

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

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Abstract

In October of 2013, the federal government went into a partial shutdown. The cause of this shutdown was the polarized debate over the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), or Obamacare. The polarization of this policy did not stop at the elite level; the public has been by-and-large divided on the law as well. This division of the public may have been created by the large and diverse coverage over the policy.

There are multiple approaches to determine how the media impacts public opinion. I attempt to find what has been the primary influence on the public attitude toward Obamacare. I hypothesize that news information is framed in such a way as to promote a specific agenda and that frame is different depending on the news media used. These varying frames should play a significant role in determining how the public thinks about Obamacare.

I use data from the Kaiser Family Foundation health tracking polls of August and September of 2013. My results show that there is a significant relationship between news source and opinion towards Obamacare. These findings support the theory that framing plays a part in opinion making.

Introduction

The ability of citizens to absorb political information and therefore participate in political discourse is a fundamental principle to the system of democracy used by the United States, and for democracy as a whole. The twentieth century brought with it a new age in the consumption of political information. Up to this point, the process of information gathering for political knowledge was through centralized newspapers and direct contact. When the radio became a common-place in American homes in the early twentieth century, politicians jumped at the opportunity. In March of 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt broadcast his first Fireside Chat

(Peters, 1999-2013). This radio broadcast was the first opportunity for a president to reach a mass amount of people all at the same time, live. Since then, new technologies have brought new ways in which to consume political information; the television became a household item in the 1950's, the internet in the 1990's and 2000's, and now mobile devices in the 2010's (Newman & Guggenheim). With each wave of new technology, people become more and more capable of gathering and interpreting political information and participating in the democratic organization.

With each revolution in technology mediums for the media, the public has become more and more dependent on the media for its news. This dependence on the news media has given significant power to those who could control what information is presented by the media, as well as how it is presented.

Over time, the impact or influence of the media on public opinion has been the subject of much debate. This debate is a multi-layered one and has seen a variety of different approaches. In attempting to discover what role the media plays in public opinion, it must first be established that the media plays a role at all. If it is decided that the media in fact does participate in shaping public opinion, an examination of how and to what extent that participation goes. To paraphrase, does media exposure influence citizens political beliefs, and if so, what is that influence?

Current Research and Theories

The current research into the impact of media consumption on public opinion is fractured. There are multiple schools of thought into this area with many different extrinsic factors coming into play. Inside each school of thought are various theories of the relationship between media consumption and public opinion.

Viewer-Centered Theories

The theories in the “viewer-centered” school of thought tend to focus more on how the audience is affected by the news they see or hear. These theories do not take much into account as far as how the messages in the media are being presented; the focus is primarily on how the audience reacts to news information.

One such theory is the cultivation theory. The cultivation theory was developed in 1976 by a man named George Gerbner. He theorized that television had become America’s main source of information for both news and entertainment. In his research, Gerbner classified those who watched television for more than four hours a day as “heavy” viewers and hypothesized that these people were exposed to more violence via television and therefore had a more uniform view that the world was dangerous (Gerbner & Cross, 1976).

Gerbner’s cultivation theory states that the more a person is exposed to media, at that time it was television, the more it will help to shape their general opinion of the world. This means that if the news and entertainment that a person is exposed to on television is primarily about crime and violence, and that person relies on those sources for their information about the world, then that person will grow to become worried that the world is, generally speaking, violent and full of criminals (Dautrich & Yalof, 2014).

Another viewer-centered theory is the cumulative effects theory. According to Donica Mensing in her outline of the media effects theories, the theory of cumulative effects was developed in the 1960’s. This theory says that the effects of media consumption very depending on a number of different factors. The claim is that the media has more of an affect during times of “unrest” than times of peace. This theory also states that the effects of media consumption are based on personality; i.e. some personalities are more vulnerable to influence from the media

than others. Mensing also says that the media is a socializing force that has an influence on the development of attitudes, beliefs, and values (Mensing).

Basically, this theory says that media consumption only accounts for part of what shapes public opinion. The other influencing factors are personal demographics and personality.

