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ABSTRACT

Media priming research attempts to address how media might shift the ground on which elections are decided. Most often, empirical tests of media priming have involved presidents and national issues. Empirical tests of priming effects show that people’s evaluations of political leaders’ performance on domain-specific issues influence evaluations of their overall performance. This effect is strengthened by media use. Unfortunately, there has been no clear specification about what considerations people take into account when making these domain-specific judgments. To address this question, Sniderman et al.’s (1991) reasoning chain model about people’s policy preferences was employed. This study attempted to integrate the theoretical work on priming and the research on how citizens process and incorporate media messages into their cognition to form their evaluations of political figures. It extended traditional priming and reasoning chain models to study the evaluation of state-level political actors and issues. Data for this study come from interviews with a panel of adult Ohioans conducted before and after the 2002 Governor’s election. All survey data come from RDD telephone surveys conducted by the Center for Survey Research at the Ohio State University. Results showed that the dominance of economic issues in news made the governor’s economic performance the standards by which his overall job performance
was judged. The candidate visibility, economic expectation, and party identification were significant predictors of voting choices in the Governor’s election. The finding that media enhanced the weights of the governor’s visibility and the economic expectation supported the notion that media priming had electoral consequences. Affect and economic perceptions were showed to be important factors in the reasoning of the governor’s economic evaluations and his overall evaluations. Media strengthened the role of affect and ideology in the reasoning process. The moderating role of political sophistication was also explored. Using issue discrimination as the measure, political notices were subject to media priming effect, while experts were immune to it. In addition, the reasoning of the novices was affective-driven, whereas the experts cognitive-driven. Implications and future research direction were also discussed.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Much research attention in the field of communication has been devoted to the relationship between the news media and various matters regarding audience orientations to public issues. Until recently, the study of media effects on public opinion in the context of public issues had been dominated by the agenda-setting perspective which emphasizes media’s role in influencing issues that people say are important. Now the field has been broadened by encompassing new ways of capturing the relationship between media and public issues perceptions. Among them, framing and media priming have been probably the most important and promising models of media effects in the past decade (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). There is yet another model that can be employed to study media’s influence on factors affecting people’s opinion on public affairs but has received limited attention—the reasoning chain. In this study, a causal reasoning model is proposed to demonstrate Ohioans’ reasoning processes in their evaluations of the governor and to examine media’s influences in the process.

The following section contains a brief review of the history of media effects research and what the aforementioned models have contributed to our understanding of
the relationship between media information and the formation of public opinion about political issues, and a specification of what’s still missing.

**Media’s influences on public opinion about public affairs**

Early research on media effects focused on questions about whether media have direct impacts on people’s opinions, attitudes, and behaviors and held that the media were so powerful that the audience just couldn’t resist their influence. The research during that era was largely based on the stimulus–response model drawn from psychology and grounded in mass society theory (Perse, 2000). However, persuasion and election research beginning from the World War II found no direct effect of media on voters, instead, the primary reference groups and opinion leaders mediate the influence (Lazasfeld et al., 1944; Berelson et al., 1954). Research in this vein by the Columbia School led to the articulation of a “minimal effects” model of media (Klapper, 1960). The reason for media's limited effects was the ability of the audience to selectively choose and use media content. In other words, people are able to control media content through various tactics—selective exposure, selective attention, selective perception, and selective recall. Thus, media effects were seen to be merely reinforcing people’s preexisting beliefs and attitudes, rather than changing them.

Starting from the 70s, researchers have shifted the focus from persuasion-driven questions to the more subtle cognitive aspects of media message processing. The shift was largely enhanced by the cognitive revolution in the field of psychology and proved very fruitful, compared to the earlier stage of research. Agenda-setting, priming, and framing are the product of this shift in the field of political communication. Scholars
working in the new cognitive framework no longer look for the obvious and direct impact of media on behavior, instead, they target the cognitive effects of media which concentrate more on the function of media in conveying knowledge and changing various types of cognitions (McLeod & Reeves, 1980).

Agenda-setting, priming, and framing models all take a cognitive perspective which examines how media coverage of certain issues influences public’s thinking about political issues and political actors, but they are distinctive models with different intellectual origins and approaches.

