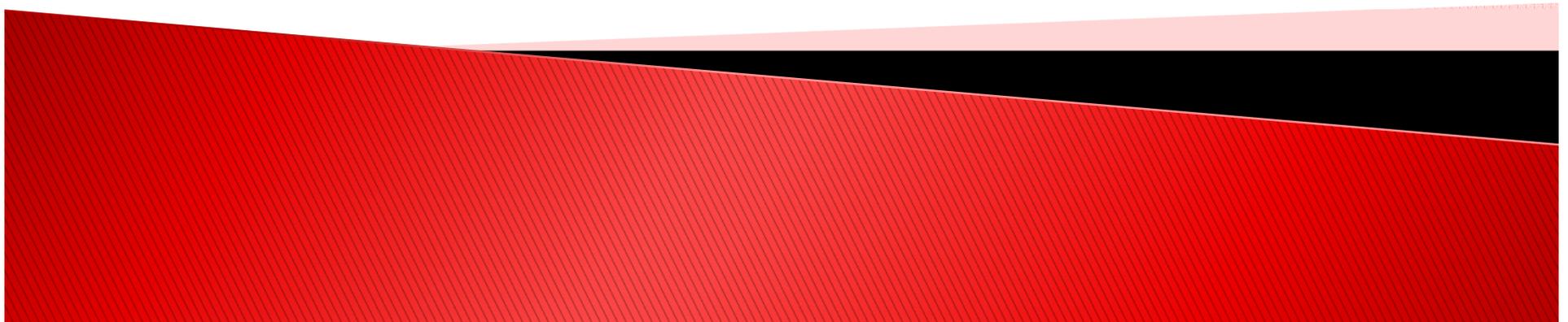


The Relationship Between News Media Consumption and Public Opinion, Using the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act as a Case Study

Taylor Burdick
Thesis Presentation
Advised by Dr. Patrick Donnay
2013–2014



Why Does This Relationship Matter?

- ▶ Public opinion is a driving force behind democracy
- ▶ In October 2013 the US government went into a partial shutdown
- ▶ The shutdown was caused by a polarized debate over the PPACA (Obamacare)
- ▶ The public by-and-large reflected this divide
- ▶ What influences public opinion?
 - There are multiple theories on what shapes public opinion



So What Shapes Public Opinion?

- ▶ News media may be partially responsible
- ▶ Other demographic factors also play a part
 - Region
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Race
 - Etc...

“The media clearly have a pervasive presence in the everyday life of most Americans.” *Dautrich, K., & Yalof, D. A. (2009, 2012, 2014). The Eduring Democracy (3rd ed.). Wadsworth, Cenage Learning.*



Theories on the Media's Role in Public Opinion:

- ▶ Second-Level (Attribute) Agenda-Setting Theory
 - *Priming*
 - *Framing*
 - *Agenda-Setting*
- ▶ Minimal Effects Theory

* No existing theory completely explains the relationship



Priming

- ▶ Thoughts, ideas, and memories are connected.
- ▶ One belief can be connected to another through an emotional reaction
- ▶ Most effective when the connection is close in time and is repeated

“Priming is providing a stimulus that influences the near-term future thoughts and actions, even though they may not seem to be connected.” Straker, D. (2010). *Changing Minds in Detail*. Crowthorne.



Framing

- ▶ Message is characterized in such a way as to have a certain affect on the audience
- ▶ Values-based theory
- ▶ Media sources reflect common goals or ideas of their audience
 - Appeals to beliefs of the audience

“[the media] promotes apathy, cynicism, and quiescence, rather than activate citizenship and participation”. Gamson, W. A., Croteau, D., Hoynes, W., & Sasson, T. (1992). Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, 373–393.



Agenda-Setting

- ▶ The media ‘sets the agenda’ for what the public thinks about
- ▶ The media puts importance on an issue and therefore the public believes it to be important
- ▶ Hierarchy in the media
 - “Elite media sources”

“The media sets the public agenda for the issues and activities that many Americans choose to think and talk about.” Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 9–20.



Second-Level (Attribute) Agenda-Setting Theory

- ▶ Elite media sources use concepts of framing and priming to set certain agendas for what the audience thinks about & how they feel
- ▶ Focuses on the ‘tone’ (attributes) of news coverage

“The media have a tendency to marginalize positive news.” Hester, J., & Gibson, R. (2003). The Economy and Second-Level Agenda Setting: A Time-Series Analysis of Economic News and Public Opinion about the Economy. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 80(73), 73-90.



Minimal Effects Theory

- ▶ The media does not have much effect on changing public opinion.
- ▶ People will seek out news that supports their previously held beliefs.
 - *Selective perception and retention*

“[People] are stubborn and isolate themselves against contradictory messages.” Mensing, D. (n.d.). *Media Effects Theories*. Retrieved from Journalism 101; University of Nevada, Reno: <http://www.jour.unr.edu/donica/101/effects.html>



My Theory:

- ▶ I hypothesize that news information is primed and framed in such a way as to promote a specific agenda
 - The 'tone' of the news
- ▶ The agendas differ depending on the news source
- ▶ The differing agendas are what cause the divide in public opinion.



