace coverage. At the same time, several elections included much more coverage of the competitive game (1992, 2000 and 2008, for example).

What is interesting about the growth of the horserace narrative is that it continues to be the major focus of election coverage even when the race is not close, or even when there are important substantive issues to discuss. In 1996, for example, Bill Clinton led Bob Dole in the polls by upwards of 15 percentage points in the final weeks of the campaign. Yet the horserace schema was still the dominant frame within which the election was waged. And even amongst the economic crash of 2008, pundits discussed how the issues were affecting the horserace and the competition between the two candidates. Even during the beginning of the worst economic crisis in decades, the news media continued to frame a majority of their political stories about the candidates' standings in the polls or their overall campaign strategy as it related to the economy. And it does not seem as if that trend is changing. The horserace is new, exciting, cheap to report on, easy to cover, and compels viewers to tune in. And that is why it has always been such a dominant component of election coverage on evening news broadcasts and throughout other mediums.

Lack of Policy Coverage

Patterson and McClaren (1975) found that networks did not spend very much time focusing on the issues during the 1972 campaign. They found that television news "emphasized superficial pictures of the candidates in action" instead of examining issues of candidates' qualifications (Patterson and McClure 1975, 31). During the 1972 general election, 60% of candidates' images on NBC, CBS and ABC showed the candidate in front of a large crowd, for example. In this manner, "instead of analyzing issues… the networks simply parade faces" (Patterson and McClure 1975, 31). Most often, when the networks did report anything about issues, the story was "suffused with enough hoopla to make it visually exciting" (Patterson and McClure 1975, 36). They qualified this coverage as "so fleeting" and "superficial" that it became almost meaningless to the viewer (Patterson and McClure 1975, 36). When looking at the 1972 election, they found 26 different issues that were discussed on the campaign trail. The evening newscasts at ABC had 35 minutes pertaining to the 26 issues during the general election. CBS had 46 minutes in total, and NBS carried only 26 minutes in total (Patterson and McClure 1975, 38). With the exception of Nixon's Vietnam policy, which accounted for 30% of all

network time given to the 26 issues, no other issue received nearly as much coverage. Averaged together, each of the other 25 issues only received about 60 seconds of air time during the entire 7 week period (Patteron and McClure 1975, 38).

What is important about this lack of issue coverage is that it does not help create a well informed electorate. Patterson and McClure (1975) found this explicitly in their research. They conducted interviews with people before and after the election to see if they had learned more about the important issues of the campaign. Since they interviewed the same people before and after, it was possible to see how much their issue knowledge had grown. What they found was that people who regularly watched network news did not display an increase in issue-related knowledge. In fact, they found that people who watched the evening news displayed the same amount of issue knowledge as those who ignored the news media during the campaign altogether (Patterson and McClure 1975, 51-53). This should come as little surprise considering the fact that each issue only averaged about 60 seconds of air time. What the study found was that it was those who regularly read newspapers — not watched television — who displayed a much stronger increase in knowledge from the beginning to the end of the campaign.

When this same study was done during the 1976 election, Patterson (1980, 156) also came to the same conclusion. For more than 90% of the issues relevant to the 1976 campaign, there was no significant relationship between heavy viewing of the evening news and increased issue awareness or knowledge. People who read newspapers, on the other hand, showed increased awareness of 75% of Carter's positions and 63% of Ford's.

> Television's issue content is too sparse and fragmented to benefit viewers. News of the issues is a small part of election news, which in turn is only a part of all news that must be covered in the 30-minute span of an evening newscast. As a result, most election issues are mentioned so infrequently that viewers could not be expected to learn very much — in 1976 the typical candidate position was mentioned between two and three times a month on evening news. Moreover, most issue references on telecasts are so fleeting that they hardly could be expected to impress their audiences (Patterson 1980, 159).

During the 1976 election, issue coverage, once again, remained in the background. Patterson (1980, 24) found that it accounted for only 18% of election coverage in the random sample of evening news stories from January 1st to November 2nd, 1976. He also found that

nightly newscasts gave heavy coverage to almost 70% of "campaign issues" — scandals, horserace, logistics — and only gave heavy coverage to 10% of policy issues. Heavily covered issues are those that received twice as much coverage on television as did the average issue. Fifty percent of policy issues received moderate coverage, and 39% of issues received light coverage. Light coverage, in this context, means coverage that is less than half as much as the average issue. The data showed that television news, compared to newspapers and magazines, provided the most extreme dichotomy between heavy coverage of campaign issues and heavy coverage of policy issues. Therefore, even when policy issues were covered, they were not covered heavily enough to leave an impression on the viewer.

Patterson (1980) also went further in his analysis. He split the 18% of coverage that was about issues into coverage of clear-cut issues, diffuse issues and mixed issues. Clear-cut issues are defined as issues that neatly divide the candidates and can be stated in simple terms without having to delve into complex details or relationships. "Preferably, they also produce disagreement and argument among the candidates" (Patterson 1980, 31). Diffuse issues, on the other hand, include broad policy proposals where candidates are not so easily separated. How to fix the economy would be one such example. Candidates all agree that they need to help bolster the economy, but it is their strategies, emphasis and proposed solutions that differ. Patterson (1980) found that evening news coverage tends to focus more much attention on clear-cut issues than do the campaigns themselves. He found that network newscasts focused 67% on clear cut issues and only 19% on diffuse issues. The other 14% was on mixed issues. Candidate convention speeches and even television advertisements, conversely, focused 22% on clear-cut issues and 56% on diffuse issues (Patterson 1980, 32-33). Patterson (1980) concluded, therefore, that television news has different priorities than the candidates themselves and that television's institutional biases can be seen when looking at the types of policy issues that are and are not covered on television.

During the 1980 election, Robinson and Sheehan (1983, 146) found that 59% of CBS election news stories failed to contain a single sentence about policy issues, despite the fact that they identified more than ninety issues that were often discussed on the campaign trail by Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. The issue heavy focus of the campaign trail was not reflected on

television. Indeed, television devoted 4 times more coverage to the horserace and hoopla than they did to covering the issues (Robinson and Sheehan 1983, 26). Walter Cronkite, the anchor of CBS Evening News at the time, was a heavy-handed critic of the prominent role played by the horserace. He called it like he saw it, saying that the media are "horse-racist" in their lack of policy coverage. He said in 1976:

> I was disappointed again this year in our ability to grasp the issues on the daily broadcasts, on the evening news. We say this every four years, and every four years we determine that… we're not going to be swept up by the panoply of campaigning and stick to the substance. And every year I wonder if that is even possible with daily journalism (Robinson and Sheehan 1983, 147).

Robinson and Sheehan (1983), in their extensive analysis of the 1980 election, found that each month of Campaign '80 devoted more time to the horserace than the issues. In the month of August, for example, the issues received 1,760 seconds of airtime on CBS Evening News, while the horserace received 5,165 seconds of airtime. The horserace received roughly 3 times more coverage than all 90 of the issues discussed on the campaign trail. That is because "when candidates say the same thing over and over, it is not news" (Patterson 1993, 149). And campaign stump speeches about policy are almost always repetitive and therefore not newsworthy.

This lack of policy coverage is illustrated by the public's lack of knowledge about the Republican nominee, Ronald Reagan, even despite the fact that this was his third attempt at the presidency. When people were asked to place Reagan on an idealogical scale just two weeks before the election, 43% of respondents did not know where to place him, 10% said he was a liberal, and 6% identified him as a moderate (Patterson 1993, 89). This was shocking to scholars because of Reagan's political prominence as a forceful advocate for conservative principles. Yet even people who regularly paid attention to the news were still unable to place him on an ideological scale.

Then came 1984. Keith Blume (1985) performed an exhaustive study of every nightly news report on ABC, NBC and CBS from September 3rd to October 22nd. He outlined each night's lead and trailing stories in his book *The Presidential Election Show.* In the first week of the general election campaign he found that of the five election specific special reports on the

three networks, three were about campaign logistics and strategy. The other two were about one singular issue: religion and politics. On Thursday, September 6th, 1984, two of the three networks spent the bulk of their time discussing President Reagan's position on the separation of church and state. What was interesting about that development was that that was just one of the many issues that the candidates were discussing at that time. The candidates had spent just as much time talking about defense policy, government spending, taxes and nuclear-testing. These issues, however, were completely ignored on television during that first week. Walter Mondale's — Reagan's opponent — proposal for a comprehensive nuclear-testing moratorium, for example, was completely ignored. This led Blume (1985, 58) to say that "the issues were there, but TV news wasn't covering them." They chose, instead, to cover the cut and dry issue, and the one that had the most potential for drama between the candidates. This led Bloom him to a larger conclusion that the presidential election "show" of 1984 was a flop by any standard of journalistic integrity. "It was in fact a 'show' and hardly journalism at all," (Bloom 1985, 183).

The 1988 campaign, then in turn, was even more issue poor. Instead of discussing issues, reporters dissected the campaign's advertising strategies and reported in unprecedented amounts about the campaign process (Runkel 1989). And polls seemed to increase by exponential amounts, which was a major criticism of the 1988 election by scholars of all kinds. David Runkel, in his book *Campaign for President,* compiled the transcript of the 1988 Campaign Decision Makers meeting*,* sponsored by the Institute of Politics at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. At this conference, scholars, campaign strategists, journalists and media "managers" met to discuss the events of the election. Larry Sabato, a political science professor at the University of Virginia, said this following the election:

> You know, when you look at the amount of time and effort we're spending on polling in the campaign process, it's obvious that something's getting squeezed out, and what's getting squeezed out is discussion of policy issues. There's only so much time on the evening news every evening to devote to politics. More so this year than every before, more time has been devoted to horserace, who's ahead, who's behind, who's gaining (Runkel 1989, 183).

Participants in the conference heavily criticized the news coverage of the campaign for not stressing issues and the records of the respective candidates. Roger Ailes — the former CEO of

Fox News — was a media consultant for George Bush in 1988 and was an attendee of the conference. He stated that the media is only interested in three things: pictures, mistakes and attacks, and that that was reflected in the "troubling" 1988 campaign (Runkel 1989, 263). Those non-political interests are precisely why journalists don't cover the issues. During the meeting, Ailes was asked if he believed that a candidate running for president because they want to do something for this country was crazy. "No," he responded. "It's suicide" (Runkel 1989, 136). Running for the right reasons is one thing, but when a campaign does not appeal to journalistic norms, their campaign is doomed from the start.

Shanto Iyengar (1991, 142), in his study of presidential election coverage, found that coverage of issues during the 1988 campaign focused on the Pledge of Allegiance, patriotism, prison-furlough programs, flag desecration, membership in the American Civil Liberties Union, "and other issues more symbolic than substantive." Clearly then, the news media was not discussing true substantive issues; they were discussing symbolism. And they were discussing clear-cut issues that easily split the candidates. This is evidenced by the phenomenon of the shrinking sound bite. In 1968 the average candidate soundbite on the evening news was 42 seconds long. By 1988, it had shrunk to only 10 seconds (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 64).

Patterson's (1993) study analyzed news coverage over time between 1960 and 1992. His research coded 4,000 paragraphs in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine during that period, with an equal amount stemming from each election cycle. What he found was that election news coverage had moved from policy problems — problems that refer to enduring issues about how government should act — to campaign controversies — controversies that refer to short-term concerns about how candidates should act. He found that the major switch took place during the 1976 election. From 1960-1972, 70% of the stories he found were about policy problems. Only 30% were about campaign controversies. Then in 1976, 55% were about policy problems and 45% were about campaign controversies. In 1980, campaign controversies became the dominant election schema, accounting for 58% of coverage. While *Time* and *Newsweek* are not evening news broadcasts, they do go to show the broader trends that were taking over over time. And various scholars have found that evening news coverage is even more policy poor than other forms of traditional media, including magazines.

In 1992 and 1996, the amount of issue coverage was higher than it had been in 1988. After receiving criticism for their lack of issue discussion during the 1988 election, the news media vowed to do better. In the overall scheme of issue coverage, they fulfilled their promise. The television networks featured segments on the issues including ABC's "American Agenda," CBS's "Eye on America," and CNN's "Democracy in Action." In 1992, the economy was the major topic of discussion, and in the 1996, the news media discussed a wide range of policy issues including tax cuts, welfare reform and drug abuse (Perloff 1998, 321). According to Richard Perloff (1998), nearly half of all election stories from April through September 1996 involved discussion of policy issues. But, this issue coverage was often brief and frequently "just scratched the surface of a complex problem" (Perloff 1998, 323). Indeed, he found that nearly three of four issue references in a TV or newspaper story were no more than a couple of sentences and most failed to provide specific details about candidates' records or issue positions. Farnsworth and Lichter (2011, 49) stated that "most 1992 media references to the candidates' programs resembled bumper-sticker slogans — brief, superficial, and without context."

In 2000, the amount of issue coverage was quite low because the hefty horserace narrative left scant room for serious policy debates. Kerbel (2001) discusses how after the presidential debates, for example, most evening newscasts did not have meaningful discussion or segments about the content of the candidates' answers. Substantive analysis would have compelled journalists to ask different questions, like whether the programs that the candidates proposed were practical, or whether their claims about their opponents were indeed correct. Instead, post-debate coverage on television showed undecided voters talking about the performance of the candidates — how well they spoke, how knowledgable they seemed, and if they matched their expectations (Kerbel 2001). Howard Rosenberg (2000), a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* summed up the election well in saying, "missing [from the media's coverage] was a thoughtful discussion of ideas, as if this country's future would be shaped by the candidate's slogans and exit polls instead of their vision."

Network news transcripts of the 2000 election were collected from September 4th to November 7th from NBC, ABC and CBS using Lexis-Nexis transcripts. The number of election stories that were coded were 173 from CBS, 129 from NBC and 115 from ABC, for a total of

417 stories. What John Tedesco (2002) found was that the amount of mentions of issues and process on the three networks was quite similar. He found 2,520 total mentions of the 22 campaign issues, and 2,468 mentions of 9 different campaign processes. But Tedesco (2002, 207) found that process coverage was much more likely to be the dominant content of news coverage, while issues were more likely to be in the background. So it mattered little that there were many references to the issues if those issues were simply discussed as pawns in the larger process-dominated game of chess. And in the issue stories that were aired, the stories did little to translate how candidate proposals might affect typical audience members. While journalists did discuss policy issues in 2000, television media failed to bring those issues to life.

In 2008, the final six weeks of the campaign were much more issue focused than they had been in the past several decades — 22% issue focused, to be exact. That is because the 2008 financial crisis was in full swing, and the media extensively covered the state of the economy and the way that the crisis intersected with the presidential campaign. Economic conditions accounted for the largest aspect of coverage, accounting for almost 19% of election coverage in the 2,412 campaign stories that were studied (Pew 2008). The stories were from 48 different news outlets across all forms of media, and spanned evenly across the six week general election period. But researchers also found that despite the increase in issue coverage, the horserace frame dominated the issues. As in past election, when issues were discussed, they were discussed in terms of tactics, strategy and polling. In fact 58% of all coverage analyzed by the Project for Excellence in Journalism was framed within the political horserace. Only 20% discussed policy without any horserace framing (Pew 2008). This is rather consistent with the data compiled by Kerbel (2001) and Tedesco (2002) regarding the 2000 general election campaign.

Moving to 2012, 20% of the total media coverage was about policy, which is quite similar to the overall total for 2008. The economy was a much bigger issue in 2008 than it was in 2012, but overall, the amount of policy discussion was quite similar. Discussion of the turmoil in the Middle East made up for the 5% reduction in discussion of economic issues. But even then, policy discussion only made up 1/5 of the total election coverage (Pew 2012). In 2016, policy issues accounted for just 10% of news coverage — less than a fourth of the coverage given to the horserace, and less than half the amount of issue coverage from 2012 (Patterson 2016d). In

looking at the media coverage overall, Patterson (2016d) concluded that policies were thrust into the headlines after new developments, but that they just as quickly fell out of favor.

Discussion of Policy Issues Over Time

The change in the amount of policy issues reported, according to Patterson (1993), occurred during the 1976 election. It was in that election that "campaign controversies" as he called them, overtook issue coverage. And that has remained the case ever since. Certain elections are more policy heavy than others, depending on the economic conditions, state of the world, and other domestic issues. Overall, however, true issue coverage is much lower today than it was during the pre-McGovern-Fraser Commission elections. Today, issue coverage makes up only a small fraction of total election coverage in all forms of media, and on television specifically. In 2016, it accounted for only 10% of coverage during the general election period, which is the lowest amount found in the modern era.

What scholars seem to unanimously find is that even when issues are discussed, they are discussed only as background fodder to the horserace. It is typical to see reports saying that 'Mitt Romney made a stop in Pennsylvania to talk about job growth in order to win Pennsylvania's critical contest.' The policy issue of job growth is mentioned, however it is mentioned within the context of the horserace. Statements like this provide almost no context for the actual policy as well as no substantive discussion of the candidates' proposal. In 2016, Trump's name would be mentioned along with the issue of immigration, however, there was hardly any discussion of his policy proposals to combat illegal immigration. This seems to be the trend across all platforms studied, although less extensively in newspapers and magazines. Newscasters and reporters on television prefer to stick to clear-cut issues that easily divide the candidates, rather than potentially bore audiences with long stories on the viability of candidates' policy proposals. What is important to note is that scholars from across the decades have found that the lack of focus on issues correlates with a lack of issue knowledge among voters.

An Increase in Negativity

Richard Hofstetter (1976), who did an exhaustive study of over 4000 news stories on CBS, NBC and ABC during the 1972 election, found that approximately 79% of stories were neutral or ambiguous in tone. His findings challenged the idea that there were strong biases in favor of, or in opposition to particular candidates. Since most of the coverage was so neutral in tone, it was not possible to argue that certain candidates were being swarmed with negativity. Several scholars, when looking at the subsequent elections, found an increase in media negativity during the post-Watergate years, as the media became more critical of government and of candidates in general. Many have argued that the tumultuous events of Watergate led to increases in negativity during the 1976 campaign (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Robinson and Sheehan 1983). Before that, reporters were more trusting of politicians, less skeptical of their statements, and therefore less negative overall. During the 1976 election, Patterson (1980) found that a great deal of coverage about Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford was negative in nature. Over 80% of references to Carter's issues stances were negative, for example. Other aspects of the election, however, were much more positive or neutral in tone, which counteracted this issue negativity. Clearly then, the election of 1976 was still trending away from negative territory in the neutral/positive realm.