**Agenda-setting**

The agenda-setting model grew out of the dissatisfaction with the limited effects model dominated in the 50s and 60s and the desire to reorient media effects research away from the attitude change tradition. Instead of focusing on media’s direct impact on what people think as seen in the earlier persuasion research, agenda-setting examines the more subtle cognitive aspects of media message processing and demonstrates that media influence what topics people think about. Following Lippmann (1922), changes in the public agenda are thought to be caused by changes in the media agenda. Trenaman and McQuail (1961) in their 1959 study of the British general elections showed with empirical evidence that media influenced issues that people considered important. As they said, “The evidence available suggests very strongly that people think about what they are told…but at no level do they merely think what they are told” (p. 178). McCombs and Shaw (1972) showed with empirical evidence that through the selection
and display of news, mass media influence the public’s perception of what are the important issues of the day.

Agenda-setting’s orientation away from the traditional direct persuasive effect of media is noteworthy. However, the earlier agenda-setting work has been criticized for the lack of adequate theory to explain the processes involved in the effect (Kosicki, 1993). More recent exceptions include Iyengar and Kinder (1987)’s work which links agenda-setting to the cognitive psychology perspective and addresses the cognitive process that people undergo. Kosicki (1993) also notes that agenda-setting discusses public issues in a broad and sterile way. Since public issues are inherently contextual, treating them as bland topics leads to the loss of the essence of the controversy.

In comparison, the priming and framing research to be discussed next has been rationalized better by explicitly employing the cognitive framework.

**Media Priming**

What are the implications and consequences of media’s agenda-setting role in the real political context? Most Agenda-setting research before 1985 just stopped at the cognitive level of issue rank-order and didn’t go beyond that. Iyengar and Kinder (1997) developed the media priming hypothesis as a product of some experiments for agenda-setting testing to show how people’s opinions about public affairs may have real-world consequences. Media priming refers to the tendency of audiences to evaluate political leaders based on particular events and issues emphasized by news stories (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Essentially, media priming addresses a more consequential question about how media might shift the ground on which elections are decided (Iyengar &
Kinder, 1987). The priming hypothesis was defined by Iyengar and Kinder (1987) as, “By calling attention to some matters and ignoring others, media news influences the standards by which governments, presidents, public policies and candidates for office are judged by the public.” They found through a series of experiments that political issues receiving more news attention were given more weight in people’s judgments about the president’s performance. In contrast to those defined in agenda-setting, issues are defined in terms of more particular categories, e.g., the president’s stand on arms control, budget reductions for the student loan program, abortion policy, etc. Thus, certain details of issues and the nature of the controversies surrounding them are preserved.

Priming research has its origin in cognitive psychology. According to the theory of priming, when faced with a judgment or choice, people ordinarily do not take all plausible considerations into account, carefully examine and weigh all their implications, and then integrate them all into a summary decision, especially when dealing with an area that doesn’t have an immediate personal interest to them. People typically forgo such exhaustive analysis and instead employ intuitive shortcuts and simple rules of thumb, due to limited thinking powers (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982). People rely on information that is most accessible in memory, information that comes to mind spontaneously and effortlessly when a judgment must be made (e.g. Higgins & King, 1981). In other words, people tend to “satisfice” rather than “optimize” (Simon, 1957).

In political settings, priming refers to the ability of the media to activate people’s pre-existing beliefs, which then serve as standards for evaluating political actors. Media priming is usually considered to be a special case of the general cognitive process derived from the associative network model of human memory (e.g. Collins & Loftus, 1975;
Taylor & Fiske, 1978; Price & Tewksbury, 1997). According to the model, political attitudes are stored as nodes in the network of memory. When a node is activated by some stimuli, it may remain active for some time (ranging from hundreds of milliseconds to hours or longer) and thus increase the probability that related thoughts be activated. The spread of activation between related nodes in memory is how priming works. According to Pan and Kosicki (1997), media priming may increase the ease with which the related thoughts are activated, increase the breadth of the accessible thoughts, and tighten the links of the various thoughts.