Difference in Frame?

- ▶ MSNBC website (3-20-2014)

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Difference in Frame?

▶ Fox News website (3-20-2014)

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The largest doctors group in the country is raising alarm that an obscure **ObamaCare** rule could stick them with the tab for patients who skip out on paying their premiums. The American Medical Association, which ...

[foxnews.com/politics/2014/03/20/medical-group-that-backed-obamacare-warns-](#)

[Sen. Wicker blasts ObamaCare push during NCAA tournament](#)

Story | Wed, 19 Mar 2014 | Politics

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., on Wednesday slammed the Obama administration's decision to advertise **ObamaCare** during the NCAA basketball tournament. "This is yet another desperate attempt by the administration to persuade young people ...

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[Vegas man stuck with \\$407,000 medical bill after ObamaCare breakdown](#)

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[foxnews.com/politics/2014/03/18/vegas-man-stuck-with-407000-medical-bill-after-](#)

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Methods and Data that were Used

- ▶ Data was collected by the Kaiser Family Foundation for their August and September 2013 health tracking polls.
- ▶ The *dependent* variable was a measure of the favorability towards the PPACA (Obamacare)
- ▶ 3 *independent* variables measuring:
 - Most trusted news source (MSNBC/Fox News/CNN)
 - Perceived tone of the media (control)
 - Knowledge of the law



Tests

- ▶ Crosstab tables showing relationship between variable
- ▶ Clustered bar charts showing the direction of the relationship between variables

❖ Dependent Variable:

- Favorability towards Obamacare

❖ Independent Variables:

- Knowledge index
- Observed tone of news coverage

- ✓ All results are statistically significant at the 0.01 level (Chi-Square, two-tailed)



Testing the Data

- ▶ How Much People Favor Obamacare Based on Their Most Trusted Health Care News Source

		Respondent's Trusted News Source				Total
		CNN	FOX News	MSNBC	Some other cable news channel	
Favorability Towards Obamacare	Very favorable	127 27.3%	43 6.1%	124 45.3%	127 29.7%	421 22.5%
	Somewhat favorable	203 43.6%	83 11.9%	60 21.9%	140 32.7%	486 26.0%
	Somewhat unfavorable	80 17.2%	92 13.1%	54 19.7%	61 14.3%	287 15.4%
	Very unfavorable	56 12.0%	482 68.9%	36 13.1%	100 23.4%	674 36.1%
Total^b		466 100.0%	700 100.0%	274 100.0%	428 100.0%	1868 100.0%

Data from the August 2013 Kaiser health tracking poll

b. Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Cramer's V moderate and positive relationship (0.34)



▶ How Much People Favor Obamacare Based on Their Overall Knowledge of the Health Care Law

		Overall Knowledge of the Health Care Law					Total
		very high	high	moderate	low	very low	
Favorability Towards Obamacare	Very favorable	129 52.2%	207 31.2%	135 15.8%	43 10.8%	8 11.9%	522 23.4%
	Somewhat favorable	84 34.0%	200 30.2%	191 22.3%	64 16.1%	6 9.0%	545 24.4%
	Somewhat unfavorable	24 9.7%	131 19.8%	146 17.0%	75 18.8%	12 17.9%	388 17.4%
	Very unfavorable	10 4.0%	125 18.9%	385 44.9%	216 54.3%	41 61.2%	777 34.8%
Total ^f		247 100.0%	663 100.0%	857 100.0%	398 100.0%	67 100.0%	2232 100.0%