During the 1980 election, Robinson and Sheehan (1983) found that 52% of election stories were neutral in nature. In looking at election stories on CBS from January 1st to November 3rd 1980, they found that 52% were neutral, 21% were "directional" and 27% were "ambiguous." They defined directional as a direct negative story about a candidate, while ambiguous were stories about candidates without a clear negative or positive tone. They stated in their discussion that "most everybody who has systematically studied campaign journalism in the last 2 decades has found the press to be essentially neutralist in its reporting" (Robinson and Sheehan 1983, 98). Their research showed that most stories could not be coded as positive or negative towards a candidate, a party or a particular issue. In fact their study found the exact same amount of neutral and ambiguous coverage that Hofstetter (1976) had identified two election cycles earlier.

Other studies of 1980, however, found that coverage in 1980 was indeed more negative than it had been in the past. The Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) coded every positive or negative evaluation of a candidates' record, policies, personal character or performance, excluding neutral mentions. What researchers found was that statements about candidates were much more likely to be negative than positive — five times more likely, in fact. CMPA found that 85% of coverage about Reagan and Carter was negative, while only 15% was positive in tone. It is unclear in this data how much of the overall discussion was neutral or ambiguous — so it is difficult to compare the data to past elections. The discrepancy between positive and negative evaluations, nonetheless, is quite striking. In the 1980 election, "there was consensus from both network and non network people that the tone of coverage was more cynical and negative than it had to be or ought to be" (Linsky 1983, 67). After the 1980 election, reporters and pundits promised to do better for the next election.

John Windhauser and Dru Wiley Evarts (1991) found that coverage of all four candidates on NBC, CBS and ABC in 1984 was favorable overall, despite the fact that the media subjected Ronald Reagan to extensive criticism. Walter Mondale fared much better overall, and received positive reportage in almost every aspect. Four years later, in 1988, they found that the networks reported even more negative stories, especially regarding issues. But overall, coverage of the presidential candidates on all three networks remained favorable overall. The difference between these findings and Linsky's (1983) findings from 1980 is notable. It is possible, however, that differences in methodology, coding or scope caused a difference in conclusions. Or perhaps the media truly did respond to a call to improve their reporting.

But the 1992 race changed that narrative, and reverted back to the coverage identified in 1980 by Linsky (1983). When looking at the 1992 race, Patterson (1993) found that the three major candidates, Bill Clinton, George Bush and Ross Perot, all received more bad press than good on network evening newscasts during the general election. Bill Clinton received 63% negative press, George Bush received 69% negative press, and Ross Perot received 54% negative press (Patterson 1993, 6). George Bush, the incumbent, led the pack in negative press throughout the entire contest. The amount of negative coverage reported here excludes negative horserace statements — these percentages are regarding the candidates' ideas, campaign conduct,

personalities, and job performance. And they only include the instances that could be coded as either positive or negative; neutral statements were excluded. Even statements by supposedly nonpartisan sources — policy experts and reporters — were 60% negative (Patterson 1993, 6). And for Bush specifically, they were 93% negative (Patterson 1993, 106).

For the 1996 race, Bob Dole received the brunt of the negative coverage, mostly because of his position as a trailing candidate. Many stories on network news were devoted to Dole's weakness as a candidate and comparing that weakness to Clinton's position as a strong incumbent. Dole had entered the 'likely loser' narrative, and his coverage reflected that. Statements about his policy proposals, his demeanor and his campaign strategy were all used to explain his poor poll standings. And those stories are inherently negative. Clinton, conversely, received very positive coverage for his handling of foreign policy, and because of the positive growth of the economy.

In 2000, the tone of the coverage was predominantly negative for both candidates. Stephen Farnsworth and Robert Lichter (2011, 102) found that Gore's substantive evaluations were 40% positive and 60% negative, and Bush's evaluations were 37% positive and 63% negative, excluding discussion of the horserace. Gore's image was promoted by the media as "an opportunistic politician willing to say or do anything, for exaggeration to downright distortion, to advance his career," and Bush was portrayed as "an intellectual lightweight" (Ceaser and Busch 2001, 117-118). Farnsworth and Lichter (2011) analyzed data compiled for the Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) at George Mason University. The data coded each evening news segment on ABC, CBS and NBC during the elections studied. The most negative on-air judgement for Bush and Gore was reserved for how both of the candidates conducted their campaigns. In that arena, an overwhelming 96% of evaluations were negative.

In 2004, John Kerry received highly positive press coverage between Labor Day and election day — 59% positive in tone. George W. Bush, in comparison, received coverage that was only 37% positive in tone. Farnsworth and Lichter (2011, 101) found that Kerry received at least 19 percentage points better coverage on all three networks than George W. Bush. Kerry received more positive coverage in almost every major policy matter, including domestic policy, health care, the economy and foreign policy. The only major area where Bush had him beat was

in discussion of terrorism (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 101). It is important to note that while John Kerry did receive positive coverage during the 2004 race, the other candidates during the early millennial battles were not so lucky.

Negativity had always been involved in news coverage of candidates. 2008, however, seemed to be a different story altogether. Coverage for Republican candidate John McCain was the most negative in modern election history. During the general election period — from September 8th to October 16th — nearly six in ten stories about McCain were decidedly negative in nature, while fewer than 14% were positive. In this manner, unfavorable stories about McCain outweighed favorable ones by a factor of more than four to one (Pew 2008). He received 62% negative coverage regarding the horserace, and 46% negative coverage on policy issues. In the press, the race became defined around McCain's troubles in the polls and his troubles regarding economic policy. And once that schema came into place, it was very difficult for McCain and his team to shake it off. These findings stem from analysis of more than 2,412 campaign stories from 48 news outlets done by the Project for Excellence in Journalism. Much of this reported negativity was due to the sudden economic crash and the Republican response. When Lehman Brothers collapsed, the entire Republican party, and John McCain as a candidate had to be on the defensive. McCain also made a mistake by stating that the "fundamentals of the economy are strong" soon after the crisis began (Pew 2008).

According to Pew Research, the Republican nominee also received the brunt of the negative news reports during the 2012 general election, although far less extreme than the coverage John McCain received. From August 27th to October 21st, Mitt Romney received 38% negative coverage, as compared to 30% negative for Obama. Much of the reason for this disparity was due to Romney's polling. In stories about polls, Romney received 45% negative coverage (Pew 2012). When horserace references were removed from the analysis, the breakdown of positive, negative and neutral reporting is virtually identical for both. Even then, however, both candidates only received 15% positive references. The remainder, 53% and 55%, respectively, were mixed or neutral (Pew 2012). But President Obama did not get off scot-free. His public record and policy stances were 35% negative during the period studied (Pew 2012). What is interesting is that the only theme for which both candidates received more positive than

negative coverage were personal stories about the two men and their families. The rest was dominated by mixed coverage and negative assessments.

On television specifically, Obama received 23% negative coverage, and Governor Romney received 33% negative coverage. A quarter of coverage of the President was positive in nature, while only 16% of Romney's coverage was positive. In this manner, the television narrative about Obama was mixed — 25% positive to 23% negative — while Romney's narrative was more than 2-1 negative — 16% positive to 33% negative. And the coverage was remarkably consistent between ABC, NBC and CBS, as is typical of the 3 major networks.

Then came 2016. For each news report analyzed by Patterson (2016d), coders from Media Tenor identified relevant topics and actors and evaluated the tone, from positive to negative on a 6 point scale. These tonality ratings are then combined to classify each report as being negative, positive or having no clear tone. These findings show that during the general election period, 77% of Trump's coverage was negative, compared to 23% that was positive. Clinton's coverage was 64% negative and 36% positive. These numbers, while striking, do make it very difficult to compare to the Pew studies compiled in 2008 and 2012, because every study here is coded as either negative or positive — with the neutral stories excluded. If this same strategy was used for the Pew study, just for the sake of comparison, one can see the difference in negativity between 2012 and 2016. Romney's 2012 coverage resembled Hillary Clinton's 2016 coverage. With neutral stories excluded, out of a total of 100, 67% of stories about Romney were negative, while 33% were positive. Obama faired much better: 48% negative coverage and 52% positive coverage overall. And when one applies this same strategy to the coverage that John McCain received in 2008, it seems that he and Trump received very similar levels of negative coverage. Out of 100% — with neutral stories excluded — 74% of McCain's coverage was negative, while only 26% was positive.

Negativity Over Time

In looking at negativity over time in this manner, it is clear that negativity in media coverage has grown tremendously in the last several election cycles. Patterson (2016d) combined data from his own book *Out of Order* (1993)*,* the Center for Media & Public Affairs' analysis of

the 1996 campaign, Pew Research Center analysis from 2000-2012, and the data from his extensive study of the 2016 election to come to an overall conclusion about the amount of negativity in media coverage of presidential campaigns. In his synthesis of all of the different sources, he discovered that positive coverage of candidates dominated from 1960 until 1980. From my presentation of the data compiled by the various authors, this should come as no surprise. In the 1980's the coverage was largely mixed, wavering at around 50% positive and 50% negative. By 1992, that had changed. Negative coverage was now outweighing positive coverage 60% to 40%. The largest gap came in 2000, when 75% of campaign coverage was negative and only 25% was purely positive. It returned back to 1992 levels for 2004, spiked up in 2008, before moving closer to the 2000 levels in the 2016 contest. In 2016, by averaging the amounts of positive and negative coverage for Secretary Clinton and Mr. Trump, Patterson (2016d) found that 71% of coverage was negative in tone and 29% was positive in tone.

The question that remains is why. Why did media coverage turn so rapidly from positive to negative between 1988 and 1992? And why had there been a bump in negativity in 1980? Was there something inherently more negative about George Bush and Bill Clinton in 1992, or about Ronald Reagan in 1980 than previous candidates for president? I would have to say no to that question. But still, there is no all encompassing answer to the question of why. Part of the answer stems from news values of competition, contrasting images, the horserace and controversies. These issues are fundamentally negative. And as media outlets began to adhere more strictly to these news values, negativity seems to have been a potentially unintended consequence. In 1980, the bump in negativity seemed to cause a backlash, leading to almost a decade of more neutral and positive coverage. But then in 1992, levels of negativity shot up once again. It can be argued that pressures from 24 cable news networks were mounting, and network news needed to keep up. If CNN was reporting on a story, so too did the networks. CNN and other cable venues became real players in the media during this same time, perhaps because of the prominence of their gulf war coverage. But it is not possible to know for sure. All that can be said is that since 1992, every election has been more negative than positive, albeit in different degrees depending on several outside factors.

Scandal Coverage

Then came coverage of gaffes and scandals. Coverage of both has increased remarkably over the past several decades. Patterson (1993) identified the major blunders in each election from 1972-1992, showing that the 1992 election was a radical departure from the typical number of gaffes discussed during the election period. The 1992 election included references to two affairs, a vice-presidential candidate spelling potato with an e at the end, and then President George Bush being unable to check-out his own groceries. It was not the first election where gaffes were reported on — reporters seized on Bush when he misstated the anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attacks during the 1988 campaign — but it was the first election where they were discussed with such ferocity. And that trend only continued as we moved past 1992, into the internet age and eventually into the social media age. Mistakes and slip-ups cause reporters to enter into the feeding frenzy, adding fuel to the fire for many campaign non-issues.

In 1996, there was also a great deal of coverage about controversies. What was different about the 1996 coverage than the scandal coverage of today was that it was short-lived. The television news media paid attention to the controversies "in response to short-term events" (Dover 1998, 143). They exhibited little sustained interest in the controversies over the course of the full campaign. The Whitewater scandal, for example, received coverage only when Clinton testified in Court, when the jury reached their verdict, and when the Senate Committee issued its final report. Dover (1998, 143) found that interest in Clinton's and Dole's ethical troubles was always short-lived, "often taking place for only a few days at a time, and ended quickly without new developments."

In 2012, scandals were back in play. On September 17th, a video surfaced of Mitt Romney at a private fundraiser stating that 47% of Americans who pay no income tax see themselves as victims and would never vote for him. This story flooded the airwaves with pundits questioning Romney's empathy and with opponents seizing on his lack of connection to the middle-class. During that week, 61% of Romney's coverage was negative, since much of it was scandal focused.

2016 will undoubtably be remembered for the sheer number of scandals reported during the 18th month campaign. During the general election period, scandal and controversy coverage

accounted for 17 percent of total coverage for Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. This is a radical departure from all previous election cycles. The only election that even comes close would be 1992, with the discussion of Clinton's extramarital affair and his draft dodging, among others. The importance of this scandal coverage is that it is so overwhelmingly negative. In the 2016 election, Patterson (2016d) found that 91% of controversy coverage was negative in tone. The scandal coverage played a large role in the media's coverage of the Clinton campaign. In the final two weeks of the election, to use an illustrious example, her e-mail scandal accounted for more than a quarter of her total coverage (Patterson 2016d).

Scandal Coverage Over Time

Coverage of scandals appeals to each and every one of journalists' core values. It is difficult, therefore, for journalists to ignore potential headlines. While there have always been scandals in election news coverage — drug use, affairs, mistakes and rhetoric blunders — it seems to have grown exponentially in the past several election cycles, especially 2016. Perhaps 2016 was an anomaly. Having a celebrity, non-politician candidate heading up the Republican ticket certainly was a radical departure from past trends. But we can't know that for sure. While the amount of scandal coverage was much greater than it had been in the past, it is not completely without precedent. The media covered Bill Clinton's scandals in 1992 and 1996 with glee, and they always seem ready to pounce on candidate gaffes and misstatements. In 1988, the media reported on Michael Dukakis' visit to General Dynamics, where the Massachusetts Senator took photos behind the wheel of a M1A1 tank. He looked silly, diminutive, and downright un-presidential compared to George Bush. In 2008 the media attacked Obama's relationship with his pastor Jeremiah Wright, whose sermons were labeled as anti-American and racist. The controversy sparked continuous media coverage on both national media outlets and local sources; more than 3,000 news stories had been written on the issue by early April of 2008. And in 2012, Mitt Romney's comments about having "binders full of women" received extensive coverage.

It is clear in the literature that the idea of extensively covering scandals is not new. What does seem to be a new trend, however, is the scope of that scandal coverage. In the past, scandals

were reported only when major milestones occurred. Dover's (1998) discussion of the 1996 election is clear on that. Today, on the other hand, it seems as if scandals are reported on constantly. Hillary Clinton's e-mail scandal never received less than 7% of total coverage throughout the entire general election campaign, despite the fact that there were no new developments until the FBI director reopened the investigation on October 30th. Once again, however, it remains unclear if this will continue in the next election cycle, or if this aspect of the 2016 campaign was simply a response to the wildcard nature of Donald Trump's candidacy.

Conclusion

In looking at all of this data together, it is clear that television media coverage has become more horserace heavy, policy light, negative and scandal prone over time. Much of the change can be traced back to 1972, when the media became a larger presence in the presidential election circus. But negativity, scandals and a lack of issue coverage did not become ingrained into media coverage of U.S elections permanently until 1992, for the most part. Prior to that, with a few small exceptions, coverage was more about the issues than the competition, or at least evenly split, and candidates could count on a majority of coverage to be neutral or ambiguous in tone. But by 1992, external factors, news values, candidates and the pressures of the 24 hour news cycle brought scandal, negativity and the horserace to the forefront.

More research would need to be done to quantify this directly, but it does seem that the election of Bill Clinton was a turning point into the modern era. Cable News Network, CNN, was founded in 1980. It began earnestly, struggling to gain a foothold in a television world that was so dominated by the primordial powers of NBC, CBS and ABC. But as the years went by, CNN gained traction in reporting live events, covering the news 24 hours a day, and reporting on things that other networks did not. One such example is the Persian Gulf War in 1991. People turned into CNN to see what was going on, and other networks took notice (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011). It was at this same time that the big 3 — because of economic pressure and the end of their television monopoly — began adhering more strictly to news values and working to entertain their viewers rather than purely informing them.

From 1992, much of the trends seemed to move in tandem. As horserace coverage increased, issue coverage decreased and negative coverage became more prominent. All the while scandals were reported on negatively and were related back to the larger story of who was winning and who was losing. While there were several election contests that were not quite as pronounced, all of the elections since 1992 have been much more about the horserace than policy, and have been more negative or neutral than positive. Scholars have also found a correlation between the amount of negative coverage and the amount of cynicism that people feel towards their government.

What is important about these trends is that they do not seem to be slowing down. If anything, 2008 and 2016 show that the trends are only speeding up. Twenty percent of coverage was about the issues in 2012, while only 10% was about the issues in 2016. And even that 10% was often framed within the broader narrative of the competitive game. Additionally, 2016 was as negative as 2000 and 2008, and perhaps more so when one adds in all of the scandals that were reported during the general election phase. 2016 was negative for both major candidates, and was one of the most horserace heavy campaigns in modern history.

What can be asked is whether or not the media will respond to criticism about their role in the 2016 election the way that they did in 1980, for example. After extensive criticism about their role during the 1980 election, the media did reform. They decreased their level of negativity, increased their issue coverage, and seemed to focus less on the competitive game. But they soon fell back into old habits. After the levels of negativity in 2008, the 2012 election seemed to be much more even in coverage. So perhaps the media will respond to criticism of their performance in 2016 and work to reform their coverage. I will return to discussion of potential reforms for these institutional problems in my concluding remarks.

Chapter 3:

Did the Media Propel Trump to Victory?

In some elections, the campaign is distorted by the media's fascination with the story possibilities presented by one of the candidates. That was true, for example, of Barack Obama's 2008 candidacy, John McCain's 2000 candidacy, Gary Hart's 1984 candidacy, and Jimmy Carter's 1976 candidacy. Donald Trump can now be added to the list. Any such candidate gets outsized coverage. It's not that journalists sit back and decide to put their finger on the scale in a way deliberately intended to help a candidate who captures their fancy. They are in it for the story, though the political impact is real enough (Patterson 2016b).