Priming that grew out of psychology can be considered as a temporary accessibility short-term effect. But through routine activation and use of certain constructs over time, it’s certainly possible to have long-term and perhaps cumulative influences (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Media priming models in public opinion and political communication work usually deal with effects that are cumulative and have longer time frames than what’s in the psychology literature about priming.

Framing

Framing goes beyond the traditional agenda-setting model about what people talk or think about an issue by examining how they talk and think (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Framing also has its roots in cognitive psychology. In decision making literature, individuals’ choices vary a great deal depending on whether things are phrased as potential gains or losses (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; also see Price & Tewksbury’s review, 1997).
Pan and Kosicki (1993) categorize a psychological conception and a sociological conception on framing and maintain that framing analysis is built on the convergence between those two. As Kinder and Sanders (1990) suggest, frames serve both as “devices embedded in political discourse,” which is equivalent to media frame, and as “internal structures of the mind,” which is equivalent to individual frames.

Gamson and Modigliani (1987) defined a media frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events.” By framing social and political issues in specific ways, news organizations state the underlying causes and likely consequences of a problem and establish criteria for evaluating potential remedies for the problem (Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, 1997). Iyengar (1991) distinguished two frames in news coverage of political issues—the episodic news frame and the thematic news frame. The former presents a particular issue as a social and political phenomenon. The coverage is generally abstract and impersonal. The latter presents an issue as a personal experience of an individual or a family. He noted that news organizations produce more stories with episodic frames than those with thematic frames in order to attract audiences. As a result, issues are treated as isolated pieces. Iyengar further investigated the effects of these alternative frames on TV viewers’ attributions of responsibility for political issues and suggested that the prevalence of episodic news leads audiences to make personal attributions instead of institutional attributions of a social problem.

Individual frames are defined as “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information” (Entman, 1993). According to Goffman (1974), audience framing involves invoking “schemata of interpretation” that allow individuals to
“locate, perceive, identify, and label” information coming from the environment. In most instances, framing of media messages involves low levels of attention and the use of various cognitive shortcuts to make enough sense of a story or issue (McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002). In the domain of public affairs, how media choose to present stories will have an effect on how people evaluate public policies and political leaders involved in the stories.

**Different foci of the three models**

These three models all attempt to explore the relationship between the news media and people’s opinion about public policies and political actors from a cognitive perspective but with different foci. Agenda-setting deals with public’s agenda in broad categories. More specifically, agenda-setting is about the correspondence between what media portray as the most important problem facing the country and what people actually think is.

The media priming model advances our knowledge in this area by linking what stories media present with the evaluations of political actors, mostly of the presidents. Basically, news media alter the foundation of the judgments about political leaders by emphasizing certain issues while ignoring others. In the empirical testing of the media priming hypothesis, the evaluations of the president’s domain-specific performance is shown to influence the overall evaluations of him and the effect is moderated by the level of media use. Due to the limitation of people’s cognitive capacity, when people are prompted to make a judgment about a political actor’s overall performance, they use as a shortcut what’s the most accessible in their mind, i.e., the political actor’s performance in
the area that’s been stressed in the media. The media priming model just assumes that the
domain-specific evaluations are already formed at that moment. But what is not clear is
what factors people take into account when making the judgments about political leaders’
domain-specific performances.

What’s relevant to the public affairs domain in the framing model is the study of
media frames as independent variables. It asks the research question of how media frames
influence the audience’s perception of public issues and how the process works
(Scheufele, 1999). Quite a few scholars have conceptualized the impact of media frames
on the formation of attitudes and opinions, but few of them have empirically tested it.

**Linking reasoning chain model with priming effects**

The reasoning chain model originally formulated by Sniderman et al. (1991) in
the book *Reasoning and Choice* refers to the process in which people work through the
policy preferences and form opinions from abstract beliefs to more specific judgments,
even though they have limited information about politics. A group of researchers in the
book tested the model on a variety of issues. A few communication scholars have also
adapted it to the study of media effects (Pan & Kosicki, 1994, 1996, 1997; Park &
Kosicki, 1995), which provides an innovative way of looking at the links between media
and public opinion.