Another theory that focuses on how the audience is affected by news media is the silver bullet theory. This theory is also referred to as the hypodermic needle theory. The theory, which emerged in the 1930's, was attributed to a psychopathologist named Harold Lasswell. The assertion in this early model was that messages in the media had a direct and immediate effect on the viewers. The idea was based on the assumption that the audience did not have access to outside, autonomous sources for their information; i.e. first had accounts (Neuman & Guggenheim).

The minimal effects theory also fits into this viewer-centered school of thought. The Minimal Effects theory emerged in the 1950's (Neuman & Guggenheim). The idea behind this theory was that media consumption had a 'minimal effect' on shaping public opinion. As Mensing says, there were two studies done in this period by a man named Paul Lazarsfeld. These studies analyzed voter behavior and opinion during an election. What Lazarsfeld found, according to Mensing, was that the media did not have much effect at all on voter choices. Mensing also states that the public are "stubborn and isolate themselves against contradictory messages" (Mensing).

In *The Enduring Democracy*, Kenneth Dautrich and David A. Yalof (2014) state that for minimal effects theorists, the things that had the biggest influence in public opinion, and voting behavior, were the "deep-seated long-term political attitudes" of the citizens. These stubborn political attitudes would then lead people to selective perception. That is to say that based on a

person's deep-rooted, unchanging political attitude, they would select news sources that supported their beliefs. This selective behavior would also influence the person's retention of news information; i.e. the more a news story fits the person's belief system; the more likely they were to remember that information, long-term. This is called selective retention. A person's own partisan perspective also comes into play with the minimal effects theory. Included in this theory is also the idea of selective exposure. That is to say, a person's previously established political outlook will often influence the kind of news people will watch in the first place .

However, the minimal effects theory was challenged in 1987 by Benjamin I. Page, et al, when they were able to demonstrate that neutral, seemingly unbiased news sources such as commentators and experts had a positive effect on public opinion (Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey, 1987).

Building off of the minimal effects theory is the social learning theory. The social learning theory was developed by a man named Albert Bandura in 1977. Simply put, people learn behavior through their environment by observing. Bandura did studies on children and found that they absorb behavior that they have observed and will later imitate that behavior. He also found that the children were more likely to imitate behavior from people they perceived as most similar to themselves; i.e. by gender (McLeod, 2011).

Dautrich and Yalof explain that social learning theorists would say that the minimal effects theory was a good start, but it should be expanded. The idea was that, not only do citizens selectively perceive, retain, and choose their news information; they also attempt to imitate what they have seen on television through something called observational learning (Dautrich & Yalof, 2014).

Source-Centered Theories

On the opposite side of the debate over the impact of media consumption on public opinion are theories that fit into the “source-centered” school of thought. The reason behind labeling these theories as being source-centered is because the theories in this school of thought focus more on how the messages in the media are being shaped, rather than the impact that the messages are having. That is not to say that these theories do not address how the audience is impacted; only that the attention is primarily on how messages in the media are shaped.

One such theory is called priming. Priming is essentially the belief that thoughts, ideas, and memories are connected. According to this theory, two beliefs can be connected through the stimulation of an emotional reaction. This is important to media consumption theories because media sources will “cue” up images and references to other specific issues or areas in news stories and allow that to ‘prime’ the viewer’s attitude toward the main topic of the story. This concept basically works through “thought-activation processes”. The impact of a prime will be more significant the more times it is repeated and the closer the connection of ideas is in time. The belief is that these primes will have more of an aggregate, long-lasting effect on political attitudes than fresher, more temporary primes (Dautrich & Yalof, 2014) (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) (Mullinix, 2011).

Another theory that focuses on how messages in the media are shaped is called the agenda-setting theory. The agenda-setting theory asserts a very simple claim; that the media ‘sets the agenda’ for what the public thinks and talks about. The theory says that the more importance the media puts on a certain topic, the more the public will believe that the topic is important. This theory also makes the claim that there is a hierarchy inside the news media. That is to say that there are “elite” media sources (i.e. large national news sources) that dictate to

the rest of the country what news information is most important. By doing this, these elite media sources are controlling the agenda for what the public believes to be important (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

As Toshio Takeshita (2005) explains, there are three main issues yet to be resolved in agenda-setting research; those issues being process, identity, and environment. The process issue, according to Takeshita, refers to the issue of whether the system of agenda-setting is “automatic and unthinking”. The identity issue tackles the question of whether the newly developed second-level agenda-setting will be seen as too similar to that of framing. The environment issue, for Takeshita, is in reference to the question of whether the new emerging technologies in communication, i.e. the new media, are going to reduce the effects of agenda-setting.