On November 8th, 2016, Donald Trump stunningly defeated Hillary Clinton in the Electoral College. On every television news channel, reporters seemed shocked as the totals continued coming in. Once the verdict seemed clear, pundits tried their best to explain the victory; but most couldn't find the right words. In the ensuing days and weeks, people continued searching for answers. A CNN commentator called his victory a "whitelash against a changing America," NBC credited Trump's anti-establishment message, and others blamed Secretary Clinton for being an uninspiring and scandal-prone candidate (Ispahani 2016).

But one question that has yet to be adequately answered is what role did the press play in all of this? Is the media partly to blame? Was it complicit in Trump's success, or was it simply doing its job? Various reporters, experts and scholars have weighed in — all with very different takes on the matter. Thomas E. Patterson (2016a, 2016b, 2016d), in his scholarship on the 2016 election, found significant patterns that shine light on television media's role in the process. His work shows that the media's decision to focus on Trump early in the process propelled him to be taken seriously by a public who may have otherwise cast him aside as a celebrity candidate. Patterson also found that journalists, in an effort to seem unbiased — created false equivalencies between Trump and Clinton, often comparing his and her scandals as if they were of the same magnitude.

This chapter will look more in depth into the media's performance in the 2016 election. Continuing off of the work presented in chapter 2, I will show how media coverage of Donald

Trump's candidacy was a continuation as well as a departure from past trends. Furthermore, I will discuss the impacts that that coverage had on the final election result. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of the media's institutional biases and the impact of post-truth media on Trump's victory. All of this is in the effort to show that the media's position as a miscast institution was one of the many factors that helped propel Trump to the nomination and eventually to the presidency.

Is the Media to Blame?

While it is not the job of the media to tell people what to think, shouldn't Americans expect our journalists to deliver us with the truth and not create false equivalencies that work to level the playing field between candidates with significant differences in personality, experience and policy preferences? Historically, the press has helped citizens recognize the "difference between the earnest politician and the pretender. Today's news coverage blurs the distinction" (Patterson 2016d). And it blurs such distinctions by focusing on winners and losers, on controversies, and on scandals instead of focusing on whats at stake in a particular election. If we have indeed entered what some scholars have called a post-truth society, should the media be complicit, or fight against it?

Nicholas Kristof, a prominent New York Times columnist, also agrees with Patterson, arguing that the media was a major force of empowerment for Trump. Television journalists empowered Trump by allowing him to appear on air via telephone interviews, by spending countless hours live streaming his rallies, and by allowing themselves and their daily coverage to be sucked in by Trump's entertainment vortex. The media, Kristof (2016) argues, should have more aggressively "provided context in the form of fact checks and robust examination of policy proposals." He understands that the media couldn't ignore Trump's statements or his crazy antics, but that does not make up for the media's failures in holding him to the truth. In his opinion piece from March 2016 entitled "My Shared Shame: The Media Helped Make Trump," he discusses what conclusions he drew after speaking to other journalists and scholars about their role in the election.

I polled a number of journalists and scholars, and there was a broad (though not universal) view that we in the media screwed up. Our first big failing was that television in particular handed Trump the microphone without adequately fact-checking him or rigorously examining his background, in a craven symbiosis that boosted audiences for both (Kristof 2016).

President Obama even weighed in, stating that journalists had given Trump billions of dollars' worth of attention without demanding "serious accountability" for his "unworkable plans" and "promises [he] can't keep" (Kasperowicz 2016)

This is because Trump was an expert at using the media to his advantage. He effectively manipulated television by offering outrageous statements that viewers couldn't help but watch — without facing skeptical follow-up questions. He didn't hold traditional town-hall events or press conferences where he would have to answer questions — instead he held large rallies and appeared in interviews over the phone. This meant that he was not being held accountable for his many claims, and for his many mistakes. The fact-check website PolitiFact even named the lie of the year for 2015, "the many campaign misstatements of Donald Trump" (Kristof 2016). But it didn't seem that television media was truly working to correct these misconceptions. How could a candidate who was running on his business acumen, for example, not be questioned more scrupulously about his bankruptcies, malpractice lawsuits or mediocre investing? And this lack of accountability, especially on television, is what left "many voters with the false perception that Trump is actually a straight shooter" (Kristof 2016).

Other scholars, however, do not believe that the media was to blame for Trump's rise or his victory (Robinson 2016, Mazzoleni 2016). That credit, they argue, should all be bestowed to Mr. Trump himself. Any other argument gives too much power to the press and not enough to Trump. He was the one who cultivated his celebrity persona, who had almost universal name recognition entering the race, and who made himself ready and available to speak to the press. Trump is the preeminent example of a made-for television candidate, and that allowed him to garner a great deal of airtime. In simply being himself, he was the attraction, and the public began paying attention. And once the public began paying attention, the press had no choice but to continue covering him at such feverish ratings.

Moreover, Trump equaled ratings. He was good for every major network as millions of Americans tuned into the news every night to see what he would do or say next. As ratings soared, CBS CEO Les Moonves said that Trump's dominance "may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS.… The money's rolling in and this is fun" (Flynn 2016). Reporting on Trump increased ratings and advertisement revenue for networks across the ideological spectrum. And it would have been too much to ask to expect networks to shy away from a man who helped boost their ratings so intensely.

> Trump is not just an instant ratings/circulation/clicks gold mine; he's the motherlode. He stepped on to the presidential campaign stage precisely at a moment when the media is struggling against deep insecurities about its financial future. The truth is, the media has needed Trump like a crack addict needs a hit (Kristof 2016).

Every network received criticisms for the amount of time they spent covering his campaign, especially cable networks. CNN President Jeff Zucker, who actually signed Mr. Trump to star on The Apprentice, admitted that "we shouldn't have put on as many Trump rallies as we did" (Flynn 2016). But it was good entertainment; Trump truly was a telegenic candidate. Because the media never knew what he would do or say next, cameras were always on him — effectively giving him editorial control (Brown 2016). And as several lamented, CNN effectively "handed its schedule over to Mr. Trump" (Kristof 2016). That is why in the case of Trump, I believe that it is necessary to look deeply into the way that he was covered on his original media empire: television.

In looking at the scholarship, there seems to be empirical proof that Mr. Trumps's early rise occurred after he received a deluge of television coverage. The amount of coverage he received during the invisible primary phase was entirely inappropriate for his standings in the polls at that time. A man sitting in 11th place should not be receiving more than 40% of the GOP coverage. It was unfair to the other 15 Republican candidates who didn't get nearly the same airtime. Soon thereafter, Trump's poll standings began to rise tremendously. It may not be possible to prove indisputably that that rise would not have occurred anyway, however, it does show that, contrary to popular belief, the public was not Trump's first audience — the media

was. And in that case, the media may have played more of a role in his rise than they would care to admit. Thomas Patterson (2016d) said it best when he proclaimed that "the car wreck that was the 2016 election had many drivers. Journalists were not alone in the car, but their fingerprints were all over the wheel."

Trump, the Media and the Invisible Primary

Trump came into the race with almost universal name recognition, with the largest number of Twitter followers out of any candidate, and with a reality TV empire already built under his watch. His understanding of, his expertise in and his penchant for media should not have come as any surprise. Throughout the invisible primary and rest of the race, Trump was television's darling. Journalists seemed to never tire of reporting on him, speaking to him and covering his every move, word and Tweet. But to many watching, it did seem that this coverage was disproportionate. During the invisible primary, he received a full third of the coverage — in a field, let us remember, that included 15 other candidates. His coverage was nearly twice that of Jeb Bush, who was the second most heavily covered GOP candidate (Patterson 2016a). Ann Curry, the former "Today" anchor stated that she was truly embarrassed by the scant amount of coverage that the other candidates received, an amount that she believes was entirely unfair (Kristof 2016).

What is interesting about that trend is that it is not explained by the early polls or by the amount of money Mr. Trump had raised — which are the traditional indicators for increased press coverage during the invisible primary. When his news coverage began to increase, he was not high in the primary polls. In fact, he was running in 11th place behind Bush, Cruz, Rubio, and Carson, among others. But by watching the news, you never would have known it.

> Upon entering the race, [Trump] stood much taller in the news than he stood in the polls. Journalists seemed unmindful that they and not the electorate were Trump's first audience. Trump exploited their lust for riveting stories. He didn't have any other option. He had no constituency base and no claim to presidential credentials… The politics of outrage was his edge, and the press became his dependable if unwitting ally (Patterson 2016a).

John Sides and Lynn Vavreck (2013), in their research on the 2012 election, found that increased news coverage typically preceded a surge in the polls. The news media is compelled to report on major events and actions during the campaign, and that coverage then changes viewers' perceptions and is mirrored in new polling data. Vavreck and Sides (2013, 43) stated that they chose to focus on news coverage because [they] think that it, and not the original event that catalyzed the increase in coverage, is what moves polls. Indeed, their research found that the media's interpretations, "expressed in the volume and tone of the news coverage," affected how voters viewed the candidates (Vavreck and Sides 2013, 43). And regarding the coverage of Trump's candidacy, this take-away seems to hold true.

For the 2016 election, analysts Jan von Lohuizen and Luke Thompson found a strong correlation between an increase in coverage and a rise in the polls for Trump. In comparing Trump's share of media coverage with his share in public polls, they found that "a spike in media coverage preceded Trump's rise in the polls by a full month" (Rothenberg 2016). They found that he rose in the polls a month after he started receiving extensive media coverage, not the other way around — as is traditional for presidential candidates.

In the summer of 2015, Donald Trump entered the already packed GOP field. In mid-June, the NBC/WSJ poll had Mr. Trump in 11th place with just 1% of GOP support (Todd and Murray 2015). By July, that had changed. His outrageous statements were headlining the nightly news almost every night, and the story of his fight with John McCain — a fight wherein he proclaimed that good soldiers shouldn't be captured during war — was covered on almost every channel for several days. The increase in coverage of these statements was one of Trump's first "scandals" and led to even more coverage than he was already experiencing. Then by the end of July, he had climbed 14 points in the polls to the front of the pack (Patterson 2016a). In the course of just one month, his statements and the influx of media coverage that came with them had thrust him into the position of the frontrunner.

At that point, Trump had become high enough in the polls to receive the coverage that we have come to expect of the highest polling candidate. "But he was lifted to that height by an unprecedented amount of free media" during the invisible primary (Patterson 2016a). The free media that Trump received throughout the entire campaign, according to an angry Ted Cruz as

well as research from the New York Times, added up to close to $2 billion. This $2 billion was more than twice what Hillary Clinton received, and more than six times what Ted Cruz received (Confessore and Yourish 2016). Trump benefitted tremendously from the press' role as the great mentioner, and took advantage of the attention he received — both positive and negative. That $2 billion — reported by the New York Times from reports by MediaQuaint, a firm that specializes in compiling press mentions — includes both positive and negative stories from all different types of news outlets. The negative mentions received less weight than the positive mentions, however, both were included in the study (Confessore and Yourish 2016). For Trump, they concluded, the age old adage holds true — 'any press is good press.'

Indeed, many scholars and reporters argue that Trump gained this $2 billion in free press by using his media prowess to manipulate and use the media to his advantage. By appealing to their lust for the riveting story, he was able to gain incredible amounts of attention very early on. Nicholas Kristof (2016) said it directly, claiming that journalists "were lap dogs, not watchdogs."

> [Trump] masterfully manipulated the media — bullying reporters, garnering billions in free publicity and portraying journalists as part of the corporate structure that must be brought down so that the people can triumph. That's a deeply misleading and dangerous picture… Journalists, and their corporate bosses, shouldn't allow themselves to be used as props in Trump's never-ending theater (Kristof 2016).

To many, it seemed like the television media, and cable news especially, was simply an extension of the Trump campaign. CNN — which Trump called the "Clinton News Network" — would more appropriately be called the "Trump News Network" because of the amount of time that they spent covering his campaign. And Fox News spent a great deal of their conservative coverage discussing Trump's candidacy. Since these two networks received immense ratings boosts from covering Trump, their decisions on what to air reached more Americans than ever before. In fact, 40% of Trump voters called Fox News their "main source" of news about the election, with another 8% naming CNN (Gottfried, Barthel and Mitchell 2016).

By "bullying" reporters into covering him, by understanding the importance of the sound bite and the scandal, and by constantly discussing the bias of the media, he did rather effectively

steer the conversation (Kristof 2016). He understood the power that his rallies, his outrageous statements and his Tweets had to direct the 24-hour news cycle for days and weeks to come. His opponents were always in response mode, with Trump holding most of the cards.

In combatting critiques like those offered by Kristof (2016) and Rothenberg (2016) regarding the press' role in Trump's rise, journalists often claim that during their hours of Trump coverage they subjected him to extensive criticism, and that their assessments of him were overwhelmingly negative. During the invisible primary, however, that is not at all the case. Patterson (2016a) found that on NBC, CBS, and Fox News — the three television outlets included in his initial study — Trump's reports trended positive. On Fox, more than 73% of Trump's coverage was positive or neutral in tone — meaning only 27% was negative. But traditional television news was almost nearly as positive. On CBS and NBC, approximately 65% of coverage was positive or neutral in tone, meaning that only 35% of the coverage was negative (Patterson 2016a).

The reason for Trump's favorable coverage is simple — the horserace. During the invisible primary phase, he was a "gaining ground" candidate, a position that invariably leads to good press. And since it has been shown that television media tends to emphasize the latest polls and projections and the strategic game, it should come as no surprise that this type of coverage accounted for more than 56% of Trump's coverage. And of that 56%, more than 79% was favorable in tone. In fact, news references to Trump's poll standings ran nine-to-one positive (Patterson 2016a).

Only 12% of Trump's coverage addressed his issue stances and political beliefs, and of that, 40% was positive in tone (Patterson 2016a). "Although news coverage of his positions included criticisms, it was accompanied by statements of solidarity from Republicans and was framed as the issue that was propelling him upwards in the polls" (Patterson 2016a). When television reports would talk about his position on immigration, for example, they would include clips of voters marveling at his honesty, and would be framed around his position as a candidate who was gaining ground. And it is important to keep in mind that issue coverage accounted for only 12% of his total coverage.

This lack of policy coverage is due to several factors. We know that it does not fit within news values to spend large amounts of airtime on issues. Instead, it fits within journalistic values to focus on what is new, exciting and controversial. Another reason for Trump's specific lack of policy coverage, compared to his early GOP opponents, was that many in the media treated Trump's candidacy like a joke. At the start of the race — and throughout — the media covered Donald Trump like they might cover Kim Kardashian (Folkenflik 2016). Danielle Allen, a political scientist at Harvard, stated that "the repeated use of references to 'the Donald' across all platforms structured the conversation around ironical affection for a celebrity rather than around serious conversation of character and policy" (Kristof 2016).

Because he was not vetted in the same way as other candidates, he was rarely subjected to the same criticisms and expectations. His policy preferences weren't questioned because people and pundits especially seemed happy to stop and watch him in action — along with the fact that he did not have a long career in public service to defend. In one illustrious example, Ted Cruz received extensive coverage when he announced a new immigration plan that would suspend H-1B visas for 180 days to investigate abuses of the program. Articles compared that to Cruz's 2013 plan, where he argued for the expansion of the program. In response, Trump called Cruz "weak" on the issue, saying that Cruz was merely "copying" Trump's own plan (Raju 2016). It remained unclear, however, what Trump's own plan was, besides the building of the wall. And that's how many issues were treated. When Cruz, Rubio or Kasich would come out with a new plan, Trump's criticisms would be quoted. But Trump was hardly ever pressed extensively on what his alternative plan would be.

A symptom of this phenomenon is that, according to a former CNN correspondent, Sarah Palin received more serious vetting as John McCain's 2008 running mate than Trump did as a leading presidential candidate. Indeed, "Trump was quite literally a laugh line" (Kristof 2016). Because of the entertainment provided by his candidacy and the unprecedented nature of a non-politician candidate, many made the mistake of regarding Trump's candidacy as a publicity stunt. At the beginning, the media did not take him seriously. Many believed that he would get bored and drop out, or that the American people would never vote for a man with such outrageous beliefs. But boy were they wrong; reporters were largely oblivious to the plight of working-class

Americans and the way that Trump's rhetoric appealed to them. "The media was out of touch with Americans," Kristof (2016) stated.

Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, did not receive the same celebrity treatment. Coverage of her issue positions during the invisible primary accounted for 26% of her total coverage, compared to the 12% for Mr. Trump. Of this issue coverage, a whopping 84% of it was negative in tone (Patterson 2016a). This is why the Clinton campaign complained that journalists were holding her to a different standard than other candidates. "Journalists made more references to her past history than they did to those of other candidates and focused on the negative" (Patterson 2016a). In this discussion, her successes as Secretary of State and her work during her eight years in the Senate were seldom mentioned. Instead, the press used that 26% of her coverage to discuss the Benghazi scandal, or her statements about trade, jobs and foreign policy — all of which were reported more negatively than positively (Patterson 2016a). During the invisible primary, Secretary Clinton was the only major candidate whose policy coverage was consistently in negative territory (Patterson 2016a).

2016 Primary Season

Trump's campaign message was propelled throughout 2015 and into the first stages of the primary period by incredible amounts of press coverage. It is true that he might have won the Republican nomination in any case, given the confluence of factors working in his favor, but one of his assets, without a doubt, was his press advantage. There was not a single week, for example, when coverage of Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio or John Kasich topped Trump's level of coverage (Confessore and Yourish 2016). Based on data from the Internet Archive's TV News Archive and evaluation by Luke Thompson, an expert on data analytics, Trump garnered approximately six television appearances for each one that Ted Cruz or John Kasich received. Thompson found that Trump's exposure was three times greater than Cruz and Kasich combined (Rothenberg 2016).

Additionally, from January 1st to June 7th, the Republican contest as a whole earned 63% of the total nomination coverage, compared to the 37% of the coverage devoted to the Democratic race (Patterson 2016b). The Republican race, and Trump in particular, were clearly

taking top billing. Even when Mr. Trump was the only active candidate in the Republican Party, his coverage still topped that of the ongoing Democratic race.

> Print, online and radio news organizations all gave Trump disproportionate attention during the primaries. But what we saw on television, particularly cable TV news, was a hijacking of political coverage — Donald Trump manipulating and dominating the airwaves — in which television executives were willing accomplices. Trump was able to project this image to the entire nation with a huge lift from extensive television coverage, particularly the live, unfiltered airing of Trump speeches on the campaign trail (Chernoff 2016).