As mentioned before, in the research on priming effects, the evaluations of the
president’s domain-specific performance are shown to influence the overall evaluations
and the effect is dependent on the level of media use. But what’s not clear is what
considerations people make when making their judgments of the political leaders’
domain-specific performance. There are studies that have shown, for example, that President George Bush is more likely to be judged by his handling of the Gulf War following heavy media coverage (Iyengar & Simon; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Pan and Kosicki, 1997). Pan and Kosicki (1996) also demonstrate the reasoning processes and media influences on the processes in forming the approval of Bush’s handling of the Gulf crisis and the support of the Gulf policies. There is an opportunity to integrate these two separate lines of research into one model. By unfolding the reasoning part in which media may influence the effects of ideology and affect, and some other heuristics people employ when evaluating the political leaders’ domain-specific performance, it will complete the specification of the processes in which people derive the judgments of the political leaders’ overall performance.

If the integrated model for the evaluations of political leaders proves to be successful, it can be extended to study citizens’ reasoning process in forming policy preferences.

**Context of the study— a media content analysis**

Priming studies have exclusively examined the evaluations of the president. This study extends the priming effect study to the context of a state governor. Kosicki (2002) suggests that once studies on other political leaders such as governors or senators appear in large numbers, meta-analyses can be done to provide empirical summaries. Moreover, further research can be carried out to explore the possible different mechanism involved.

Studying priming effects at the state level allows us to focus on sub-national issues closer to people’s everyday lives, to better understand and control media content in
our studies, to access a wider range of data, and to have the ability to broaden the priming and reasoning chain models with additional concepts that can help explain the process by which priming occurs.

Pan and Kosicki (1997) coined the term “issue regime” to refer to a period when an issue dominates the amount of total media time and space and there is no competitor in terms of its impact. In the state of Ohio, public school funding is an ongoing controversy that has been the subject of a well-publicized lawsuit that was appealed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. It had absorbed a large share of the news resources in Ohio till recently.

The school funding issue was raised first in 1991 as a lawsuit that charged the Ohio’s public school funding system as unconstitutional. It was brought up again in 1997 when the Ohio Supreme Court gave the state legislature one year to develop a new system which would imply a large tax increase. The legislature turned to the voters about the tax increase and the proposal was defeated by voters in 1998. This has stirred a hot debate on the issue in the newspapers in the past few years. Republicans argue that the legislature's new funding plan is good because it will provide more money for public schools without raising taxes, while Democrats argue that the new funding plan is bad because it still will not provide enough money for many public schools and continues to rely on local property taxes. Regarding this issue, the governor has come up with several plans with the aim of not increasing the tax. On September 6, 2001, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled the school funding system unconstitutional for the third time and forced the state government to pump an extra $1.2 billion annually into schools, which increased pressure on the state budget at a time of economic stringency.
It is speculated that after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the news attention nationwide shifted strongly toward national security and then to the economic conditions. Ohio is no exception. To confirm it, two steps were taken according to the two operational criteria for identifying an issue regime proposed by Pan & Kosicki (1997). The criteria are: 1) an issue has the largest amount of media coverage, compared to other issues; 2) an issue is ranked first among the nominations for “the most important issue (or problem) facing the nation.”

Therefore, first, a search was conducted of news articles in the Columbus Dispatch, the major newspaper in the capital city of Ohio via the Lexis-Nexis database. The numbers of stories published in the newspaper that were primarily about the school funding issue and the economy were counted separately for each month from March 2001 (the month when the recession officially started, according to the Columbus Dispatch, October 21, 2001) to December 2002 (the concluding time of the survey on which this study is based). The results are graphed in Figure 1.1.
Figure 1.1 Issue coverage on economy and school funding in the Columbus Dispatch from March 2001 to November 2002

The figure shows the interchanging dominance of the two issues. The school funding news outnumbered the economic news from March 2001 until August 2001. Although the recession started in March, according to economists, it was officially announced around October and the media started using “recession” to characterize the economy later in the year. The amount of school funding news plunged in August 2001 but quickly rose to the peak in September 2001, when the third ruling of the school
funding issue by the Ohio Supreme Court took place. The economic news started superseding the school funding news from October 2001 and reached its peak in December. It continued outnumbering the school funding coverage throughout the end of the study period.