The theory of framing is also a part of the source-centered school of thought. Framing is when a message in the media is characterized in such a way so as to have a particular influence on the audience. For example, one news source may ‘frame’ a story about the health care reform law by discussing the “costs” of the law; while another news source discusses the “benefits” of the law. These two news sources may be discussing the same subject matter, but because of the different frames, the information is presented in very different ways (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) (Takeshita, 2005) (Jacobs & Mettler, 2011).

In analyzing media images and how they help in the social construction of reality, William A. Gamson, et al, stated in 1992 that the media generally frame issues in such a way as to “promote apathy, cynicism, and quiescence, rather than activate citizenship and participation”. These authors claimed that television was a forum by which those in control were forced to compete for attention from the public, rather than be able to simply broadcast news. Basically

what they are saying is that what the public sees on television is never truly neutral; but reflects the point of view of the “political and economic elites” who are in charge. The authors claim that the “genius” of framing and agenda-setting is that it is done so subtly that it seems “normal and natural”; that the “very art of social construction is invisible”. (Gamson, et al, 1992).

All three of these approaches have a common theoretical foundation. That is to say that all three concepts assert that the media makes certain issues more significant for the public in an effort to shape the concerns that people use when coming to conclusions about political figures or issues (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

There is another theory in the source-centered school of thought called second-level, or attribute agenda-setting theory. This theory takes concepts from priming, framing, and agenda-setting to form a more all-encompassing theory. As this theory goes, elite media sources use certain primes and frames in the way that they present news information in an attempt to set a certain agenda for their audience. In doing this, the theory is focusing on the “tone” of the news information. This means that both what is being said in the news and how it is being said are both important factors (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) (Hester & Gibson, 2003) (Sei-Hill, et al, 2002).

As Joe Bob Hester and Rhonda Gibson (2003) attest to, the general belief about the media is that they have a tendency to marginalize positive news, i.e. stories about an expanding economy; while at the same time the media tends to accentuate negative news, i.e. stories about violence and war. According to Hester and Gibson, what this leads to for public opinion is a parallel effect. That is to say that if a group of people’s main source of news displays primarily negative news, then the political attitude of that group will be negative as well, and vice versa.

Hester and Gibson say that part of what makes second-level agenda-setting different from regular agenda-setting is that it incorporates what they call the 'tone' of news coverage; whereas regular agenda-setting only analyzes the amount of coverage. As these authors claim, attribute agenda-setting focusses on the 'attributes' that are associated with, or given to, an issue (Hester & Gibson, 2003).

Other Factors

There are, of course, other variables that come into play in determining public opinion. Many researchers believe that public opinion is much more influenced by more intrinsic factors. These factors are wide-ranging and numerous. They include the personality of a person and other demographic details like race, gender, income, and geographic location. Michael Henderson and D. Sunshine Hillygus (2011) claim that public opinion towards critical issues such as health care do not necessarily follow partisan lines. Their claim is that self-interest, core values, and ideology are what shape peoples opinion toward health care.

The economy can also be a factor in what the public attitude is towards issues; especially when the issue is a decisive one, like health care. This idea is discussed by Mark Schlesinger (2011) in his article about the relationship between the economy and health care. Schlesinger goes on to state that the elites are the ones who frame economic situations in their favor, often times through the media.

Differences in opinion on issues like health care can also vary depending on geographic region. Brodie, et al, (2011) explain that in the case of the recent Affordable Care Act, due to the fact the implementation of the law will be a state-by-state issue opinion toward the ACA differs by region. Brodie also said that these differing opinions are more than likely motivated by the

political leanings of that region; which gives some support to the idea that political orientation plays a role in public opinion.