His ability to cultivate his celebrity persona and appeal to media's journalistic values allowed him to receive this disproportionate coverage. Media analysts from all across the aisle believe that the coverage was not just disproportionate, "but wildly so" (Folkenflik 2016). At one point, Buzzfeed counted 69 televised phone interviews with Trump in 69 days (Folkenflik 2016). This kind of coverage was absolutely unprecedented — networks never would've allowed a non-celebrity candidate to appear on air via cellphone. It was simply not done before Trump. In this manner, Trump received a great deal more coverage than his GOP opponents as well as Hillary Clinton. Networks' decisions to air his rallies and speeches, and their obsession with covering his each and every statement amplified his message to the public.

The coverage that Trump received during the primary season was fairly evenly split between positive and negative. That is because, once again, the coverage was focused on the horserace. His position as front-runner was bolstered by polls and his success in the early state contests. During the first four contests — Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada, Trump received more than 37% of the Republican coverage, of which 57% was positive (Patterson 2016b). Much of this was due to the fact that he accumulated 82 delegates, with Cruz accumulating 17, Rubio accumulating 16 and Kasich garnering 6. Indeed, Trump's largest poll increases during the primary season came after his dramatic victory in New Hampshire and his showing during the Super Tuesday races (Patterson 2016b). It was during this exact same period that his coverage reached its peak volume and peak levels of positivity. And during this period when the first — and arguably most influential — ballots were being cast, only 5% of his coverage was about his character or policies platforms (Patterson 2016b).

It wasn't until Trump was the only candidate left in the field that coverage became more critical. The spread became 61 percent negative to 39 percent positive (Patterson 2016b). In the final month of the primary season, references to his personal character and his policies jumped to 19 percent of coverage. It seemed that journalists were finally probing his character, framing the discussion "through the lens of Trump as a possible president rather than Trump as a striving candidate" (Patterson 2016b). Indeed, scholars have found that "it isn't until later in the process, when the race is nearly settled, that substance comes more fully into the mix" (Brady and Johnston 1987). But is it too little, too late? The media focused much more extensively on Trump's negative factors after he had already eliminated the other candidates from the race. But perhaps this probing investigation should've occurred before the primary ballots had been cast.

The increase in negative coverage after Trump clinched the nomination didn't mean that the deluge of his coverage was anywhere close to slowing down. Although Trump no longer had active opposition, he still received more news coverage in the last month than Clinton or Sanders, "a development that has no possible explanation other than journalistic bias" (Patterson 2016b). Reporters are attracted to the new, the unusual, the sensational, the outrageous — the type of story material that can catch and hold an audience's attention. Trump fit that interest as has no other candidate in recent memory. Even as his Republican rivals quit the race, journalists were unable to forego the story possibilities presented by Trump's candidacy (Patterson 2016b).

The General Election

Throughout the entire general election, Trump, once again, received more coverage than Clinton. On average, he received 15 percentage points more coverage than she did (Patterson 2016d). And much of this coverage was in his own words. His slogans and soundbites — "crooked Hillary" or "make America great again" — were heard more often than her message of "stronger together." It is possible that stronger together is just an inherently weaker soundbite or message in general. But it also seems that Trump benefited tremendously from institutional bias towards' the entertainment possibilities presented by his candidacy. That is because, according to Thomas Patterson (2016d), Trump "met journalists' story needs as no other presidential nominee in modern times." That is why they followed his speeches, statements and tweets so closely. And

because he was so perfectly suited for television's soundbite format, he benefitted tremendously from copious amounts of screen time.

It is true, however, that much of his coverage during the general election was incredibly negative in tone — 77% of his coverage, in fact (Patterson 2016d). He was trailing in almost every single poll, which meant that the horserace coverage was in Clinton's favor. But if you look at the campaign as a whole (the entire 18 month battle), her negative coverage actually outweighs his — 62% negative for Clinton and 56% negative for Trump (Patterson 2016d). And in other facets during the general election, their coverage was remarkably even. When television media discussed both candidates' personal characteristics and "fitness" for office, for example, the reporting was 87% negative in tone for each (Patterson 2016d).

Then came scandals. During the general election, scandals and controversies abounded — Trump's Access Hollywood Tapes and refusal to release his taxes, as well as the reopening of Clinton's e-mail investigation. Both candidates, therefore, received a great deal of attention for their scandals during the final stretch of the election. During the general election period, controversies and scandals accounted for 17% of total coverage — or one in every six news reports. Fifteen percent of Trump's coverage was about scandals, while an unprecedented 19% of Clinton's coverage was about her campaign scandals. Her "badgering had a laser-like focus" (Patterson 2016d). And in the two weeks prior to November 8th, Clinton's e-mail investigation was the most talked about topic on television and was consistently folded into discussion of her shrinking lead in the polls (Ispahani 2016; Patterson 2016d).

> Controversies accounted for 15 percent of Trump's coverage. On the other hand, his leadership ability and experience were infrequently touched upon in the general election, accounting for four percent of his coverage. His personal traits, such as his relationship with business associates, also accounted for four percent (Patterson 2016d).

It is clear in Patterson's findings that the media did not spend a great deal of time discussing Trump's leadership experience or his personal traits during the general election. Indeed, these traits only accounted for 8% of his total coverage. While some stories about Trump's business failures or leadership experience were indeed exceptional, they seemed to be the exception, rather than the norm. Instead, journalists continued live-streaming his rallies and

speeches, and reporting on the ramifications of his scandals. This meant that for the 57% of people who get their news from television — and for the others who turned on the television to watch Mr. Trump in action — his leadership abilities or his problematic relationship with business associates were not the topics that they were thinking about when they cast their vote on Election Day.

The same thing was true of policy positions. Both candidates' policy positions were seldom discussed during the final eight weeks of the campaign. For Hillary Clinton, her policy positions received even less attention than did Trump's — 9 percent versus 12 percent (Patterson 2016d). This scant amount of coverage could not possibly educate the populace on a candidate's far-reaching policy agenda, especially for one with as many facets as that of the Clinton camp. For Trump, on the other hand, his position on immigration and his desire to build a wall between the southern United States and Mexico received the majority of his policy attention. And Clinton's record of public service received just 2% of her total coverage — an amount that seems inconceivable for properly vetting a candidate, especially one who has had such a long, complex political career (Patterson 2016d). And within that 2% of the coverage, much of it was negative. Trump was often seen on stage stating, "she's been there 30 years and has nothing to show for it" (Patterson 2016d). And once again, her response(s) to those claims received very little attention.

The Creation of False Equivalencies

The amount of negativity in media coverage of this election undoubtably contributed to the overall cynicism that Americans feel towards their elected officials. Indeed, it's gotten to the point "where the toughest story for a reporter to write about a politician is a positive story" (Patterson 2016d). But a problem arises when the sheer amount of criticism in television journalism effectively blurs important distinctions between candidates. The amount of criticism, especially in 2016, helped create false equivalencies between the scandals of Clinton and Trump. It is part of the reason why Clinton was seen as less trustworthy than Trump throughout much of the election campaign (Kristof 2016).

> Were the allegations surrounding Clinton of the same order of magnitude as those surrounding Trump? It's a question that journalists made no serious effort to

answer during the 2016 campaign. They reported all the ugly stuff they could find, and left it to the voters to decide what to make of it. Large numbers of voters concluded that the candidates' indiscretions were equally disqualifying and made their choice, not on the candidates' fitness for office, but on less tangible criteria — in some cases out of a belief that wildly unrealistic promises could actually be kept (Patterson 2016d).

It seems that false equivalencies were created throughout every step of the 2016 election. Donald Trump's business experience was constantly compared to the political experience of his GOP opponents, and allegations against him were directly compared to those against Hillary Clinton, putting them on the same playing field. Patterson (2016d) laments that "when journalists can't, or won't, distinguish between allegations directed at the Trump Foundation and those directed at the Clinton Foundation, there's something seriously amiss." According to Paul Krugman (2016), a prominent *New York Times* columnist, an honest report about the Clinton Foundation would've stated that "the foundation arguable creates the possibility of self-dealing and undue influence, but we've looked hard and haven't found much of anything." Instead, reports about the Foundation talked about how meetings with a Nobel Peace Prize winner were somehow scandalous. Krugman (2016) argued that one candidate — Clinton — was repeatedly harassed over trivial matters, while the other — Trump — was "allowed to slide on grotesque falsehoods" and enjoy the benefits of false equivalencies.

Eric Alterman (2016), in a piece for *The Nation,* discusses dozens of examples of the media, and The *New York Times*, in particular, creating false equivalencies between the two campaigns. An article on the front page of the *Times* from March 14th, 2016, for example, was called "2 Front-Runners, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, Find Their Words Can Be Weapons." The article compared Trump's use of words like "bimbo," "dog" and "fat pig" to describe women he doesn't like, to Clinton's admonition that her clean energy plan might result in a reduction in jobs in the coal industry. Essentially, the article argued that the rhetoric used by both candidates showed the vulnerabilities of each (Chozick and Rappeport 2016). "So you see, "dogs," "pigs," and "bimbos" versus clean energy. Both sides do it" (Alterman 2016). In hindsight, it seems rather inappropriate to compare the vulnerabilities of two candidates when

one is insulting women he doesn't like, while the other is admitting the potential detracting factors to a legitimate policy proposal.

Another example that Alterman (2016) offers is an article in the *Times* about the violence and chaos that was occurring at some of Trump's campaign rallies in March. The article quoted Democrat William M. Daley who stated that "both sides are fueling this" (Barbaro, Parker and Gabriel 2016). But neither Daley nor the authors offered any evidence to support this accusation. It seemed as if, according to Alterman (2016), reporters were "transparently eager to blame both sides, often regardless of circumstance." Even when articles would point out the roundly disputed inconsistencies of the Trump camp — shying away from outrightly using the word lie — they would make sure to emphatically state that "the tendency to bend facts is bipartisan" (Alterman 2016). While yes, the tendency to bend facts is bipartisan, that does not lessen the severity of the lies promoted by Trump and his surrogates.

In emphasizing the bipartisan nature of campaign falsehoods, the media effectively leveled the playing field between candidates. Since Hillary Clinton lied too — about her emails, about her grandparents immigration status — it made Trump's lies seem more appropriate in the broader political schema. Paul Krugman (2016) stated that "the media haven't treated Clinton fibs as the equivalent of outright Trump lies; they have treated more or less innocuous *Clintonisms* as major scandals while whitewashing Trump." This helped shine a very negative light on both Trump and Clinton, and contributed to the high levels of distrust felt by voters (Alterman 2016). This has potentially disastrous consequences because if "everything and everyone is portrayed negatively, there's a leveling effect that opens the door to charlatans" (Patterson 2016d).

This type of rampant criticism also invariably works against the incumbent party. If voters watch negative stories on television, they are primed to think that everything is going downhill — even if it isn't — and they will therefore be looking for a change. In our two-party system, the opposing party then, is benefitted by such coverage (Patterson 2016d). The consistent anti-government message espoused on television works as a rallying cry for voters to support the opposing party that will be able to change things up in Washington. And that is part of the story of Trump's success.

A Major Reason Why: Trump Equaled Ratings

In looking at Trump's coverage during the invisible primary, primary season and general election, it is clear that networks did not shy away from covering him. Indeed, it was the exact opposite. That is because Donald Trump equaled ratings. And in an effort to enjoy that ratings spike, television media effectively amplified his message, ensuring that people from all over the country heard what he had to say. It was not necessarily maliciously intended. It did, however, have far-reaching consequences for the electoral outcome. Groups of people who do not normally vote in such high numbers turned out to the polls on November 8th, partly because they had heard so much about him and were mobilized by his television persona (Regan 2016).

Campbell Brown, a former CNN and NBC news correspondent, in an article for Politico, explicitly blames TV for Trump. She understands why they had to spend so much time covering him, noting that during her time as an anchor, there was extensive pressure to increase ratings and to follow breaking news.

> Trump's candidacy is largely a creation of a TV media that wants him, or needs him, to be the central character in this year's political drama. And it's not just the network and cable executives driving it. The TV anchors and senior executives who don't deliver are mercilessly ousted. The ones who do deliver are lavishly rewarded. I know from personal experience that it is common practice for TV anchors to have substantial bonuses written into their contracts if they hit ratings marks. With this 2016 presidential soap opera, they are almost surely hitting those marks. So, we get all Trump, all the time (Brown 2016).

Trump truly did bring life to a business that has been in decline for the last few years, especially with the newfound dominance of social media and digital news platforms. CNN rode the controversies, the rallies, the interviews, debates and town halls to a "rare prime-time win this spring over Fox News" (Folkenflik 2016). But according to Brown (2016), that is no excuse for how the television media handled itself. Trump still should've been held accountable for his outrageous claims, especially after reveling in a media-created rise in the polls. David Folkenflik (2016) of NPR — one of the organizations that did not buy into the 24-hour Trump machine — stated that the media failed in covering his campaign. News organizations, he says, need to fulfill their jobs. Those jobs include "informing, enlightening, illuminating, stimulating and

entertaining their audiences, usually while making a profit" (Folkenflik 2016). It seems, however, that the need for profit won out over the desire to inform throughout 2016.

A Post-Truth Election?

Another question to be posed is whether the media can combat today's post-truth society. Post-truth was named the word of the year by the Oxford Dictionary in 2016, being defined as, "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." Some of what occurred during the 2016 election can be explained by this phenomenon. It is perhaps why, even when Trump was subjected to serious fact-checking, the fact-checking didn't seem to matter to most Americans. If people are more convinced by what they feel the truth is rather than what the truth actually is, it is extremely difficult to convince them otherwise.

As of today, there is very little scholarship on the specific ramifications of post-truth society or post-truth media. It can be inferred from the tumultuous 2016 election, however, that those ramifications are far-reaching. For 2016 specifically, it seemed as if the media decided to base their reporting on the tone of the election itself, which was much more emotionally based than fact based. For the candidates, and for Trump especially, the truth was all subjective. It was subjective, according to Trump, because the media was liberally biased, was trying to get Clinton elected, and was failing as an institution. In responding to this post-truth narrative that Trump was working under, the media, too, seemed less focused on concrete facts than on emotional appeals. They did do some fact checking, however, it seemed to make little difference.

This was a major trend on cable especially. 40% of Trump's voters, for example, named Fox News as their main source of election news (Gottfried, Barthel and Mitchell 2016). Fox News, a conservative niche channel, watched its audiences soar during this long election season. Indeed, 19% of all voters stated that Fox News was their main source of news (Gottfriend, Barthel and Mitchell 2016). The problem with this is that Fox News is not known for its fact-checking operations. Trump was subjected to occasional hard-hitting analysis on NBC, on PBS and in several interviews on CNN (Folkenflik 2016). Chuck Todd on *Meet the Press*, and several stories by CNN's Jake Tapper pointed out the dangerous inaccuracies in his statements. Fox

News, however, seemed to have a less concrete versions of the facts. The pundits on Fox News do not necessarily hold the same views about the facts of climate change, immigration, or terrorism as do the various experts. Fox News, as an institution, seems to be a symptom — and/or perhaps a cause — of our post-truth society. More research on the effects of Fox News and of post-truth media needs to be done before any concrete conclusions can be made, however, it is a reflection on the state of our society and of our media more generally. The fact that a media outlet that often discusses non-factual information is so successful shows that the post-truth aspect of media has become engrained into our media landscape.

Conclusion

Television brings candidates into peoples' living rooms, it broadcasts their images, their advertisements, their scandals and their successes. And since it is the source of news preferred by most American adults, it should fulfill its duty to educate and provide context behind the characters that it broadcasts. Indeed, Trump was a gifted manipulator of the media, and an expert at using his media prowess. But the media could've and should've done more. Journalists spent so many hours airing his live speeches, speaking to him in cell phone interviews, and speaking to his many public surrogates, that they effectively became another branch of his campaign. Several op-ed's asked whether or not the executive staff at CNN might, in fact, be on Donald Trump's payroll. While this is obviously an exaggeration, it does show the major faults in the way that the media covered Donald Trump, and the 2016 contest as a whole.

It began when Mr. Trump entered the race. He began in early June polling at just 1%. A month later, after dominating the GOP news coverage, he was polling in first place. It seems too directional to be coincidental. The media simply could not avoid their desire for a good story, and executives couldn't ignore the boost in ratings that he created. Once he was in first place, Trump benefited tremendously from the news values outlined in my first chapter. The news media is obsessed with scandals, with gaffes, and with events that are new and exciting — and he appealed to each and every one of those values. Trump was the motherload.

In their adherence to those values, they failed to subject Trump to the same amount of scrutiny as his GOP opponents. When Jeb Bush was subjected to intense criticism for his

position on Common Core, Trump sat idly by, producing soundbites about Jeb as weak and ineffective. And when Marco Rubio started rising in the polls due to his positions, Trump's comments about the size of his feet and hands effectively brought the conversation back to him. But these comments never brought coverage back to the issues — which is exactly what Trump seemed to want. And the media hardly pressed him to discuss concrete issues. Then when they did, he was smart and deft enough to deflect the conversation back onto his opponents, his own leading position in the polls, or the media's failures as an institution.

All of these factors — the media's ironic affection for 'the Donald,' their decision to live-stream his events, and their obsession with the horserace — helped lead to Trump's victory. He benefitted from a great deal of free media which helped to amplify his message to the public. And although many anchors did their best to question Trump and hold him accountable, it simply wasn't enough. The amount of free exposure he received when each and every one of his Tweets, statements and outbursts was broadcasted to America outweighed much of the more hard-hitting reporting. Most of Trump's coverage was about the horserace, or was simply live-feeds of his speeches without extensive fact-checking. Because the election was not being contested based on the facts, television networks did not seem to feel the need to discuss them extensively. And while it is true that the media did not *create* Trump, they did bolster him by buying into the circus. It was good for ratings, good for advertisers, and good for Trump all at the same time.

Chapter 4:

Expanding the Agenda-Setting Model

> In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important role in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues — that is, the media may set the "agenda" of the campaign (McCombs and Shaw 1972, 176).

The agenda-setting model of mass media, when it was introduced in 1972, represented a milestone in mass communication research. The theory, introduced by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) stated that the media strongly influence the priorities of the public. In other words, "the news media set the agenda for the public's attention to that small group of issues around which public opinion forms" (McCombs 2000). The reason why the theory was so groundbreaking was because previous communications research relied on the hypothesis that the media exerted little influence on the public. Early studies found that the effects of newspapers, radio and television on political campaigns "were not impressive" (Patterson 1980, 74). They believed that social processes, selective attention, and other mediating factors were more important in determining the public's priorities.