Second, the responses to a state RDD survey (conducted by the Ohio State University Center for Survey Research in September 2002) question “the most important problem facing the state of Ohio” were counted. During the study period from September 23, 2002 to October 13, 2002, the economy was named “the most important problem facing the state of Ohio” by 33% of the respondents and was ranked the No. 1 issue. In comparison, the school funding problem was nominated by 14.8% of the respondents. This pattern corresponds to the media coverage of the two issues during the same period. This partially supports the issue regime definition regarding the two issues in Ohio.

The purpose of this study is to enhance the understanding of the mechanisms underlying the formation of the job performance evaluation of a state-level political leader through the integration of the media priming model and the reasoning chain model.
CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will introduce the conceptual framework for the study. It will clarify the meaning of key concepts related to priming effects and reasoning chain, specify the relationships among the concepts, and discuss the value of integrating the two models. Finally, hypotheses will be formulated and presented.

Concepts related to priming

Evaluations of political actors

Throughout its eighteen year history, media priming research has almost exclusively dealt with presidential evaluations. Specifically, media priming studies mainly focus on “the judgments that Americans make regarding the performance and character of their president” (Iyengar et al., 1984, p.778). Presidents are judged by the policies they advocate, the party they represent, the achievements and failures they have brought about, the personal characteristics they possess, the feelings they invoke, membership in demographically defined groups, and more (Kinder & Sears, 1985). These “themes” are the key standards by which people judge presidents (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).
The priming hypothesis is about how a certain policy domain intensively addressed by the media and the President’s performance in that domain accordingly impacts the judgments of his performance in general. So it’s important to differentiate between overall evaluations of a political figure and domain-specific evaluations. The distinction can also be extended to the examination of state-level political leaders. In this study, overall evaluations refers to the judgments about how well the state governor has handled his job in general, while the domain-specific evaluations is defined as the judgments about how well the state governor has handled his job in a particular area, be it the economy or the school funding problem.

Media exposure and attention

Media exposure is an important concept in mass communication research and in many other fields where media effects are studied. This is so because of the widely accepted assumption that exposure to some content must occur before media effects will occur (McLeod & Reeves, 1980). Exposure is usually ascertained in a setting in which individuals come into contact with stories through the medium being examined (Allen & Waks, 1986, cited in Price & Zaller, 1993).

Although exposure has a long and distinguished history in media research, there have been numerous attempts to measure more refined conceptions of media use beyond exposure. One of the more important concepts is attention, or focused mental effort responded to media stimuli (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). McLeod and Kosicki (1986) noted that attention gained popularity with media researchers because it was easy and reliable to measure and that it was shown to be useful in predicting media effects.
Another benefit of measuring attention is that it tends to correct for the often-noted asymmetry between newspaper and television exposure. That is, reading implies attention, but ordinary television watching does not. This asymmetry often results in weaker relationships between television news viewing and public affairs knowledge than occurs for newspaper use. Measuring attention seems to level the playing field across media, yielding more stable and meaningful comparisons (Kosicki & Yuan, 2001).

Most priming studies using survey data do not test the direct effects of media exposure and attention. The traditional way is to compare the differences of the predicting power of domain-specific evaluations on the president’s overall performance judgments before and after a dramatic event that has received extensive focus from the media and is highly related to the domain that’s been evaluated. As McLeod & Reeves (1980) argue, media content alone does not produce effects. In order to show media effects, we need to examine not only the content that people are exposed to, but also the process in which the effects occur.

Krosnick and Brannon (1993) treated media exposure as one aspect of political involvement along with political knowledge and interest. They found that greater impact was associated with higher levels of knowledge and lower levels of exposure and interest. They argue that people who pay little attention to news tend to make the judgment on the spot. Those people are most likely to consider only a handful of issues that come to mind, thus are subject to a greater priming effect than people with higher levels of media exposure. In their study, media exposure is only a contingent condition for priming.