Applying the theories to the health care reform law

In writing about the impact of policy design on public opinion, Andrea Louise Campbell (2011) suggests that a newly developed approach to analysis may be used to explain how the policy designs themselves influence public opinion. Campbell says that the relationship between public opinion and policy is a cyclical one; where the designs of a policy influence political attitudes in the public and therefore effect how they mobilize politically; this in turn has a causal effect on potentially shaping future policy.

From these numerous theories, one thing can be certain at this point, “the media clearly have a pervasive presence in the everyday life of most Americans” (Dautrich & Yalof, 2014). In looking at a specific issue today, that will be shown true. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare as it has been coined, is a relevant and testable example of how the media and media consumption shapes public opinion.

The polarized debate over Obamacare

According to research done by Mathew A. Baum and Tim Groeling, (2008) polarization can be created through a variety of news sources; such as cable news and political blog sites. Baum and Groeling looked at news stories surrounding the 2006 midterm elections in their research. Those sources included DailyKos.com, FreeRepublic.com, and Foxnews.com, as well as from wire sources Reuters and the Associated Press. Their results discovered evidence that the three web sources had significant partisan filtering, while the wires remained relatively strong with “traditional newsworthiness criteria”.

As for our current issue, the official Obamacare website explains, the PPACA is a type of health care reform that seeks to provide a system in which citizens can have access to federally regulated health insurance that is also federally subsidized. Obamacare was officially signed into law on March 3, 2010 by President Barack Obama. The Act was, and still is a hotly debated issue however. Shortly after the bill's passage, Oklahoma and Arizona passed constitutional amendments to ban one particular part of the new law; that being the requirement of all Americans to have health insurance or be fined for not having any. In 2010, twenty states had filed a lawsuit against the new law; leading to the bill being taken before the Supreme Court to decide if the Act was even constitutional. The constitutionality of Obamacare was upheld on June 28, 2012 (www.obamacarefacts.com) (Conway).

Even though the Act was accepted by Congress and upheld by the Supreme Court, the viability and legitimacy of Obamacare remain a polarizing force. It is worth note as well to mention that the PPACA only passed Congress with marginal party support. As Bethany Conway points out in her paper for the University of Arizona, thirty-four Democrats in the House of Representatives refused to sign the bill into law, and there were no Republicans to vote for it. As far as the public is concerned, prior to 2009 over half of all Americans polled believed that it was the government's responsibility to ensure that all Americans had some sort of health insurance. After 2010 and the passage of the PPACA however, that number fell to its lowest point in a decade at 47% (Conway) (Henderson & Hillygus, 2011).

There is reason for pause, however. As Adam J. Berinsky and Michele Margolis (2011) state in their article about health care polling, public opinion polls can be misleading due to the fact that the 'don't know' category of answers is never included in the statistics for policy feedback. They claim that the respondents that mark down 'don't know' are typically those who

have fewer socioeconomic resources; they say that these are the same people who will most likely support health care reform.

The two sides of this polarized debate in the media can easily be seen by looking at two of the major online and cable news sources; FoxNews.com and MSNBC.com. Foxnews.com is widely accepted as being on the conservative side; whereas MSNBC.com is seen as being more liberal. A web search was done on the Fox News and MSNBC websites on March 20, 2014 of the term “Obamacare”. The search was done at the same time on the same day to show how different the news can be depending on where the information is coming from. A side-by-side comparison shows the differences.

On the foxnews.com site (image 1) the first of the top stories talks about the desire of Republicans to replace the health care law. The second story talks about how the health care law is hurting doctors. The headline of the third story suggests that the story is not about the health care law, but instead about why the Obama administration should not have taken time to fill out a March Madness basketball bracket. A fourth story discusses the costs of the health care law.

Conversely, on the MSNBC.com search (image 2), the first story to be shown was a public relations piece about Ellen DeGeneres. The second of the top stories was another public relations piece about President Obama filling out a March Madness basketball bracket. The third story was the only story on the top four to discuss the health care law; the head line talked about the benefits of the law. The fourth story to make the top stories section was another public relations piece about Ellen DeGeneres (see appendix A for images 1 and 2).