But this assumption was turned on its head following McCombs' and Shaw's (1972) initial study. Their research showed that mass media set the campaign agenda for the public during the 1968 election. The policy issues that had been promulgated by the media as the most important issues during that campaign were identified by each of the experimental participants as the most pressing issues facing America. Clearly then the media had an incredibly strong role in determining voters' perceptions of the most important problems of the day. Indeed, subsequent studies have corroborated the idea that the media has a great deal of power in influencing public perceptions of the political world. This means that the media is able to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda — which has become the overarching definition of the agenda-setting theory in subsequent research. And this hypothesis has been supported by hundreds of

studies over the last four decades (Abramson et. al 2012; Bennett 2014; Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Iyengar 1991; Rogers and Dearing 2007).

The idea that the media does play a role in developing the public agenda is now widely accepted. In 1972, Theodore White wrote that "the power of the press is a primordial one. It determines what people will think and talk about — an authority that in other nations is reserved for tyrants, priests, parties and mandarins" (5). Today that assessment still holds true; the news media is responsible for organizing much of the election process. In that framework reporters tell citizens not so much what to think, but what to think *about*. They effectively set the issue agenda for the nation, and form the intellectual basis for people's ensuing knowledge. The press tells citizens how much importance to bestow on certain issues, and gives them the frame within which to view those same topics. By "attending to some problems and ignoring others, television news shapes the American public's political priorities" (Iyengar and Kinder 2010, 33).

If the media had little impact on the priorities of the public, what aired on evening newscasts would matter little. But we know that this is not the case. That is why it is so important to study the media's ability to set the agenda. In this chapter, I will begin by outlining existing agenda-setting research, and then move to original quantitive research on the agenda-setting effect of mass media. Finally, I will present avenues for future research and discuss some of the broader takeaways.

Over the decades, the agenda-setting theory of mass media has been expanded to include more than simply issues. Today, there are several layers of agenda-setting that encompass attribute agenda-setting and attributes of issues. But I am interested in further expanding the model. In my expansion of the model I will work to show that the media's increase in personality coverage has caused personality to become a more important factor in vote choice. I will investigate questions of dislike, candidate mood thermometers and strength of candidate preference in an effort to show that voters are becoming more sure of their beliefs about particular candidates over time. Afterwards, I will begin a brief discussion of the media's ability to set the agenda on the broader horserace narrative in an effort to inspire further research.

An Outline of Agenda Setting Research

As mentioned previously, most people are never able to interact directly with candidates, government officials or policymakers. Therefore, citizens' images of candidates and politics in general are almost exclusively defined by the media. Much of what citizens know about the world, then, is based on what the media decide to tell them.

> Rather than a mirror held up to reality, a medium which reflects all that is there with a high degree of reliability, the press is a prism held up to reality, a prism that refracts and filters reality according to a professional set of criteria (Weaver et al. 1981, 4).

Walter Lippmann (1922, 4) in his classic *Public Opinion,* has an entire chapter entitled "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads" that discusses how the media creates the pictures that voters respond to. What various scholarship has shown is that the images promulgated by the media are the ones that help bring this far away reality to light for millions of people around the world. Newspapers provide a number of cues about the importance of the topics in the news — lead story on page one, large headlines, emphasized photos, etc. Television news, similarly, offers numerous clues about salience — the lead-off story of a newscast, length of time devoted to the story and the magnitude of images displayed alongside the words, etc. These cues repeated over and over again effectively communicate the importance of each topic to the public and affect their level of prominence in people's minds (McCombs 2000).

When television news focuses on a problem, the public's priorities are altered, and then are altered again when television moves on to new developments. In this manner, "an election campaign exists in the public consciousness largely the way it exists in media presentation of campaign events" (Weaver et al. 1981, 3). Agenda-setting occurs through a cognitive process known as "accessibility" which has been studied extensively by psychologists. This concept shows that the more frequently and prominently the news media cover an issue, the more instances of that issue become accessible in audience's memories. And when respondents are asked what the most important problem facing the nation is, they respond with the most accessible issue in their memory, which is typically the issue that the news media focused on the most. Thus, the agenda-setting effect is due to the aggregate impact of a large number of

messages on the same general issues and their effects on the cognitive concept of accessibility (McCombs 1992, 2000).

Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder (1987) found this in their research as well. They performed experiments that showed that when viewers watched multiple stories on the evening news that emphasized a certain problem, the viewers then regarded that problem as more important for the country, began to care more about it, and were much more likely to identify it as one of the United States' most pressing concerns. Participants who viewed the stories about law and order were much more likely to believe that law and order was a priority for the nation than those participants who viewed 'control' stories that did not emphasize any issue in particular. This effect was further enhanced when the story was the lead-off story of a nightly news broadcast.

> Americans' views of their society and nation are powerfully shaped by the stories that appear on the evening news. We found that people who were shown network broadcasts edited to draw attention to a particular problem assigned greater importance to that problem — greater importance than they themselves did before the experiment began, and greater importance than did people assigned to control conditions that emphasized different problems (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, 113).

McCombs and Shaw (1972) found in their initial study that voters' perceptions of the importance of issues were determined by media attention to those issues (in terms of number of stories) rather than by the voters' selective attention. Indeed, they found a .967 rank order correlation when comparing the media agenda — as measured by content analysis — with the public's agenda — as measured by a survey of voters. The 'media agenda' is determined by the pattern of coverage of issues over a pre-determined period of time. In the time frame under review, a few issues are emphasized, some receive light coverage, and many are rarely or never mentioned. And the public agenda — the other component of the assessment — is commonly assessed by public opinion polls or studies that ask some variation of the long-standing Gallup Poll question, "what is the most important problem facing this country today?"

The voters for the study were selected from five precincts in Chapel Hill, North Carolina that were economically, socially and racially representative of the community as a whole. By restricting the study to one community, other sources of variation — regional differences or

variations in media performance, for example — were controlled. The 100 interviews that were conducted were restricted to voters who were not yet fully committed to a particular candidate and who were therefore more susceptible to campaign information during the general election campaign of 1968. In their month long study, they found that there was almost complete correspondence between the amount that the media covered certain issues and the rank with which participants placed those same policy issues on a list. If, for example, the media talked about foreign policy the most, law and order the second most, fiscal policy the third most and civil rights the least, then the voters' priorities would also follow in the same order (McCombs and Shaw 1972).

Conversely, when the media's focus is not on a particular topic, the public's focus will also be directed elsewhere. Take the election of 2000 as an example. In 2000, reporters said little about the conditions of the national economy because it had been growing at such a consistent rate over the last eight years. Exit polls taken in 2000 showed that only 18% of those casting a ballot in the contest between Al Gore and George Bush considered the economy to be the most important issue. Compare this to the 1992 election, where the economy was the major topic of conversation. In exit polls from 1992, 43% of voters stated that the economy was the most important issue. The same can be said in 2008, when 63% of voters said the most important issue was the economy, since it was so heavily emphasized. But in 2004, when the focus was on moral values and the Iraq war, both moral values and Iraq were cited as more important to voters than the state of the economy (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011; Pew 2004, 2008). The responses to these exit polls show that there is a significant relationship between the issues on the media agenda and the issues on the public agenda.

What Shaw and McCombs (1977) then needed to prove was causation. Was the original correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda caused by the media's priorities, or was the media simply reflecting the public's priorities? To investigate this claim, Shaw and McCombs (1977) designed a study to determine the directionality of the agenda flow. Through the use of year long longitudinal panel research in Charlotte, NC in 1972, they found that there was a .51 correlation from the newspaper agenda to the later public agenda, while there was only a .19 correlation from the public agenda to the later newspaper agenda. The study also found that

CBS and NBC had greater effects on the later public agenda than newspapers — so the .51 would've been higher if the study had isolated just television. What this study showed, at least preliminarily, was causation; the media agenda was driving the public agenda, and not the other way around.

Since these two foundational studies, hundreds of scholars over a 40 year period have taken up the agenda-setting theory. Studies have used a variety of research designs in investigating this theory including numerous panel studies, time-series analyses and controlled laboratory experiments. In accordance with McCombs and Shaw's original study, social scientists in the subsequent studies calculated the correlation between the ranking of issues on the media agenda and the ranking of issues on the resulting public agenda in order to aid in comparisons across studies. In the entire decade of the 1960's, for example, the correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda was +.78. And for the 1976 election, the correlation was +.63 between the national television agenda and the subsequent voter agenda (Weaver et al. 1981). And when taken together, the aggregate research over decades shows that there is a +.50 correlation between how issues are ranked on the media agenda and how the public ranks the importance of those same issues (McCombs 2000). That reflects a substantial degree of influence.

The sheer number of studies and the scope of the scholarship has created several levels of agenda-setting as a theory of mass media. Subsequent studies, which focused on different aspects of media coverage, found that the media can also set the agenda about the tone of issues, rather than just the issues themselves. When scholars studied the specific content of mass media messages — including the tone of those messages — they gained a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the way that the media impacts the pictures in our heads and the "subsequent attitudes and opinions grounded in those pictures" (McCombs 2000).

The second level of agenda-setting, discussed in McCombs et al. (1981) and Balmas and Sheafer (2010) is the idea of "attribute" salience. McCombs et al. (1981) found that the salience of attributes — characteristics and traits — in the news messages transferred to the public established an agenda-setting effect for candidate attributes. The focus at the first level of agenda-setting emphasized the media's role in telling voters what to think about, while this

second level discussed the media's role in telling voters *how* to think about objects. This second level focuses more on how issues, objects and people are depicted — whether they are reported on positively or negatively, for example — rather than what issues are reported on more or less. For example, respondents were able to rate the two presidential candidates in 1976 — Ford and Carter — on a scale regarding a wide range of image attributes: man of principles, inspires confidence, compassionate, forthright, versatile, etc. The ratings given to both candidates regarding these various attributes were very similar to the tone in which these traits were discussed by the mass media. McCombs, in his 1992 (820-821) study, reflected that:

> Agenda-setting is about more than issue or object salience. The news not only tells us what to think about; it also tells us how to think about it. Both the selection of topics for the news agenda and the selection of frames for stories about those topics are powerful agenda-setting roles and awesome ethical responsibilities.

The agenda of attributes or objects presented by the news media influence what the pictures in our heads are *about,* not just what the pictures are. Maxwell McCombs and Lee Becker (1979) found that the correspondence between the news agenda of attributes and the voter agenda of attributes in 1976 was +.64 in mid-February. By late March, the correlation had grown to +.83. By comparing the news agenda's descriptions of the Democratic contenders for president with the descriptions given by voters, they found a strong correlation of qualities and traits. So if the media discussed a candidate favorably, than respondents would also begin to view him or her more favorably. Or more accurately, favorable coverage of one candidate contributed to a decrease in support for their opponent. I will investigate further evidence of this later in this chapter. McCombs and Becker's (1979) study showed that voters not only effectively learned the media's attribute agenda, but they actually learned it better with additional exposure over time.

There are also examples of attribute agenda-setting for issues. A study undertaken in 2000 found that the news media's presentation of social welfare and the way in which U.S. voters talked about the issue was incredibly similar (McCombs 2000). Indeed, there was a +.60 correlation. Since the tone during the campaign was very anti social welfare, so too were

responses during a panel study. For issues like the environment, the results are very similar. A study undertaken in Japan found that were was a +.78 correspondence between the presentation of the issue in the Japanese newspapers and the way that residents of Tokyo thought about eight aspects of the issue (McCombs 2000). And while this example is not U.S. specific, it does go to show the way that the media can impact the public's perception of certain attributes of the issues, and not just the issues themselves.

This is also where the idea of media frames comes in. Framing, in its most basic sense, is the tone with which issues, people and objects are discussed. The news media supplies the context that gives people reasons for taking sides or forming strong opinions on issues, people or events (Graber 1997, 167). Most scholars use the word interchangeably with the idea of attribute agenda-setting discussed above, and McCombs himself called framing a logical extension of his theoretical work (McCombs 2000).

Expanding Agenda-Setting: ANES Analysis

Past research on agenda-setting, for the most part, revolves around the ways in which the news media's issue agenda — discussion of the economy, health care, abortion, crime, etc. — impacts voters' perceptions on the saliency of issues. There tends to be a strong rank order correlation between topics on the media agenda and the public's subsequent agenda. While some research has expanded the theory's purview into the attribute agenda and the broader idea of framing, I still believe there is more to be said. For my research, I am interested in cementing the expansion of the theory and providing more corroborating evidence. If voters are exposed primarily to negative news coverage about candidates and issues, for example, does that cause them to think about candidates and issues within the same negative frame? If more and more television attention is spent on candidate personality and character, does that then become more salient to voters? Essentially, does agenda-setting prime viewers on what to think about and how to think about other aspects of the campaign besides policy and issues?

I was inspired by the work of several early scholars of agenda-setting in taking up this question. David Weaver, Doris Graber, Maxwell McCombs and Chaim Eyal (1981, 4) wrote that "over time the priorities of the press become the priorities of the public." Now wouldn't that

same logic apply to things besides simply the issue agenda? If the priorities of the press are scandal, competition, and personality, do those too become the priorities of the public? Cappella and Jamieson (1997), for example, found that when citizens are exposed primarily to horserace news coverage, they do a much better job recalling that information than more substantive matters. And since we know that voters make their decisions and assessments based on the cognitive concept of accessibility, the fact that this information is the most readily accessible is important to note.

Some research on this has been done. McCombs (2000) found that because of the increasing salience of public figures in the news, more people have moved away from a neutral position about candidates and have formed a strong opinion about them. An examination of all five elections between 1980 and 1996 found exceedingly strong correlations between the pattern of media emphasis, and the relatively few number of people who expressed ambivalent opinions about the candidates. When a respondent felt ambivalence about a candidate, they were likely to choose somewhere close to the mid-point of various rating scales, including the thermometer scale used to gauge citizens opinions on candidates in the American National Election Survey (ANES) dataset. McCombs (2000) found that 20 of the 24 comparisons between media attention and subsequent strong opinions about a candidate were significant, with a median value of -.90. The correlation is negative because high salience for a candidate in the media was associated with a low number of people who selected the neutral mid-point on the rating scales. There were many more people who chose either very hot or very cold 'temperatures' when rating various candidates from 1980 to 1996 than there were people who chose to stay near the middle.

For my own original research, I too, will be using the American National Election Survey datasets. I will be looking at the same mood thermometers to investigate whether or not people's opinions of candidates have become hotter or colder over time, or have stayed relatively ambivalent. I will also look at questions of 'dislike,' which ask respondents if there are things that they dislike about a candidate enough to vote against them. These variables will allow me to analyze whether the news media's focus on candidates' personalities have increased the salience of candidates on the public agenda, and have given respondents more negative points of reference. Also in the ANES dataset, I will be looking at respondents' understandings of who will

win the race as well as the closeness of the race. This will help show the ways in which the media set the agenda for people's understandings of the horserace, since that is such a dominant frame of coverage. All of this is in an effort to expand the agenda-setting model, to prove its broader implications, and to look for avenues for future research.

<u>Candidate Thermometers</u>

In looking at the mood thermometers for candidates over time, there is a great deal of variation, depending on the candidates themselves and the year in question. But I am curious to see if the trend identified by McCombs (2000) — a decrease in ambivalence and an increase in polarity — can be seen over time. I am curious to see if the increase in media coverage of candidates, personalities, scandals and candidate controversies causes respondents to have stronger opinions — positive or negative — about candidates. Mostly, I am interested to see if negative opinions, perhaps thanks to news values and focuses of media coverage, have increased over time. To investigate this, I will analyze candidate mood thermometers from each election from 1968 until 2008 to see if the amount of ambivalence among respondents has decreased. When it has, I will attempt to understand why by comparing the respondents' evaluations with news stories during that time. And when it has not, I will also work to bring that trend into context. I will begin with the election of 1968, which is the first to ask respondents to rank candidates on the thermometer, and end in 2008, the last election for which this data is available to the public.

Hubert Humphrey — the Democratic candidate for president in 1968 — is the first on the list. In looking at respondents' placement of Humphrey on the thermometer from 1 to 100, the mean for the data is approximately 54, while the median is 50. This shows that for Humphrey, there was a high level of ambivalence among respondents. Twenty-one percent of participants — 1,831 out of 8,768 cases — ranked Humphrey at 50 degrees along the 100 degree scale. Seventeen percent of people ranked Humphrey at 60 degrees, and 9% ranked him at 40 degrees. Clearly then, a plurality of respondents seemed to be ambivalent about Humphrey as a candidate during the 1968 contest. Much of this could perhaps come from the lack of coverage about him during the primary season, since he was selected as the party's nominee during the brokered

convention of 1968. Since respondents did not know very much about him as a person, they were unlikely to have developed strong opinions positively or negatively.

Next comes Richard Nixon, the Republican candidate for president in 1968. The mean for his rankings was 45, while the median was once again 50. In comparing respondents' assessments of him against those for Humphrey, there is much more variation in responses. Twenty percent of respondents ranked Nixon a zero on the 100 point scale, for example, compared to the 7.3% of people who ranked Humphrey with a zero. There are also many more people who ranked Nixon at a 15 or an 85 than did for Humphrey. This could be because Nixon's long political career allowed people to develop concrete opinions about him before as well as during the election campaign of 1968. But once again, a plurality of responses are between 40 and 60 degrees. And the fact that the median is 50 and the mean is 45 shows that the level of ambivalence for Nixon was still quite high.

George McGovern, the Democratic candidate in 1972, was also rated near the midpoint by a majority of respondents. Twenty-nine percent of people gave McGovern a rating of 50, with 10% giving him a 40 and 15% giving him a 60 on the thermometer. The mean was slightly lower than it was for Nixon in 1972, where Humphrey had a mean of 48, while the median was still 50. Nixon's mood ratings had improved from four years prior; his mean increased to 55 while the median moved to 60. For McGovern, only 9.8% of respondents ranked him at 0, and only 2.8% of respondents gave him a value of 97 or above. McGovern, like Humphrey four years prior, received highly ambivalent assessments from voters. In 1972, Richard Nixon won the election in a landslide, carrying 49 of the 50 states and almost 61% of the popular vote. He received almost 18 million more votes than McGovern, which represents the widest margin of any United States presidential election. Nixon was leading in the polls by large margins throughout the entire campaign, and received the bulk of coverage because of it — McGovern was always in the background. And thinking back to my discussion of coverage of the 1972 election back in Chapter 2, it is important to remember that more than 77% of total coverage was neutral or ambiguous in tone towards McGovern as well as Nixon (Hofstetter 1976, 50). This could help explain why the level of ambiguity in responses remained so high.