Pan and Kosicki (1997) consider media as a priming agent and estimate priming effects directly from media exposure variables. They posit that heavy exposure to media
coverage of a dominant issue leads to more frequent activation of thought elements related to the issue. Thus increased media exposure is related to increased activation.

Distinguishing between general media use and content-specific media use is also very important. Since the focus of the priming studies is on the intensive attention to a certain issue in media and its impact on the evaluations of political actors, it makes more sense to study the audience’s use of specific media content, rather than news in general. The relevant content in this study may include stories about the local economy, the state budget, the governor and the state legislature, and stories about the governor’s race.

**Character assessments**

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) are also interested in exploring whether TV news can prime the standards that viewers apply to evaluate the character of the president besides the judgments of a president’s performance. Following Kinder (1985)’s two-dimensional framework on presidential character assessment, they outlined two aspects of a president’s character that voters deem most important—competence and integrity. Competence is best represented by specific traits like “experienced” and “knowledgeable”; integrity is represented by traits such as “moral” and “honest.” They anticipated the largest priming effect on judgments of a president’s general performance, because people’s judgments of the overall presidential performance are an average judgment of how well the president handles some major domains and consequently news coverage of one area will enhance the weight they assign to it when making the judgment. They also expected an intermediate priming impact on the judgments of the president’s competence, since many people are aware that the performance in any domain doesn’t
necessarily reflect the president’s competence perfectly. Priming effect on judgments of
the president’s integrity was expected to be the weakest as problems such as
unemployment are not quite related to personal integrity.

The six experiments they conducted proved the basic priming hypothesis. However, the results supported the expectation in the case of President Carter, but consistently violated in the case of President Reagan. This work suggests that the public may be most susceptible to priming on the aspects of the president’s character that are most open to debate. They concluded that for President Carter, it’s a question of competence, while for Reagan, it’s more a question of trust.

McCurley and Mondak (1995) found that at the congressional level, voters also evaluate the candidates along the lines of their demonstrated competence and integrity. It is expected that people will judge the candidates for the state governor on the basis of competence and integrity as well. Nevertheless, since a state governor’s election is different from a presidential election in terms of the competitiveness of the candidates, as well as in many other details, the priming effect on the character evaluation of the governor may be weaker in magnitude.

In the case of the Ohio governor, Bob Taft has never been involved in any administrative or personal scandal, so we expect that the priming effect in the evaluations of his integrity will be the weakest.

**Political sophistication**

Almost no variable is more central to public opinion research than political cognitive complexity, or known as “political sophistication” (Luskin, 1986).
Priming researchers have also been identifying various conditions under which priming effects will be enhanced or reduced. Among them, political sophistication has drawn much attention because of its importance to the healthy operation of the political system. However, the role political sophistication plays in conditioning the impact of news coverage on the presidential evaluations is presently unclear due to contradictory findings and competing theoretical accounts for the observed phenomena. The methodological characteristics and the conclusions of these studies regarding political sophistication are presented in Table 2.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Analysis tool</th>
<th>Measurement of political expertise</th>
<th>Conclusion about political expertise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iyengar, Kinder, Peters &amp; Krosnick</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>A single assemblage experiment</td>
<td>Regression with interaction terms</td>
<td>Nine-item battery about political facts not presented in the presentations</td>
<td>Priming diminished among political experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iyengar &amp; Kinder</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Sequential experiments</td>
<td>Regression with interaction terms</td>
<td>Interest, media exposure and interpersonal discussion</td>
<td>Priming is not related to education in any consistent way. Priming is independent of political expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krosnick &amp; Kinder</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1986 NES survey data</td>
<td>Split-sample</td>
<td>Six factual knowledge items</td>
<td>Novices show more priming effects than experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krosnick &amp; Brannon</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1990-91 NES panel survey</td>
<td>Regression with interaction terms including all three aspects of involvement</td>
<td>Nine factual knowledge items for knowledge measure, plus media exposure, and interest measures</td>
<td>Examined separately, higher involvement was associated with reduced priming; but when put together, greater effect is associated with higher levels of knowledge and lower levels of exposure and interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller &amp; Krosnick</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Two experiments</td>
<td>Regression with interaction terms</td>
<td>Combined measures of general political knowledge and knowledge about the two target issues</td>
<td>Knowledge facilitates priming only among people who trust the media.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Summaries of the methodological characteristics and the conclusions of the studies testing the moderating role of political sophistication
One can learn from the table that several factors have contributed to this inconsistency: one is different types of data, the second is different means of operationalization of the concept, and the third is different analytical methods. There is no consensus on the optimal means of operationalization of political expertise. Different measures have been employed in different fields over the years, ranging from open-ended survey responses about candidates likes and dislikes (Lau, 1986), factual knowledge (e.g. Fiske et al., 1990; Tewksbury, 1999), news media use (Fiske et al., 1990; McGraw & Pinney, 1990); political participation (Fiske et al., 1990; McGraw & Pinney, 1990), and political interest (e.g. Guo & Moy, 1998), among others (see Eveland’s review, 2002). This problem is well reflected in the study of expertise as a contingent variable in priming effects. Some investigators measured the concept with questions about general political facts (Iyengar, Kinder, Peters & Krosnick, 1984; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990), some with combined general and domain-specific factual measures (Miller & Krosnick, 2000); some with knowledge alone (Miller & Krosnick, 2000), some with combined measures of interest, media exposure and knowledge (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). Recently, several researchers have concluded that knowledge measures are superior indicators of general political sophistication (Luskin, 1986; McGraw & Pinney, 1990; Zaller, 1990). Echoing McLeod, Kosicki & McLeod (2002) and Eveland (2002), I think knowledge measurement should tap both the knowledge content (facts) and structure (organization of thinking).