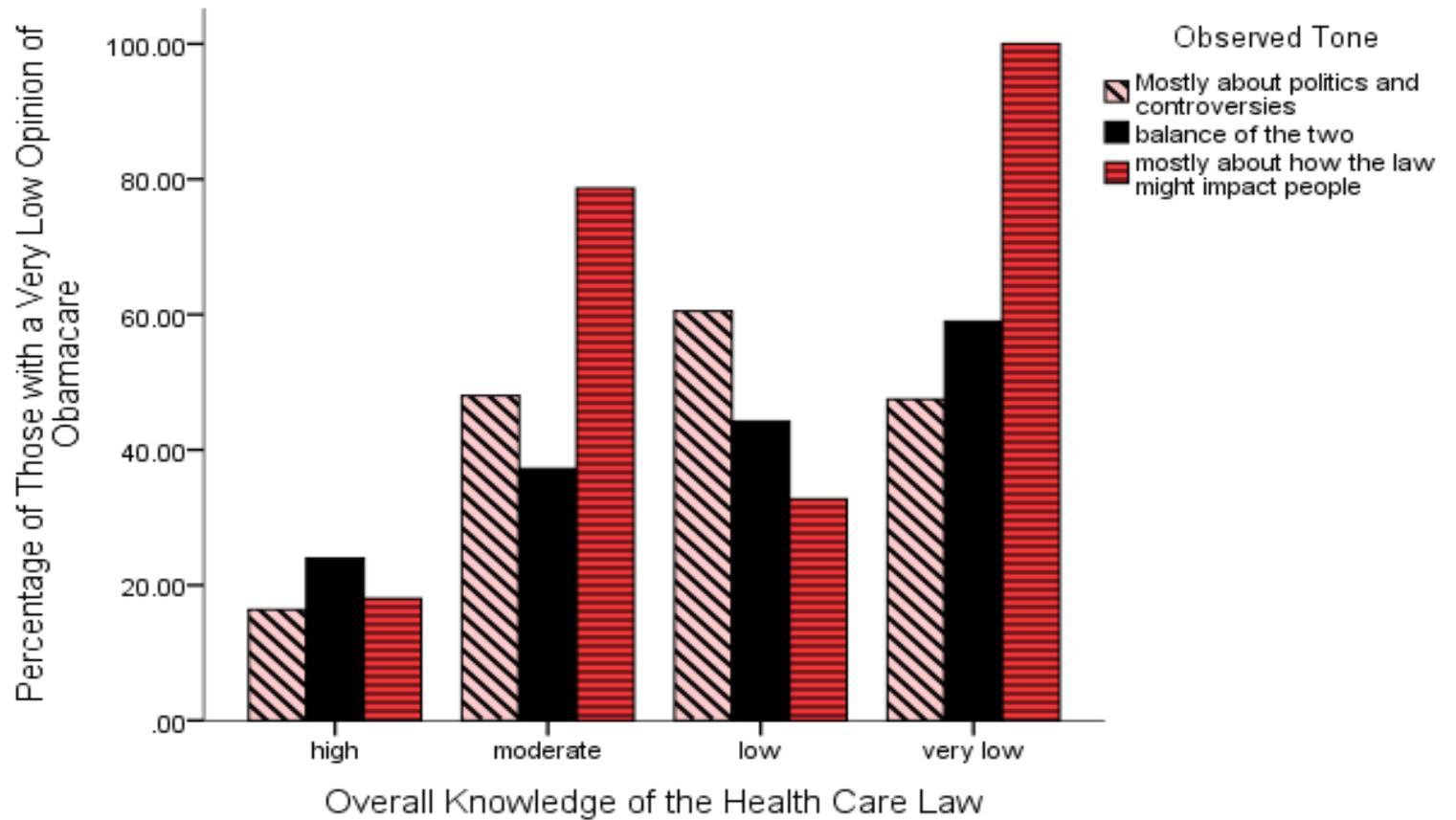
Data from the September 2013 Kaiser health tracking poll

f. Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Cramer's V weak and positive relationship (0.25)



Percentage of People Who Do Not Favor Obamacare Based on Their Overall Knowledge of the Law and Separated by the Observed Tone of Their Media **



Cases weighted by Weight using new first-stage weight computation

Significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)
 moderate Somer's d relationship (0.271)
 N = 1940

** Data from September Kaiser health tracking poll



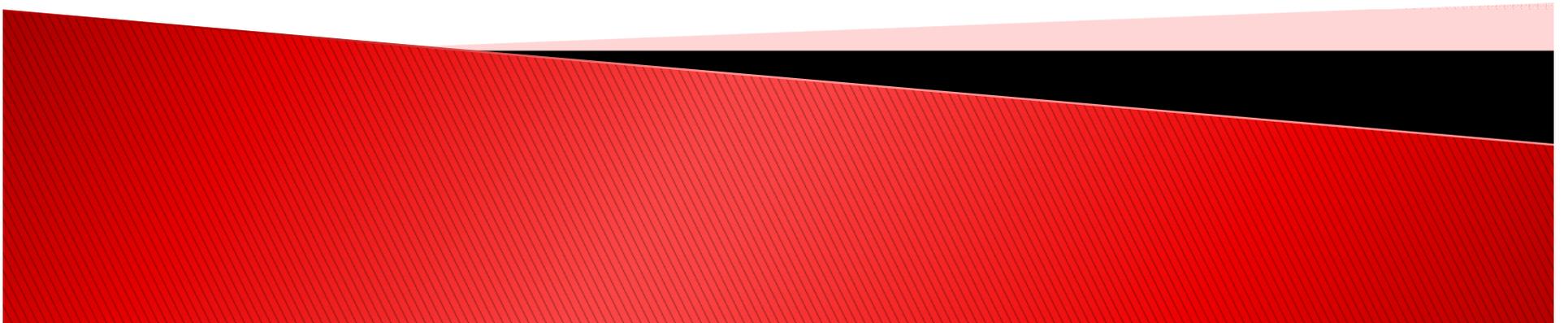
What This All Means

- ▶ There is a relationship between the news media and public opinion
- ▶ Tone of media coverage impacts public opinion
- ▶ One of the most important factors is how much people know about the law
- ▶ The hypothesis was supported by the findings



Thank You!

Are there any questions?



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