Jimmy Carter, in 1976, was ranked much higher on the mood scale than his predecessors in the ANES database. Only 14.5% of people ranked Carter at 50, with 17.1% ranking him at 60, 17.4% ranking him at 70, and 13.8% ranking him at 85. This made the mean rise up to 58, with a median of 60 — based on 3,965 cases. Gerald Ford, the other candidate in 1976, also received more markedly positive ratings on the thermometer. The mean for his aggregate assessments during 1976 was 60, with a median of 60 as well. The majority of respondents rated Ford at a 60 or above on the 100 point scale, with more than 36% rating him at 70 degrees or above. The move away from ambivalence on the part of respondents is likely due to the increased coverage of candidates during the long primary season. Twelve candidates vied for the Democratic nomination, while Ford was challenged by Ronald Reagan on the Republican side. During these month long battles, coverage focused on candidate personality, and media images brought the candidates themselves to the forefront. This likely allowed respondents to develop more concrete, more positive and less ambivalent feelings about the contenders for president.

Reagan fit that same pattern when he was the Republican candidate in 1980. With a mean of 58 and a median of 60, respondents were much more likely to rate him more positively on the thermometer than they were for Nixon, Humphrey and McGovern. His assessments resembled closely those of Carter and Ford from four years prior, and of Carter, once again, in 1980. The majority of people rated Reagan at 60 or above, with 41% rating him a 70 or above. Ten percent of people rated Reagan a 97 or above. Carter's coverage became somewhat less positive than it was in 1976, but levels of ambivalence — the amount of people who rated him at 50 degrees on the scale — stayed below 15%.

Walter Mondale, the Democrat in 1984, received much more neutral assessments. Thirty-two percent of respondents ranked him at 50 degrees. His mean was still above 50, with a mean of 55 and a median of 50. The reason for this, perhaps, is Mondale's lack of saliency during the election. That was one of McCombs' original conditions, outlined in 1992. He argued that a lack of saliency on the part of a candidate in the media led to an increase in the amount of ambivalence among respondents. Reagan was without a doubt the dominant figure during the election, receiving more than 60% of total coverage. Then on election day, he carried 49 of the 50 states, and almost 60% of the popular vote. It is because of Mondale's lack of coverage, it can

be argued, that his assessments reverted back to the candidates of the 1960's and early 1970's. Media coverage of Mondale simply did not identify him as overwhelmingly negative or overwhelming positive, and his candidacy ultimately produced ambivalence from many respondents (Blume 1985, 228). Whether that made him more or less salient remains to be seen, but it does go to show that respondents had not developed strong positive or negative feelings about him overall.

The exact same pattern can be seen with assessments of Bob Dole and Ross Perot during the 1996 election. Thirty-two percent of respondents ranked Dole at 50 on the scale — which is the exact same percentage of people who ranked Mondale at 50 degrees eight years prior. And once again, Bob Dole lost to Clinton in a landslide, with Clinton winning 31 states and 379 electoral votes, more than twice that of his opponent. Twenty-five percent of respondents ranked Ross Perot — the independent candidate — at 50 degrees. While not as significant as the number for Dole, it still represents a large degree of ambivalence. So it is fair to assume that Dole's and Perot's lack of prominence as candidates prevented them from causing strong reactions from voters. Whether that was the fault of Dole, Perot and their campaigns, or whether it was caused by media messages about them during the campaign is something worthy of further research.

Assessments of George H. W. Bush during the 1988 election, once again, moved away from ambivalence. With a mean value of 57 and a median of 60, respondents had more positive evaluations of Bush than they did negative or ambivalent ones. Forty-four percent of people rated Bush at 60 degrees or higher. As for the other candidate in 1988, Michael Dukakis, there is no thermometer data available. I don't know exactly why, however, I am unfortunately forced to leave discussion of his candidacy out of subsequent analysis.

Only 10% of respondents ranked Bill Clinton at 50 degrees during the 1992 election. This is the smallest number of mid-level responses thus far. The plurality of people ranked Clinton at either 60, 70 or 85 degrees. This is likely because much of Clinton's coverage was focused on his personal qualities throughout the race (Graber 1997, 251). The largest component of his coverage, as identified by Doris Graber (1997, 251) was personality traits — such as integrity, reliability and compassion — style characteristics and image characteristics. The trend continued in 2000 when the plurality of respondents also ranked Al Gore and George W. Bush at 60, 70 or

85 degrees. With a mean of 55 and a median of 60, there were clearly more positive assessments than negative and/or ambivalent ones about Al Gore. The same pattern was true of George W. Bush, with a mean of 58 and a median of 60.

In 2004, assessments of Bush were the most positive thus far. They were also clearly the least ambivalent. Only 8% of respondents ranked him at a 50 on the scale, with 12.8% ranking him at 70, 16.1% ranking him at 85, and a notable 14.5% ranking him at 100. Also notable is the 14.2% of respondents who ranked Bush at a 0 on the 100 point scale. Clearly then, assessments of Bush had moved sharply away from ambivalent territory during the 2004 campaign. Assessments of John Kerry also moved away from ambivalence into positive territory. While not as notable as assessments of Bush during the election, a plurality of people still ranked him at 60 or above on the thermometer.

The trend continued in 2008. John McCain and Barack Obama were both ranked positively on the temperature scale, with Barack Obama being ranked the most positive. Only 12.3% ranked him at 50 degrees, while 19% of respondents ranked him at 85 degrees and 17.8% of respondents ranked him at 100 degrees. McCain's numbers are less positive, but still less ambivalent than the candidates of the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's. Nineteen percent of people ranked McCain at 50 degrees, with 12.1% ranking him at 70 degrees and 10.1% ranking him at 85 degrees. Hillary Clinton, who did not end up becoming the Democratic nominee, but who was an important figure throughout the entire primary season, also inspired strong opinions among respondents, much like Obama. Only 11% of people ranked her at 50 degrees, with the majority of respondents ranking her at 70 degrees or above. And for 2012 and 2016, the feeling thermometer data is not available. The published version of the 2012 ANES dataset does not include candidate thermometers, and the 2016 data has yet to be released.

In looking at the aggregate trends here, McCombs' argument seems to hold true. Increased coverage about candidates' personal backgrounds, scandals and personalities has allowed those factors to become more accessible — and perhaps more salient — to voters. In looking at the data from the late 1990's and 2000's, respondents were much less likely to rate candidates at the mid-point of a 100 point scale. They were more likely to rate candidates at 60, 70, 85 or even 100 degrees. This data is surprising considering the amount of negative coverage

that we know is promulgated by the media. Perhaps, then, negativity in the media plays less of a role than we think — especially if all candidates are being covered negatively. But much more research would need to be done to explain the cause of these positive candidate assessments. What the data does show, at least preliminarily, is that increased coverage of candidates as people has decreased the frequency of people possessing purely ambivalent feelings about them. Since the candidates are becoming more visible to voters, respondents are more comfortable placing them farther away from the mid-point on a feeling thermometer.

This is corroborated by the fact that when comparing the thermometers of various candidates from people who do and do not watch television, there is a demonstrable correlation. Those who watched television were much less likely than those who did not watch television to rank the candidates at 50 degrees on the thermometer. For Ford, 14.7% of people who watched him on television ranked him at 50 degrees, while more than 21% of those who did not watch him on TV ranked him at 50 degrees. For McGovern, the breakdown was 27.7% to 34.4% when comparing television viewers to non television viewers. And for Humphrey, the breakdown was 20.5% to 30.4% — or almost 10 full percentage points. The same 10 percentage point differentiation was demonstrated in responses about Gore, Clinton and Nixon. Data shows that those who watched television had stronger assessments of the candidates than those who did not and that they were statistically less likely to rank them at 50 degrees on the 100 point scale.

Strength of Candidate Preference

Another related factor that can be analyzed in the ANES data is the strength of candidate preference. Over time, the strength with which people support their vote choice has grown. In the years that this question has been asked, so from 1980 until 2004, the strength with which people support their candidate has grown notably. In 1980, 68.4% of respondents said that they supported their vote choice strongly. Thirty-two percent of people responded that their choice was not very strong. By 2004, the amount of people who supported their candidate strongly was 82.6%, with the percentage of people who supported a candidate not strongly at 17.4%. And this trend grew at a stable rate from 1980 until 2004.

There are several potential causes of this increase in strength of preference. It is a widely discussed and widely studied phenomenon that partisanship seems to be becoming stronger over time. So of course that likely plays a role in this increase in strength of preference. To what degree would need to be studied more closely. The impact of media, too, likely plays a role. Its role can be seen in the ANES data. When the strength of candidate preference is compared with whether or not respondents watched television news programs about the campaign and about the election, there is a strong correlation. People who watched television programs were seven percentage points more likely to have strong overall opinions about their vote choice than those who did not have television news.

The trend remained strong even for those respondents who identified themselves as independent or apolitical. Fifty-eight percent of independent or apolitical respondents who did not watch television news supported their candidate strongly, while 66% of those who watched television news supported their candidate strongly. While these findings do not conclusively prove that television news alone caused the increase in the strength of candidate preference, they do show that there is a distinct correlation. More research would need to be undertaken to test this condition while controlling for other variables like partisanship, selective attention, media variables, etc. But that does not mean that these findings are insignificant. Indeed, they do go to show that television viewership does relate to the strength with which respondents support their vote choice.

Questions of Dislike

From 1972 to 2012, the national election study asked respondents if there was anything in particular about a candidate that might make them want to vote *against* him/her. The question isolated the Republican candidate for president and the Democratic candidate for president, asking respondents if there was anything in particular that they disliked about each. This yes or no question yielded rather consistent results regarding dislike for candidates. In 1972, 69% of respondents disliked something strongly enough about the Democratic presidential candidate — George McGovern — to vote against him. In 1976, 58% of respondents disliked something about Jimmy Carter enough to vote against him. In 1980, 69% of people disliked something about

Carter enough to vote against him, with 55% disliking Walter Mondale enough to vote against him in 1984. Fifty-five percent of respondents strongly disliked something about Michael Dukakis in 1988, and 52% of people disliked something about Bill Clinton in 1992. In each election besides 2000, 2008 and 2012, the amount of people who disliked something about the Democratic candidate enough to vote against him or her was more than 50%. Al Gore and Barack Obama were the exceptions.

The same pattern was evident with the Republican candidates for president. In each election cycle besides 1972 and 2000, more than 50% of respondents said that there was something that they disliked about the Republican candidate enough to vote against him. The largest discrepancy was in 1992, when 68% of respondents said that there was something in particular about George H.W. Bush that made them want to vote against him. The results for each election stayed between 50% and 70%, besides the two exceptions. Much of that variation came from differences in candidates themselves, but it also could be partly based on media coverage of candidates as well as issues. In 1992, the media narrative about George H.W. Bush's handling of the economy was extremely negative — it involved not only attacks on his policies, but attacks on his personality as well. Perhaps this contributed to an increase in respondents who disliked his handling of the economy enough to vote against him.

In response to the question posed above — is there anything in particular about a party's candidates that makes you want to vote against him/her? — researchers would ask respondents to elaborate. They asked respondents what the particular things were exactly. If a respondent gave one dislike, they were coded with a 1. If they offered two negative mentions, they were coded with a 2. So on and so forth. In comparing the data from 1952 to 2004 (the last year the data for number of dislikes is available), the amount of negative mentions increased for both the Republican and Democratic candidates, as one might expect.

In looking at the aggregate data for Republican candidates over time, the amount of respondents who give zero negative mentions has decreased slightly over time, but has remained relatively stable. The amount of respondents who provide only one negative mention also decreased over time. What increased was the amount of people providing three, four or five negative mentions about a Republican candidate. In 1952, .7% of people — or only 13 out of

1,899 people — gave five dislikes about the candidate. By 2004, that number had moved to 9.2% — or 112 out of 1,212 people. The campaign that yielded the most number of negative mentions for the Republican was 1992, where 259 respondents out of 2,485 total participants, or 10.4%, gave five or more dislikes about President George Bush. As I discussed in Chapter 2, 1992 does seem to be an important benchmark in discussing changes in media coverage of campaigns, especially with regards to negativity.

The same pattern occurred on the Democratic side, although less severely. The number of respondents who provided two or three negative mentions of the Democratic candidate grew markedly over the years from 1952 to 2004. Only 4.7 percent of participants provided two negative mentions in 1952, while more than 14% of participants provided two negative mentions by 2004. The number of people who give four or five negative mentions is not as many as for the Republican side, however, there has still been a slight increase over time — from .7% in 1952 to 5.4% in 2004. And the trend does seem to be growing in a rather stable manner.

Taken together, this dislike data provides evidence for several broad trends. Firstly, respondents are more likely than not to have specific negative associations with a candidate that make them want to vote against him/her. This is evidenced by the fact that more than half of respondents consistently say that there are things about the candidate that make them want to vote against him/her. What is more interesting is the number of dislikes that respondents are able to reference when asked to elaborate. Over time, the number of people with zero, one or two dislikes about a candidate has decreased, while the number of respondents who reference three, four or five negative factors has grown. Over time it seems that respondents are able to access more negative factors in their minds, and have developed stronger images of detracting factors about candidates of both parties. This goes to show the way that attribute agenda-setting has created a stronger understanding of negative factors over time, and has given citizens more examples to reference.

This can be seen outright when comparing the number of dislikes mentioned with whether or not the respondent watched television news programs about the campaign. People who did not watch television were more than 16 percentage points more likely to respond with zero negative mentions than those who did watch television. And those who did watch television

named one, two, three, four or five dislikes much more often than non-television viewers. The correlation was significant for the Democratic candidate as well as the Republican candidate. Those who watched television were able to access more negative mentions of the candidates themselves. Important to note is that those who watched television were able to access more positive mentions, or likes, about candidates as well. Indeed, candidates themselves were much more salient to television viewers than non-television viewers in that they could name more things — good or bad — about them.

In expanding the agenda-setting model, this does seem to corroborate my initial hypothesis that the increase in discussion of personality has made these issues more accessible to viewers. What remains unknown is what exact effect this has had on people's final vote choice. More research would need to be done to show that the increase in discussion of character has caused character or personality to become a more important factor in peoples' vote choice. This variable would need to be isolated to show this connection outright. A rank order correlation, like the one performed in McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study would need to be done to prove if personality or character has moved higher up on the list of deciding factors for voters.

Understanding and Knowledge of the Horserace

Another way to investigate the potential further agenda-setting effects of the news media is to look at people's understandings of who is going to win the race. This is one way to measure how well the horserace has been engrained into people's minds. A question within the ANES asks respondents whether or not they think that the race will be a close one, or whether one candidate will win by quite a bit. The responses are coded for those who think the race will be close, those who think the winner will win by a large margin, and for those who offer some kind of modifying factor like "it depends." In looking at the responses from 1952 to 2012, the public has been consistently able to identify whether or not the election was going to be close. What is also interesting is the change in the amount of people who said that the results would depend on other factors over time. In 1952, 19.2% of people could not answer whether or not the election would be a close race, and instead offered other potential modifying factors. The level of this response remained between 15% and 25% from 1956 until 1980. Then by 1984, the amount of

respondents who offered modifying factors dropped to 6.3%. And it only went down from there. By 2004, only 1.3% of people said that the closeness of the race would depend on future events or other potential avenues for change.

Clearly then, respondents understanding about the closeness of the race has become stronger. Respondents can now identify with little doubt whether the election is going to be close or whether the margin between candidates will be quite wide, especially for those respondents who are regular viewers of TV news. In 2000, 86.2% of respondents were confident in saying that the race was going to be quite close. Seventy-nine percent of respondents believed the race was going to be close in 1992, and 81% of respondents believed that the race was going to be close in 2004. And they were correct in each and every election cycle. When a clear majority of respondents believed that a race would be close, it ended up being incredibly close. And when a smaller majority of respondents believed that the race would be close, it was close, though less so. Clearly then they had absorbed the horserace narrative broadcast to them on television.

Results in 1984 are interesting because the amount of people who said that the race would be close and the amount of people who said that the race would be decided by a wide margin were almost identical. Forty-eight percent of respondents believed that the race would be close, while 46.2% of respondents believed that the race would be decided by a large margin. This is interesting to note because, in the end, the race was not close at all; Reagan carried 49 states and 58.8% of the popular vote. Perhaps the media narrative that year made the election seem much closer than it really was? At any rate, more research would need to be done to understand why voters in 1984 were less sure of the outcome of the race than they were in previous and future election cycles.

Avenues for Future Research

During this chapter I have identified several avenues for future scholarly research on the broader implications of the agenda-setting model. Firstly, future research would have to find a way to explain why, despite an influx in negative media coverage, respondents' opinions of candidates as expressed on the mood thermometer are still so high. Research would also need to decipher why respondents, over time, have placed candidates higher and higher on mood

thermometers despite the fact that they can reference more negative things about them. It seems odd that assessments of the candidates are so positive when the same respondents can name multiple things that make them want to vote against the respective candidates. One would imagine that an increase in discussion of scandal, controversy, and candidate shortcomings would contribute to the exact opposite phenomenon. Is the increase in positive assessments part of the 'I'd like to have a beer with George Bush' phenomenon?' Is there a kind of ironic affection for candidates, despite the amount of negative mentions or dislikes that people have about them. Is this another example of cognitive dissonance, or is there something else going on? And future research would need to look into how 2016 compared, especially considering the low levels of approval for both major party candidates.

Another avenue for future research is to ask more pointed questions of respondents. Did their attention to television or to media in general impact their vote choice? Questions could ask them pointedly, did stories you saw on television cause you to dislike a candidate more or less? This would be a way to find out exactly what affect television news stories are having on the public's perceptions of candidates. The data shows that the number of negative mentions or dislikes about candidates is growing over time. And people who watch television are able to name more dislikes about candidates than they used to be able to, likely because of the increase in negative tone and an increase in candidate salience. But more pointed questions would need to be asked to prove this connection concretely.