Another issue is that, in at least one of the reviewed studies, the approach of split-sample with chi-square difference tests was used; in others, multiple regression with interaction terms was used. Both methods have drawbacks. The major problem associated
with interactions is the inevitable multicollinearity even after centering the involved variables, which leads to unstable estimates.

Some problems are associated with the split-sample technique. One is the reduced sample size after splitting which will reduce the statistical power. Second, if both interacting variables are continuous, to apply the multisample approach requires reducing a continuous variable to a nominal or ordinal scale. Such a transformation leads to an immediate loss of information (Russell & Bobko, 1992). In addition, where to subdivide the continuous distribution is arbitrary.

In the Miller & Krosnick study (2000), they treated knowledge as a dichotomous variable, with respondents who scored at or below the median being categorized as possessing low knowledge, and those who scored above the median as possessing high knowledge. Cohen (1983) notes that the cost of dichotomization of continuous variables is a reduction of statistical power equivalent to losing one fifth to two thirds of the variance that may be accounted for on the original variables.

The deeper problem is not methodological, but conceptual. The theoretical explanations provided by priming scholars have been contradictory in different studies, which makes the role of political sophistication even more confusing. Iyengar, Kinder, Peters & Krosnick (1984) found that priming effect diminished among political experts. They argue that compared to novices, experts not only know more, but possess better organized knowledge. Experts have a greater ability to deal with new information and interpret it in ways consistent with prior convictions (Fiske, Kinder & Larter, 1983). Experts are supposed to examine information more deeply and perhaps more critically. Moreover, drawing attention to the problem may only remind them of what they already
know. Therefore, experts are less susceptible to priming effect than novices and the findings confirm their expectations. In their later study (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), however, they found that priming is independent of political expertise. Their explanation for this is the difference in designs. They assert that in the 1984 study, experts tend to show less priming because their standards are more securely anchored. In 1987 studies, experts tend to show less priming due to the same reason; but they tend to show more priming, because they pay more attention. Their justification for the inconsistency was not convincing, in that they didn’t specify under what conditions experts show more priming and under what conditions they show less priming. They further note that sequential experiments in 1987 resemble viewers’ actual viewing more closely, so the results are more reasonable.