The polarization of opinion on Obamacare rages on in the public as well. The majority of Americans do not approve of the law, but it is a small majority. In an article for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Jonathan Oberlander explains that the public is largely divided

along partisan lines as to the approval and knowledge of the law. He claims that many Americans still do not understand what the law actually means; 39% of Americans are incorrect in believing that this law has created a ‘death panel’ in which a group of government officials are tasked with making end-of-life decisions for Medicare recipients. Oberlander speculates that the lack of true knowledge about Obamacare may be due to the fact that the Act does not have a “clear programmatic identity” (2012). This theory is given some weight when looking at articles like the one by Uwe E. Reihnhardt (2013) in The New York Times. In this article, Reihnhardt details how many news sources are not properly informing their audience. He claims that there is a one-sided story told in the news. Ira Israel (2013) also lends some support to the theory that Americans are not well informed about Obamacare when he details his own first-hand account of the confusion. After going through a painful and expensive medical situation, Israel said that he attempted to research the Affordable Care Act and how the new law would change what he had went through. He claims that after his research, he was still unclear as to what Obamacare would do.

Going Forward

The research thus far has shown the variety of approaches that attempt to understand if and how the media and media consumption affects public opinion. If one thing has become clear, it is that news media and the consumption of it, has an effect on the attitudes of the public towards policy. There are, however, still lingering questions that must be answered. These questions arise out of the sheer complexity of the relationship between the media and the public. It is obvious from this research that the media has an influence on public opinion, but there are other mitigating factors that play potentially significant roles in shaping how the public feels about certain issues.

The task going forward, therefore, is to discover more precisely the connection between media consumption and public opinion. In an attempt to do this, I test how individual opinions concerning the health care law are effected by the various news sources that are available. The goal is to determine whether the media are using frames and agendas in a way that is affecting public opinion. I also test to determine whether the audience itself matters; by that I mean that how much the audience understands the information may also be an important factor in determining public opinion regarding Obamacare.

Methods and Data

Dataset

Data collected by the Kaiser Family Foundation for their August and September 2013 health tracking poll were used for this research. The goal of the Kaiser Family Foundation is to create an “institution” in the health care world that is devoid of special interests or other biases. The objective of this institution is to provide a uniquely impartial source of health care information. The Kaiser Family Foundation was originally established in 1948 and in 1991 it received a foundation-wide remodel to its current design today. Their idea of “institution-building” continues today. The Foundation periodically produces surveys and creates data sets in various areas of health care. Their research into health tracking and health care reform tracks all the way back to December of 2007, but I will be focusing on the datasets from August and September of 2013. These data sets have specific questions pertaining to the 2010 health care reform law.

Defining the Independent and Dependent Variables

The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this research measured the favorability of respondents towards the Affordable Care Act (ACA), or Obamacare. This variable is an ordinal one that is measured in both the August and September 2013 health tracking datasets. The variable is separated into four categories that are ranked from 'very favorable' to 'very unfavorable'. This variable was chosen to be the primary dependent variable because it is the best measure for how much the population approves of the new health care law. It is important to note that this variable came from two separate data sources; the August and September health tracking polls. What this means for the research is that there cannot be a fully comprehensive analysis of how each elite news source frames their news information.

The Independent Variables

There are three variables that are used in this research as independent variables; this number includes one variable that is used as a control variable in an attempt to determine if there is a significant difference in responses depending on certain classifications.

A variable listing peoples main trusted news source is used as independent variable in this research. This variable is used to determine if there is a relationship between the trusted news source of a person and their favorability towards Obamacare. This question was only included in the August health tracking poll however, and therefore no analysis could be done to determine the relationship between trusted news source and tone of the media.

Therefore, the independent variable that is most relied on in this research is an index of respondents overall knowledge of the health care reform law. The index is a collection of other variables that asks respondents to answer yes or no to whether the new health care law is able to

do certain things. Answering correctly for all of the questions indicates that the respondent has a high level of understanding and knowledge of Obamacare. There are ten questions in total that make up this index. This variable is used as the primary independent variable in an attempt to find out if favorability towards Obamacare is at least in part determined by people's overall knowledge of the health care law.