In continuing to expand the agenda-setting model, it would be interesting to look more closely at the horserace as a factor. If the media focuses more on the horserace, do the priorities of the public follow suit? ANES data analysis demonstrated that over time, people have become more sure of whether or not the race was going to be close. Clearly then, the horserace has been engrained in their minds; they have countless images of polls to access when asked to assess the standings of the candidates. I would be curious to undertake research that looks to see if people are then more likely to use the horserace as a larger component in their decision making. It has been proven that people tend to tune in to watch horserace stories because of the interesting imagery and the way that it appeals to their desire to be entertained. And the bandwagon effect is alive and well. But little research has been done on whether or not, or how exactly, that manifests

itself in the public agenda. Does increased discussion of the horserace make it a more salient factor on the public agenda? That is, do people now think of the horserace as a more important factor in their final voting decision? If the media's priorities do eventually become the public's priorities — as stated by agenda-setting scholars — we would expect this to be the case. Therefore, in order to prove the broader implications of the agenda-setting model on all types of coverage, more research on this phenomenon would need to be undertaken.

Conclusion

In attempting to expand the agenda-setting model, I ran into several roadblocks. The first was the data that I had available. The ANES dataset was incredibly useful, but also had several limitations. I was only able to use the questions that they asked, which did not necessarily ask the same questions that I would've posed in investigating this particular question. There was no question that asked respondents what was the most significant factor in their voting decision. That would've been an incredibly useful question to ask in determining the media's ability to set the public agenda. If respondents had stated that a candidate's electability, their character traits, or things about their campaign performance were significant factors, then that would've concretely supported my initial claims.

Unfortunately, however, no such question existed. That does not mean, however, that my findings were insignificant. My findings showed that the increase in discussion of candidate personality has made respondents more sure of their feelings about candidates, and has made them able to access more negative factors about them. This corroborated McCombs' (2000) findings regarding an increase in candidate saliency. And the fact that this was more significant for television viewers than non-television viewers shows that there is some kind of relationship between viewership patterns and strength of preference and feelings about candidates. But, once again, more research would need to be done to isolate this away from measures of partisanship over time. That way, we would know whether this change has been caused by partisanship, or by other factors over time.

As for the horserace, my findings showed that people have become more sure of the relative closeness of presidential races over time. Today, respondents hardly ever state that the

closeness of the race will depend on future events or outside factors. This should come as no surprise because of the sheer amount of horserace information that is disseminated by the media. People who see constant images of the daily winners and losers should have no trouble identifying whether or not a race would be close. But the ANES dataset had no way to show whether or not this manifested itself in peoples' final vote choice. If people were sure that the race would not be close, did this make them less likely to vote? Or did it perhaps cause them to support the candidate that they knew would win anyways.

Nevertheless, I believe that my research has worked to start a new conversation about the broader implications of the agenda-setting model. Discussion of the ANES data shows that the agenda-setting model and the idea of attribute agenda-setting can be applied to aspects of candidate personality and candidate. And the media can effectively set the agenda on whether or not a race will be close. More research needs to be done, but I believe that the agenda-setting model — if subsequent data corroborates the trends identified here — can eventually be expanded in this manner.

Chapter 5:

A Look at the Future of Media

The fake news media is going crazy with their conspiracy theories and blind hatred. @MSNBC & @CNN are unwatchable. @foxandfriends is great! — @realDonaldTrump, February 15th

Just leaving Florida. Big crowds of enthusiastic supporters lining the road that the FAKE NEWS media refuses to mention. Very dishonest — @realDonaldTrump, February 13th

The failing @nytimes has been wrong about me from the very beginning. Said I would lose the primaries, then the general election. FAKE NEWS. Their coverage… has been so false and angry that the times actually apologized to its dwindling subscribers and readers. They got me wrong from the beginning and still have not changed course, and never will. DISHONEST. — @realDonaldTrump, January 28th

The events of the 2016 election brought discussion of television media and media in general to the forefront. Discussion of the role of social media — Twitter especially — as well as the role of fake news disseminated online, has flooded post-election commentary. Donald Trump's ability to leverage support and attention via his radical Twitter rants is one of the most talked about aspects of the entire contest. But another topic of discussion is about the media's institutional failures in holding Trump accountable, and in covering the race in a fair and reasonable way. Television, because of its *yuge* (sic) scope, plays a large role in this. Television aired countless stories about Trump, about his Tweets, and about his outrageous statements — effectively giving him millions of dollars worth of free media. Opinion pages, radio programs, podcasts and countless online articles all discussed problems with news coverage of the election process. Discussion of the post-truth media and the idea of "alternative facts" has also further complicated the role of the media in our electoral process.

Before looking at the future of media in this chapter, it is important to discuss media's current condition in the Trump Era, and the attacks being waged on the media. I will also discuss outlets that are better at reporting facts, and that are talking about more substantive issues and

working to inform the electorate. I hope to show how some of these patterns, lessons and standards can be adopted by other media outlets as well. Because today — only a few weeks into President Trump's tenure — the role of the media and the media's ability to hold Mr. Trump accountable is under extensive pressure. As I hope to demonstrate later in this chapter, the need for an independent press is stronger today than ever before.

But first, I will review the topics discussed in Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 to outline the trajectory of media coverage and some of its institutional shortcomings and failures. This will shine light on how we got to where we are today. I will return to a discussion of news values, of broad trends that have increased over time, and the ways in which the agenda-setting model can be applied and expanded to today's news environment. In this discussion, I hope to explain the ramifications of my findings, the avenues for future research, and the ways in which the fourth-estate can reform to better handle today's treacherous media environment.

In reviewing the scholarship on television media coverage of presidential elections over time, it becomes clear that coverage of polls, campaign strategy, and campaign logistics have inundated our airwaves. Scholars and citizens alike lament that "we've all been polled to death" (Kerbel 1994, 155). Over time, the importance of the horserace narrative has grown, and has effectively squeezed out discussion of more substantive policy. Over the decades, issue coverage has shrunk to a minuscule portion of election coverage. And even when issues are discussed, they are discussed in a manner that's too fleeting and too disconnected to inform most viewers. Today, issues are primarily discussed in passing, and are used as fodder to explain candidates' current positions in the daily polls.

But it wasn't always this way. In the first several elections that included television, television news was there to inform viewers. The news media was more issue focused, less biased, more positive and trusted by the majority of the American public. Walter Cronkite set the golden standard for TV reporting in the 1960's with his intimate accounts of the first moon landing, the Vietnam War and Kennedy's assassination. Seventy million people tuned in to watch Cronkite's coverage of the Kennedy assassination on CBS in 1963, for example. He truly was the "most trusted man in America" according to a 1972 poll (Galant 2012). And when he said "that's

the way it is" at the end of his broadcasts, he set the "standard by which all others have been judged" (Galant 2012).

But in the modern era, priorities have shifted. Newscasters and news institutions are less trusted than ever, and few television news anchors last long enough to leave their mark on American society. Election coverage on evening newscasts is now focused much more on negativity, on candidate attacks and on the competitive game. In 2000, 71% of coverage during the general election was about the competitive game and the horserace (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 45). And in 2016, the competitive game accounted for 66% of total election coverage, with the vast majority being negative in tone (Patterson 2016d). Part of this is because of increasing economic pressures, the creation of the 24-hour news cycle and much more media competition. Television outlets, in order to keep up with online sources, and with sources that take out the middle man altogether — Twitter, for example — must play by the same rules. They work to stay up to date on the current poll standings, on the outrageous scandals and on the character attacks in order to compete economically.

My discussion in Chapter 2 brought to life the fact that 1992 truly was a turning point election. This year was the beginning of a new media era, and the election cycle in which past trends in coverage became concrete. The election of 1980 had been berated for being overly negative, overly focused on the horserace and generally unfair to all candidates. Afterwards, news outlets reformed in 1984 and 1988 and aired much more mixed-tone coverage (Windhauser and Everts 1991). Then in 1992, things became more negative, more scandal focused and more focused on the horserace, once again (Patterson 1993). And it has only grown worse since then. In each election since, the horserace has remained the dominant framework, reporters continue to pounce on candidate gaffes and blunders, and negativity has grown markedly.

One explanation for this is the arrival of more competition on the scene. The first election where CNN played a notable role was 1992. And Fox News and MSNBC followed suit in 1996; by 2002, Fox News had already overtaken CNN as the most watched cable news program (Pew 2004). Soon after came the internet, and after that came social media. Things changed quickly, and television news would never be the same. While my findings did not look extensively at cable news, internet news or social media, it is clear that those mediums played an important role

in rewriting the media script on television. And it is clear that they are part of the broader trends that have taken away viewers from evening news; the audience has shrunk from 52 million in 1980 to just over 23 million in 2016 (Pew 2016).

In Chapter 3, I discussed in-depth the 2016 election and the rise of Trump's candidacy. In understanding Trump's rise and the deluge of coverage that he received, the values of the media were brought to light. Trump was able to succeed because of the media's obsession with the story possibilities represented by his campaign. He was an "instant ratings, circulation, clicks gold mine" (Kristof 2016). He was telegenic, unpredictable, fascinating and captivating; several notable media scholars compared his campaign to a train wreck that people couldn't help but watch. His candidacy meant major profits for news outlets, and huge increases in viewers, which appeals to the media's adherence to profit margins and advertising revenue.

Analysis of Trump's media coverage shows that the media acted as amplifiers of his message. Even when he was 11th or 12th in the polls, the media still covered him extensively. His position as a celebrity made it difficult not to. Nevertheless, this uptick in coverage did have major impacts on the campaign. Quickly after Trump received an increase in media coverage, his polls began to rise markedly. And from the moment his polls rose, he was unstoppable. He attacked opponents, celebrities, foreign leaders, and entire groups of people, and received extensive coverage for many of his outrageous statements. He was the media's darling, and the media were his loyal lap dogs (Kristof 2016). Everyone, it seemed, was waiting in the lurch to see what Trump would do next.

Trump benefitted from journalistic values because it meant that issues were not being discussed extensively. Only 10% of coverage about him was about the issues (Patterson 2016d). In lieu of issues, the media discussed the horserace, which ensured that coverage about him throughout the early months was positive. His position as a gaining ground candidate and then his hefty lead in most Republican primary polls helped garner him a great deal of positive coverage. References to his poll standings ran nine-to-one positive during the invisible primary, for example (Patterson 2016a).

It wasn't until he shored up the nomination that the tone of coverage changed. During the general election, his coverage was about 77% negative (Patterson 2016d). Much of the reason for

that is because of his trailing position in the polls. Naturally that meant negative coverage. But coverage for Clinton was not much better; her coverage during the general election was 64% negative. And it is important to remember that throughout the entire campaign, Trump had a huge advantage in the amount of coverage he received. During the general election period, he received 15% more media coverage than Clinton, which continued to help amplify his message (Patterson 2016d).

Even despite the favorable coverage he received during the invisible primary and during much of the primary period — and the aggregate advantage he received in media mentions — Trump continued to be a vocal critic of the press. He publicly portrayed journalists as part of the corporate structure that needed to be brought down to Make America Great Again. And this has continued since his inauguration. During a rally on Saturday, February 18th, for example, Trump told cheering supporters that "dishonest" media members "have their own agenda, and their agenda is not your agenda" (Wang 2017). While the dishonest part may be a bit overstated, the idea that the media has its own agenda that differs from the public agenda does seem to be true. But it is important to note that the media does not create an agenda to purposefully undermine certain government officials or causes. Instead, the media's agenda comes from its inherent adherence to news values. News values, as discussed at length in Chapter 1 and 2, are those of boosting ratings, discussing polls and the daily winners and losers, and comparing and contrasting candidates, among others. In this manner, the media agenda differs from that of regular people. This is reflected by the fact that citizens ask much more policy focused questions in unmediated town-hall settings than do traditional journalists.

Reince Priebus, Trump's chief of staff, said in an interview with Fox News' Chris Wallace that "other cable stations, not necessarily Fox," only briefly covered events like Trump's meetings with foreign leaders and announcement of the president's Supreme Court nominee (Tani 2017). Outlets instead focused on ties between Russia and the Trump campaign "all day long, on every chyron, every seven minutes" (Tani 2017). Priebus leveraged the extensive Russia scandal coverage as proof that there was some kind of media bias against Trump. The truth, however, is that it is evidence of the media's broader institutional bias in favor of scandal and all things infotainment. Trump is not the first candidate or president to receive coverage like this. In

every modern election and modern presidency, the press has shied away from covering policy heavy topics like meetings with foreign leaders or everyday White House successes. Those stories would require too much background information, and they do not tend to be the stories that keep people tuned in or get the most clicks and shares online.

Priebus continued, telling Wallace that "I think you should be concerned about mainstream news outlets that are acting like Washington daily gossip magazines" (Wang 2017). In reviewing the scholarship, it is clear that Priebus is warranted in this remark. Television news — network and cable alike — often acts as more of a gossip reporter than a political resource. And that is quite dangerous for the health of our democracy. If people who turn into the network news at 6:30 or those who watch cable news are being better informed about scandals than they are being informed about politics, governance and current events, than that is a serious institutional problem. And that does seem to be the case. Further studies would need to be done to directly link television viewership with increased understanding and knowledge of scandals, but it is easy to see the potential for such a linkage. It is easier to see the potential for linkage when we know that television news viewership does not correlate with increased issue knowledge. For the most part, it correlates with the exact opposite. To use a rather illustrative example, the news media spent at least 17% of its time during the 2016 election on scandals, which is seven percentage points more than they spent on issues (Patterson 2016d).

This would be less consequential and less worthy of discussion if the media had little influence on the priorities of the public. But agenda-setting research has shown outright that this is not the case. Studies have shown a strong rank-order correlation between the policy issues promulgated by the media and the issues identified by citizens as the most important issues facing the future of the country. Further research on the idea of attribute agenda-setting — or framing — has also shown that the media plays an important role in developing the public's perceptions of people, objects and events. If the media portrays something negatively, then the public is also likely to identify it negatively. And if the media talks more about candidates themselves, than viewers are likely to have stronger opinions about them.

My original research undertaken in Chapter 4 shines further light on the media's ability to make personality a salient concept to viewers. Television viewers were able to identify more

negative and positive aspects about candidates over time, as candidate personality became a more integral part of media coverage of elections. The psychological concept of accessibility meant that increased coverage of candidates gave respondents more examples to access in their minds. Additionally, ANES analysis showed that people have become more strongly committed to their vote choice over time. And cross-section analysis showed that television viewers are more committed to their vote choice than non-television viewers. More research would need to be done to gauge how much of this increase in commitment is due to increased partisanship versus television viewership. Nevertheless, the findings still show a significant relationship between television habits and strength of candidate preference.

My analysis also showed that people have become less likely to rank candidates at the mid-point of a mood scale over time. Following in the footsteps of McCombs' (1992) study, I investigated whether or not people became more willing to rank people at either end — positive or negative — of a mood scale. What analysis of the ANES data shows is that over the past several decades respondents have been much more likely to rank candidates at either 60 degrees, 70 degrees or 85 degrees than 50 degrees. Taken together, this data helped show that the media's focus on candidate personality has had a noticeable effect of voter's priorities, their opinions of candidates, and their ability to reference positive and negative things about them. Respondents are now more familiar with candidates and have stronger personal feelings about them than before, which contributes to a decrease in ambivalent rankings on the thermometer.

I also worked to begin a conversation about the media's ability to set the agenda about the horserace. I hoped to investigate whether the media's obsession with the horserace has made it more salient to viewers, and has contributed to an uptick in the so-called bandwagon effect. If the horserace is featured so prominently in all forms of media, does that then become a larger component of individual's vote choice — especially if it is the only substantive thing that many casual media consumers can recall? I was limited in this investigation by the questions asked in the ANES database. There was no question that truly encompassed what I was looking for, so it is not possible to draw a final conclusion about my original question. But what I did find was that, over time, people are becoming more sure of whether or not a race will be close. Over time, the amount of people who say that the outcome of the race will depend on other factors has

drastically reduced. In the 2012 data, it was such a small percentage of respondents that it was actually statistically insignificant. This means that people are indeed affected by the increase in horserace coverage. More research, however, would need to be done to determine how exactly this affect is reflected in people's final vote choice.

In reviewing the research presented in Chapters 1-4, it is clear that the several media trends have become worse over time. The media shies away from talking about issues and instead discusses scandals, daily winners and losers and campaign logistics. This institutional bias and journalistic norms helped propel Trump to victory. Another aspect that propelled Trump to victory was Trump's anti-establishment, anti-status quo message. A big part of that message was opposition to the mainstream media — NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, MSNBC, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, among others. But not Fox News or Brietbart, of course. And now that he is president, he is continuing that rhetoric. This has dangerous consequences for the state of the media in the United States, and for their ability to hold Trump accountable for his falsehoods. I will now delve into a discussion of today's media environment to shine light on the challenges that the media must now contend with.

Today's Media Environment

> Politics was never more choose-your-own-adventure than in 2016, when entire news ecosystems for partisans existed wholly outside the reach of those who at least aim for truth…I think social media sites should rightfully be doing a lot of soul-searching about their role as the most efficient distribution network for conspiracy theories, hatred and outright falsehoods ever invented (Glasser 2016).

During the first month of the Donald Trump presidency, the president and his closest advisors have told the media to "keep its mouth shut," dubbed it "the opposition party" and characterized it as "fake news" (Bardella 2017). He has ridiculed news organizations that he doesn't like as business failures, has called for individual journalists to be fired, and has even called for libel laws to be rewritten so that he can more easily sue the press. All of this fits perfectly into the narrative that Trump and his campaign promoted throughout the 2016 contest. Having the media as an enemy bolsters an anti-establishment message, allows Trump's team to combat any critique they are given by claiming that it is simply evidence of media bias, and

allows the Trump White House to wage a political war on the facts. The strategy of his White House has been to not respond to reporters before a story airs so that they can say it's false after it airs and call it media bias (Bardella 2017). Trump and his team are happy living in this post-truth media environment, because if truth is subjective, they can mold it to support their agenda. And they can use common distaste for the media as a uniting factor for the potentially fragile Trump coalition.