To test whether the tone of people's news information in general plays a part in determining opinion on the health care reform law, a variable asking how people perceive the tone of their media to be was used as a control. What is meant by tone is whether people see their media source as focusing mainly on politics and controversies, on how the law will impact them, or a balance of the two. A test is done to see if a person's favorability for Obamacare is shaped by their overall knowledge of the health care law based on how they perceive the tone of their media to be. This test can help to determine if the news source that a person uses helps to shape their opinion towards the law.

Findings

My hypothesis is based on the second-level (attribute) agenda-setting theory. I hypothesize that elite media sources use certain primes and frames to promote certain agendas for their audience. I also hypothesize that the frames and agendas are different depending on the news source and that these differing frames and agendas are what cause the divide in public opinion. In this way, I am hypothesizing that generally speaking, news information is reaching people before they are able to form a knowledge based opinion on the law, and therefore the frame and agenda play a large role in determining public opinion. It is also my belief that the amount that people know about the health care law plays a large part in their attitude towards it. As the hypothesis goes, the amount that people know about the law can often times be

determined by where they are getting their news information and the way that the information is being framed. In other words, if the news that a person is getting their information from about Obamacare is false or misleading, then the person who is consuming that information will in-turn have a skewed view and low understanding of the health care law.

The first step in attempting to determine if this hypothesis is true is to establish a baseline of how much people favor Obamacare based on where they are getting their information about the law. Running a simple crosstab of these two variables can show this for the sample group. Because the polls were only of sample groups, a test to determine the significance of the relationship between the variables must also be done; a Cramer's V test can show the strength of the relationship, as well as the direction of it. This table uses data from the August 2013 health tracking poll.

(Table 1 about here)

It can be seen by looking at this table that the data is in fact significant at a 0.01 level. The Cramer's V relationship for these variables is moderate and positive (0.34). This means that the information in this table is representative of the overall population. This table shows that almost 69% of those who get their health care news from Fox News have a very unfavorable opinion about Obamacare. At the same time, almost half of the people who get their health care news from MSNBC have a very favorable opinion of the law. Further tests will show whether there is a difference in the content of these news sources as well as other sources like them.

Now that it has been determined that the data is transferable to the general population and that there is a substantial difference between the attitudes of people towards the health care law depending on where they get their news further tests can be done to see why those attitudes are different. A second crosstab testing how much people favor Obamacare based on how much

they know about the law can help to determine why some people favor the law while others do not.

(Table 2 about here)

Table 2 shows that once again, there is significance at the 0.01 level between the variables. Looking at the table shows that those people who are very well informed on the health care law have significantly higher opinions of it. Over half of those people who have a very high knowledge base about the law also have a very high favorability towards it. Conversely, over 61% of those with very little understanding about Obamacare have a very unfavorable view of the law. Once it has been determined that knowledge about the health care law effects people's attitudes towards it, further tests can be done to find out how people perceive the health care news that they are consuming.

Based on this information, I wanted to know how the observed tone of the media plays a part in determining public opinion. I created a clustered bar chart to show the relationship between favorability towards the health care law and how much people know about the law and separated it by how the respondents observed the tone of their media to be. The question of observed tone simply asked whether the respondent believed their news source to be primarily about politicians and controversies, about the impact that the law will have on people, or a balance of both. The bar chart represents the percentage of those respondents who had a very low opinion of the health care law.

(Figure 1 about here)

Figure 1 shows that for those respondents who have a high understanding of the law, the tone of their news does not play a large role in determining their opinion of the law. As the knowledge about the health care law decreases however, the impact of the tone of the news

becomes more noticeable. What this means is that those people who do not have a strong understanding of the health care law rely much more on their news media source to determine their opinion.

Discussion

For the most part, the findings in these tests support the hypothesis that opinion about the health care law is impacted by a number of factors including knowledge about the law and the perceived tone of news coverage. Generally, it is only when people are not able to understand the law that they do not approve of it. Walking through each of these tests shows that there is a significant relationship between where people get their news information and their approval of Obamacare and that the tone of those media sources plays a strong role in how much people with a low understanding of the law approve of it.

Ideally, I would have liked to perform tests to determine the connection between specific news media source and knowledge of the law. However, because the variables came from two separate data sets, it was impossible to test. In the future, if the data permits, tests to show the relationship between media source and knowledge of an issue would be beneficial to research in this field. Moreover, being able to control in those analysis for variables such as perceived bias and tone in the media would also be beneficial.

Overall, the hypothesis that the way a news source frames their content can play a significant role in shaping the attitudes of the public can be shown to be probable. At the same time, there is no definitive evidence to suggest that this hypothesis is completely correct. Competing schools of thought suggest that other demographic factors may in fact play a larger role than that of the frame of news sources. The other demographic criteria are so numerous however, that determining what demographic plays the most important role may be difficult to

do. While I was unable to discount any other theory, I was able to lend support to the second-level agenda-setting theory.

The research done in this paper will help to further the exploration into what shapes the public's opinion on decisive issues and exactly what role the news media plays in that process. Future research into this hypothesis with other case studies will show the impact of specific news sources on the shaping of public opinion. Other research dealing with specific demographic characteristics will also prove to be useful in narrowing down exactly what shapes public opinion.

Appendix A

Image 1:

ibmit=Search&css=fn ☆ ↕ ↻ Google

e Gallery

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Republicans drive to replace ObamaCare -- but with what?

Story | Thu, 20 Mar 2014 | Politics

All Republicans want to replace **ObamaCare** -- but finding that ideal plan might isn't easy, and they recognize any **ObamaCare** alternative will face intense scrutiny purposes such as keeping the focus on **ObamaCare** when Democrats will be trying to change ...

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Medical group that backed ObamaCare warns obscure rule could hurt doctors

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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 ..."

[foxnews.com/politics/2014/03/19/wicker-blasts-obamacare-push-during-ncaa-tournament/...](#)

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Vegas man stuck with \$407,000 medical bill after ObamaCare breakdown

Story | Tue, 18 Mar 2014 | Politics

The busted **ObamaCare** websites cost a lot of people a lot of time. But for one Nevada man, problems with the state insurance exchange reportedly cost ...

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

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Get updates on Obamacare

Image 2:

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a search bar at the top right containing the text "Google". Below the browser window is a navigation bar with the text "Web Slice Gallery" and "W".

The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is titled "Stories (3054)" and includes filters for "on all issues", "from all shows", and "from any time". Below these filters are three story entries:

- Obama teases Ellen for 'cheap shot' selfie**
Obama teased Ellen DeGeneres for breaking his record for most retweets of a single tweet during an appearance on The Ellen Show set to air Thursday.
MORGAN WHITAKER POLITICS NATION WITH AL SHARPTON - 10:21 AM 3/20/2014
explore: [Society](#), [Media](#), [Barack Obama](#), [Social Media](#)
- The education of Scott Brown**
Running against an abstraction is easy; running against a law that's benefiting millions is a little trickier. That may now be slowly be dawning on Scott Brown.
STEVE BENEN THE RACHEL MADDOX SHOW - 9:42 AM 3/20/2014
explore: [Elections](#), [Election 2014](#), [Health](#), [Health Care Reform](#), [Affordable Care Act](#), [New Hampshire](#), [Obamacare](#), [Scott Brown](#)
- Rev's Early Reads: March 20**
Pres. Obama promotes health care law on "Ellen"... and weighs in on her Oscar selfie.
DANN MCDORMAN POLITICS NATION WITH AL SHARPTON - 7:16 AM 3/20/2014
explore: [Health Care Reform](#), [Health](#), [Barack Obama](#), [Rev's Early Reads - PoliticsNation](#)

The right column is titled "Featured Shows" and includes three show entries:

- FIRST LOOK**
expert in [Economy](#), [Education](#), [Green](#), [Health](#), [National Security](#), [Society](#), [Religion](#)
[follow](#)
- Way on early**
expert in [Economy](#), [Elections](#), [Money in Politics](#), [National Security](#), [Society](#), [Culture](#)
[follow](#)
- morning joe**
expert in [Elections](#), [Health](#), [Society](#), [Media](#)
[follow](#)

At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the text "we can improve your experience." and logos for WP and a search engine.