Indeed, 53% of respondents in an Emerson College poll called the media untruthful, with just 39% calling it honest (Concha 2017). In this manner, the news media is less trusted than the Trump administration — which is considered truthful by 49% of voters and untruthful by 48% of registered voters interviewed (Concha 2017). The responses were unsurprisingly split along party lines. Nine in 10 Republicans said that the Trump administration is truthful, while 3 in 4 Democrats said that his administration is not truthful. The poll found that 69% of Democrats think that the media is truthful, while 91% of Republicans think that the fourth-estate is untruthful (Concha 2017). This poll echoes Gallup's annual poll on the public's trust in media, which showed that only 32% of Americans trusted the media, including just 14 percent of registered Republicans (Concha 2017).

It seems as if we have entered a period primarily defined by post-truth media. Even when reporters did talk about issues and subjected Trump to extensive fact checking during the campaign, it didn't seem to matter. "Stories that would have killed any other politician…did not stop Trump from thriving in this election year" (Glasser 2016). That is because in the post-truth narrative, objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than emotion and personal belief. No fact is absolute anymore. This makes it extremely hard for the media to respond. If the truth doesn't matter, than how can they convey what is and is not true to voters? And if citizens don't trust the media, then how are they expected to believe the media's own *interpretation of the facts*?

This post-truth trend was evident on Trump's very first day in office. On the day of Trump's inauguration, Trump and his team became extremely angry over the coverage about the size of the inaugural crowd. Photos from the event clearly showed that there were many fewer people at Trump's inauguration than there had been at Barack Obama's in 2009. The next day, in

his first press conference, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said that the crowd represented "the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration, period" (Ford 2017). Media pundits were quick to point out that that was simply not true. Chuck Todd, the host of *Meet the Press*, pointed out the terrible precedent set when a press secretary discusses a demonstrable falsehood during his first appearance before the press, which seemed to further enrage Trump. Trump then spent much of his speech at the CIA headquarters that very same day discussing the historic size of his crowd and the lies promulgated by the media (Bradner 2017).

Then, in an interview with Chuck Todd, Kellyanne Conway — Counselor to the President — said that Spicer and Trump's statements about the size of the crowd were not falsehoods, but instead were "alternative facts" (Bradner 2017). Todd was quick to point out that alternative facts are not facts at all, but are lies. In fact the phrase seemed too Orwellian to be true — perhaps that's why sales of Orwell's *1984* have increased by 10,000% since Trump's inauguration. "I'll answer it this way," she responded, "think about what you just said to your viewers. That's why we feel compelled to go out and clear the air and put alternative facts out there" (Bradner 2017). While it is too early to know for sure, I am quite sure that this statement, and Conway's continued commitment to alternative facts, will go down in infamy. The concept of alternative facts, from that day on, had now officially entered the political lexicon.

Then came the Twitter storm. President Trump, from his personal Twitter account, tweeted on February 17th that "the FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!" While this was not Trump's first Tweet or message about the media — refer to the quotes at the beginning of the chapter — it was arguably the most radical. And the potential consequences of such a message are wide and far reaching. Chris Wallace, an anchor on Fox News, stated that Trump's statement "cross[ed] an important line" (Wang 2017). Wallace continued, stating that "If Donald Trump wants to criticize the New York Times, that's fine. But it's different from saying that we are an enemy of the American people" (Wang 2017). Indeed, that is a very different ballgame altogether. To call real news 'fake news' is to undermine the validity of mainstream media, to undermine their necessary purpose for our democracy, and to undermine the trust of the American people. And to call them an enemy of the people hinges on authoritarianism. It also

violates the ethos that an independent press is vital to the functioning of a free and fair democracy.

> Trump's attacks on the American press as enemies of the American people are more treacherous than Richard Nixon's attacks on the press. Nixon's attacks on the press were largely in private. There's a history of what 'enemy of the people' … means as used by dictators and authoritarians, including Stalin, including Hitler. And I'm not about to say anything about comparing Hitler and Trump, but it's a demagogue's statement (Wang 2017).

To call legitimate news outlets fake news is to delegitimize their political importance, and to delegitimize the plight of *actual* fake news. It acts to level the playing field between mainstream stories that Trump does not like and stories that are demonstrably false. Fake news stories played an unprecedented role in 2016. Buzzfeed — in one of their more reputable articles — found that the top-performing fake election news stories on Facebook generated more engagement than the top stories from major news outlets like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, NBC News or the Huffington Post. During the final three months of the campaign, 20 top-performing fake news stories from hoax sites and hyper partisan blogs generated 8,711,000 shares, reactions and comments on Facebook. At the same time, the 20 best-performing election stories from 19 major news websites generated a total of 7,367,000 shares, reactions and comments (Silverman 2016).

The top 5 fake election stories on Facebook, ranked by engagement during the three months before election were all anti-Clinton. The first, from a hyper partisan blog called *Ending the Fed* was called "Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement." The second, from *The Political Insider,* was called "WikiLeaks CONFIRMS Hillary Sold Weapons to ISIS… Then Drops Another BOMBSHELL! Breaking News." The next two stories, both from *Ending the Fed,* were titled "IT'S OVER: Hillary's ISIS Email Just Leaked & It's Worse Than Anyone Could Have Imagined," and "Just Read the Law: Hillary is Disqualified From Holding Any Federal Office" (Silverman 2016). While it is difficult to quantify what percentage of the almost 9 million people who interacted with these articles actually believed them, they still undoubtedly had an effect on countless voters.

Exposure to misinformation has long term effects even when it's corrected. Mostly we hear about fake news from people correcting it — but any repetition is bad repetition…misinformation regarding policy is particularly important because it undermines our trust in the most basic institutions of society (Emily Thorson, quoted in Patterson 2016d).

One fake news story even turned violent when a North Carolina man entered a pizza shop in Washington D.C. with an assault rifle in an attempt to "self-investigate" a false but persistent conspiracy theory about Hillary Clinton (Gillin 2016). The fake news story related to the pizza shop in question, Comet Ping Pong, stated that Clinton and her campaign manager were running a child sex ring from inside the business. The conspiracy theory — ironically known as Pizzagate — spread through viral emails, discussion threads and social media in the weeks leading up to Election Day. It first began after WikiLeaks released John Podesta's emails that showed Podesta discussing business with the owner of the Ping Pong pizzeria. From there, the story took on a life of its own, even without any corroborating evidence. Conspiracy theorists harassed the restaurant, its employees and even neighboring businesses. James Alefantis, the owner of the restaurant, received death threats and vulgar messages, and was then the target of the potentially disastrous shooting spree. Afterwards, Alefantis stated that "I hope that those involved in fanning these flames will take a moment to contemplate what happened here today, and stop promoting these falsehoods right away" (Gillin 2016). Pizzagate is an important example of the potential impacts of fake news and the deleterious impact it has on the state of our democracy.

And that is why Trump's comment, and the continuation of his anti-media rhetoric by other members of the White House team, is extremely controversial. Sean Spicer, the Press Secretary, stated in a press conference that "we continue to be disgusted by CNN's fake news reporting" regarding the possibility of a link between Russian president Vladimir Putin and Trump's electoral victory (Hensch 2017). This was brought to life when Saturday Night Live showed a CNN reporter inside of a jail cell during a spoof on a Spicer Press Conference. The real Spicer continued, stating that:

It's about time CNN focused on the success the President has had bringing back jobs, protecting the nation, and strengthening relationships with Japan and other nations. The president won the 2016 election because of his vision and message for the nation. This is fake news (Hensch 2017).

And in more fake news news, Spicer, Conway and even President Trump himself have identified several terrorist attacks that never actually happened. Kellyanne Conway gained notoriety for discussing the "Bowling Green Massacre," a supposed terrorist attack carried out within the United States by refugees (Blake 2017). In reality, no such massacre exists. Important to note is that Conway used the nonexistent massacre as justification for Trump's travel ban on Muslims.

Then comes Trump. "The news is fake because so much of the news is fake," is one of his actual quotations (Collinson 2016). But then, he himself, promoted an untrue story during a rally in Florida. President Trump falsely suggested that Sweden had suffered a terrorist attack. After announcing his plans to restrict immigration, especially for Middle-Eastern refugees, Trump cited several European countries that show the potential dangers of admitting refugees. "Look what happened last night in Sweden," he said. "Who would believe this? Sweden. They took in large numbers. They're having problems like they never thought possible" (Marans 2017). What he was truly referring to was a story he had watched the previous night on Fox News that discussed a rise in crime in Sweden. But still, viewers who watched the rally or read about it online — without reading fact-checking commentary after the fact — were left with the incorrect assumption that there had been a terrorist attack in Sweden.

Soon after the election, Trump tweeted that he would have won the popular vote as well as the electoral vote if the millions of votes that had been cast illegally were discarded. Trump made this statement with absolutely no proof, and seemingly no desire to provide proof. When Bill O'Reilly — a prominent anchor on Fox News — asked President Trump whether it was irresponsible to make claims with no proof, Mr. Trump replied by saying "many people have come out and said I'm right" (Kearns 2017). Once again, Trump is insinuating here that facts aren't what matter. He is saying that facts "are indistinguishable from, and interchangeable with, opinion" (Stephens 2017). Gut feelings, emotions, and opinions are what matter. If Trump and others think that millions of illegal immigrants voted on November 8th, 2016, then there must be some validity to that. That is a major tenant of the post-truth media — emotions and gut feelings are the real indicators of validity.

In looking at today's context, the media has a tough fight ahead. The news media is contending with a brilliant media manipulator in the White House and a public that has very little trust in the validity of reports found on television, online or in print. The question to be posed is how exactly can and should the media react to institutional attacks, outrageous allegations and an administration that proudly embraces alternative facts? What can be done? Kurt Bardella (2017), an opinion contributor to The Hill, argued that the only way to combat Trump is to stop reporting on him. He wrote:

> I don't believe that the media was ever looking for this fight, but like it or not, they are now in it and they are losing. Good, bad, ugly, if the conversation is all about Donald Trump, Team Trump believes they are winning. Maybe part of the solution is to spend less time talking Trump and more time spotlighting the human cost of Trump's policies (Bardella 2017).

His thesis essentially argues that by continuing to report about Trump and about his attacks on the media, the media is playing right into his hand. Because Trump and his team have now convinced many Americans — or many Americans have come to the conclusion on their own — that the media can't be trusted, the White House can create their own narrative. Anything that the media says can now be called fake news, alternative facts or can be cited as evidence of an elite liberal media bias.

So what is there to do? Bardella (2017) argues that the media should stop reporting on Trump's tweets altogether. They should stop having panel discussions to break down the meaning of his rants and television outlets should stop showing his rallies and events non-stop. Instead, the media should run news stories about real people that spotlight how policies in Washington, or how Trump's proposed policies, would affect peoples' daily lives. After all, that was the media's original purpose — to inform the populace. Bardella (2017) argues that this would fulfill the fundamental tenets that our free and interactive press was founded on — that the press has the ability to "fight for answers to questions that need to be asked on behalf of the American people."

Today, there are some outlets that are fulfilling this fundamental promise. There are outlets that are better informing viewers, that spend more time spotlighting the human cost of

Trump's policies, and that hold him accountable for his statements. There are also reporters who are doing it, such as Chris Wallace from Fox News, Chuck Todd from NBC's *Meet the Press*, and occasional commentary from Jake Tapper on CNN, among other examples. 60 Minutes — with its investigative format — as well as late-night television also dig deeper into the human cost of certain policies than do other media sources. Other outlets that could be used as models for the mainstream media are the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR), two organizations that Trump's team is interested in defunding in order to pay for the wall between the United States and Mexico. PBS and NPR, because of their organizational values, seem much more committed to informing voters and to extensively discussing policies. I will now turn to a brief discussion of these outlets.

Outlets That Are Doing it Better

NPR is an industry leader in informative programming. Their daily radio programs are incredibly issue focused, and work to inform listeners about specific policies in lengthy segments. They have also expanded into the growing world of podcasts. Podcasts are much like radio segments, but they can be listened to at any time on mobile devices, websites and on social media. They seem to fit better with today's busier lifestyles. Podcasts can be about almost anything, but their issue focused, investigative format makes them an extremely informative medium, especially with regards to election news. Pew Research has found that the percentage of Americans who say that they have listened to a podcast in the past month has increased steadily since 2008. In 2008, only about 8% of people listened to podcasts, while more than 21% of Americans age 12 or older said that they had listened to a podcast in the past month in 2016 (Pew 2016). And when looking at the percentage of people who have *ever* listened to a podcast, the number was 36% in 2016. While this is still a minority of people — and while a large portion of the American public are not even familiar with the term podcasting — it is still a growing market, especially among young people. Two and a half million people listened to NPR's weekly podcasts in 2015, and many news organizations and online start-ups are investing time and money in developing podcasts (Pew 2016). This is reflected in a cartoon in the New Yorker from February 21st that said "I feel like everyone is podcasting but no one is podlistening."

It does seem to be true that most people who listen to podcasts also pay attention to other forms of news and tend to be better informed about the issues in general (Pew 2016). But since podcasting is such a new phenomenon, only scant research has been done on their effects. But podcasts, in several aspects, resemble the styles of reporting of the past. Podcasts are more specialized than today's traditional sources of news. A 30 minute or hour long podcast tends to focus on one or two larger issues, rather than try to fit all of the events of the day or of the week into 21 minutes. Perhaps the mainstream media could head this lesson. Rather than trying to cover every event, every Tweet and every poll, they could focus each night on a different issue.

Another possibility is that evening newscasts should increase in length from 30 minutes to an hour. Farnsworth and Lichter (2011, 172) made this point outright when they stated that "success in televised news delivery does not come in thirty-minute packages." The much longer segments on PBS's hour long *NewsHour* or those seen on cable provide more time that could be spent on issues. CBS's *60 Minutes,* for example, has been one of the most commercially successful and highly rated shows in the history of broadcast television. This demonstrates that being informative and being profitable are not mutually exclusive. That is the lesson that network news should take into account for its other broadcasts.

NewsHour is the nightly newscast on PBS. Since PBS does not have commercial breaks, it represents a full hour of news — not 21 minutes. In looking at *NewsHour* in comparison to other television sources, it is clear that PBS's program airs a great deal more issue coverage. Farnsworth and Lichter found that 67% of stories on *NewsHour* were substantive, compared to less than 40% for the networks in 2000. Horserace coverage was also far less common on PBS, appearing in only 32% of all *NewsHour* stories versus 71% of stories on the networks. The tone of coverage on PBS was also balanced and positive. In 2000, Bush and Gore received 60% positive evaluations on PBS, compared to 39% positive evaluations on NBC, CBS and ABC. Additionally, the average candidate soundbite in 2000 was 52 seconds, which was nearly 7 times the length average soundbite length on network newscasts (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 145). Thus, public broadcasting offers a model of election news that is more thorough, more substantive and more positive in tone than that of the Big 3.

Even late night television and TV talk shows tend to talk more about substantive issues than their network counterparts. Farnsworth and Lichter's (2011, 157) analysis showed that late night television actually did a far better job of focusing on the issues than "any of the journalist-centered media outlets." Today, Saturday Night Live, the Late Show with Stephen Colbert, Late Night with Seth Meyers, and the Daily Show with Trevor Noah spend much of their coverage discussing and debating issues. In 1992, data showed that 74% of the segments on these shows focused on substantive matters when discussing elections (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 157). While the mainstream media can't start cracking jokes every few minutes, there are still lessons that can be learned from these programs. These programs find ways to inform their audiences while still keeping them entertained — which is something that mainstream media should aim to do, as well. Indeed, Farnsworth and Lichter (2011, 163) argue that "something is very wrong with election coverage when the one-liners are on the evening news and the serious discussions are on Leno and Letterman."

Conclusion

> Democracy depends on a fair and critical news media to investigate public wrongdoing and to evaluate objectively the claims of the self-interested partisans who populate the fields of politics and government. That said, journalists have behaved irresponsibly in their reporting of recent presidential election campaigns, particularly regarding the heavy emphasis on the horse race (even for one-sided campaigns like 1996, where there was at most a "horse trot" to cover) and their generally negative orientation (Farnsworth and Lichter 2011, 167).

In 1980, critique of the media's performance in the election caused many outlets to reform their coverage. Today we are left hoping that the same trend will emerge after 2016. The 2016 campaign was one of the most negative, most horserace heavy, and least issue focused campaigns in modern history. Only 2000 and 2008 even come close. And aspects of Donald Trump's rise, his success and his early victories can potentially be attributed to media decisions or to broader news values. The media, in pursuit of the story, covered Trump non-stop; the 24 hour news cycle was dominated by stories about Trump.

Perhaps it will be the case that the events of 2016 make the media realize the potential dangers of their institutional problems. Their quest for all things new and exciting helped

amplify Trump's message, and was part of the many factors that culminated in his victory. Perhaps television will take the time to look back at itself and to reform the ways it covers candidates, the ways it covers events, and the ways that it covers social media.

But the mainstream media — which includes the big 3 — is in for a wild ride throughout these next four years. They are being targeted almost daily by Trump and his administration, and have the lowest levels of trust in modern history. Trump and his surrogates continue to call mainstream news FAKE NEWS, as if to level the playing field between NBC and *The Onion* — which Sean Spicer did not realize was actual satirical news, by the way. The news media is under attack for being unfair to Trump, for being liberally biased, and for constantly getting it wrong. These attacks, and Trump's statement that the media is the enemy of the American people, is crossing a very important line. He is promulgating the idea that the media cannot be trusted, which has potentially deleterious impacts on the state of our democracy.

But the fact that Trump and the events of 2016 have brought discussion of the media to the forefront might end up being a good thing for the future of the media. With increased discussion and with increased self-reflection, the media can respond to these attacks and reform. And changing the way they do their work in order to best report on governance in this post-truth, alternative-fact age can only work to better inform the public, and to better conform to the original intent of the media. In today's overly saturated media environment this is by no means easy, but several reporters and outlets are leading the way. Chuck Todd's *Meet the Press*, and certain anchors on cable outlets are working to change the way that they handle fact-checking the president and his surrogates. And outlets like PBS and NPR show that it is possible to focus on issues. What the media needs to do now is decide how to prove their sanctity, how to regain the trust of the American people, and how to ensure that they do not fail the voters again in 2020.

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