Appendix B

Table 1:

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)

Table 2:

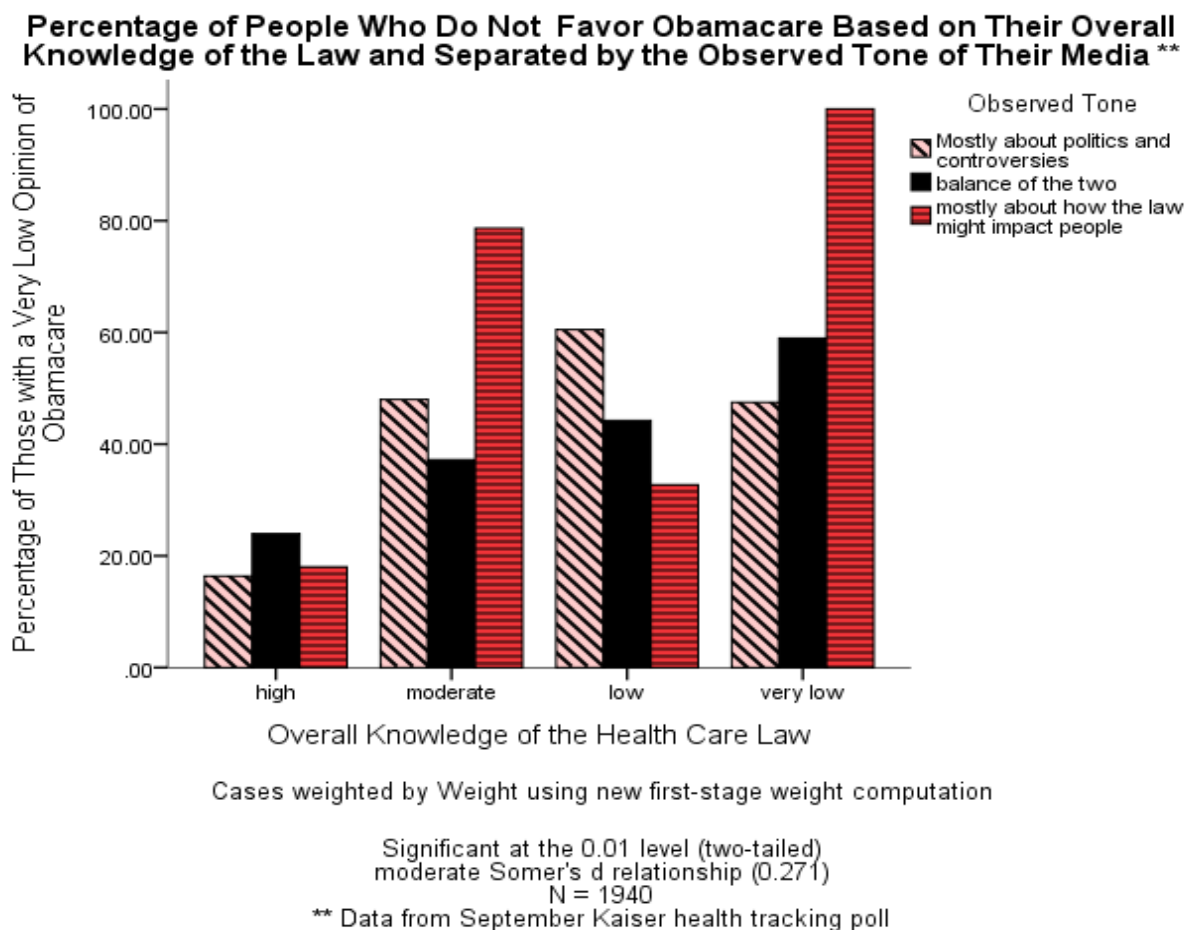
How Much People Favor Obamacare Based on Their Overall Knowledge of the Health Care Law

		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)

Figure 1:



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