Krosnick & Kinder (1990) did a study based on survey data and showed that novices show more priming effects than experts. They gave the same explanations as those in Iyengar et al.’s 1984 study. In contrast, Krosnick & Brannon (1993) disentangled different dimensions of political expertise—political knowledge, media exposure, and political interest (measured by media attention). They found that when examined separately, higher involvement was associated with reduced priming; but when put together, greater effect is associated with higher levels of knowledge and lower levels of exposure and interest. They drew from the psychological perspective on the difference between on-line and memory-based information processing to show how political knowledge, media exposure, and political interest may have oppositely signed effects. They argue that people who are highly attentive to news use on-line judgments. They form general political evaluations, update them continually and integrate them into a
“running tally” (Hastie & Park, 1986) as new information comes in, so new pieces of information have a small impact on them. In contrast, less attentive people employ a memory-based strategy. They make such an evaluation by recalling whatever comes to mind at the moment. For the latter group, they further argue that knowledge is a factor that can enhance the likelihood of information storage and retrieval and further enhance priming. So for people with low exposure and low interest, more knowledge is associated with a greater priming effect. What’s missing here is what role knowledge plays for people with high exposure and high interest. It seems that the authors implied that for those people, high levels of knowledge are still associated with a smaller priming effect. Obviously, the results were not consistent with it, because they found knowledge facilitates priming, holding exposure and interest constant.

Miller & Krosnick (2000) found that the interaction item involving knowledge was not significant, but the one involving both knowledge and media trust yielded a significant result. They then concluded that knowledge only enhances priming among people who trust the media. They argue that for the priming process to occur, one must be able to interpret, store and later retrieve the information and make inferences from the news stories. But this seems contradictory to the rationale of the priming theory. The theory holds that human thinking powers are limited. In the political domain which is not likely of the direct interest for the public, people usually do not evaluate all the information they have when called for a judgment. Instead, people are more likely to use only a sample of readily accessible information. Therefore, according to the theory, more knowledgeable people should be relatively immune to the effect compared to less knowledgeable people. Or in other words, they would be more likely to consider more
information and make the according judgment rather than picking whatever is accessible at that moment, because presumably they have more information processing abilities.

This study proposes that political sophistication will be associated with weak priming effects. Different measures of political sophistication will also be employed.

Conceptual relationships—priming

**Media priming**

The concept of priming has its origin in cognitive psychology. According to the theory of priming, when faced with a judgment or choice, people ordinarily do not take all plausible considerations into account, carefully examine and weigh all their implications, and then integrate them all into a summary decision. People typically do not bother with such an exhaustive analysis and use intuitive shortcuts and simple rules of thumb instead (Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky, 1982).

People rely on information that is most accessible in memory, information that comes to mind spontaneously and effortlessly when a judgment must be made (e.g. Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). In other words, people tend to “satisfice,” rather than “optimize” (Simon, 1957).

In the political setting, priming refers to the ability of the media to activate people's pre-existing beliefs, which then serve as standards for evaluating political actors. Thus, as the media emphasize particular issues for evaluating politicians, voters accord more weight to such issues in making political judgments.
According to the theory of priming, when Americans evaluate the job performance of their president, they are unlikely to assess the president’s performance in a wide range of political domains and integrate those domain-specific judgments into an overall summary. More likely, especially during a relatively speedy survey interview people would take a satisficing approach, assessing presidential performance in only a small sample of policy domains—a sample of convenience (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). And the accessibility of the policy domains is presumed to be determined mainly by news media coverage.

Pan and Kosicki (1997) suggested that media’s repeated coverage of a given topic or issue may affect the audiences’ cognitive processes in three ways: by increasing the ease with which the related considerations are activated, by increasing the breadth of the accessible thought elements, and by strengthening the linkage of the thought elements. As a result, people are more likely to use the information activated by media when judging a policy or a political actor and this priming effect occurs in consequence of “automatic and effortless processes of spreading activation” (Miller & Krosnick, 1996, p81).

Miller and Krosnick (1996) specified the core of the priming effect by proposing three subhypotheses: the gradient hypothesis, the dosage hypothesis and the resistance gradient hypothesis. There are two components of the gradient hypothesis. The first is the target gradient hypothesis. It suggests that priming effects are stronger when attitudes are closely related to those that are directly activated by media. That is to say, news stories about the national economic conditions will have more impact on attitudes about the president’s performance in the economic domain than his performance in other domains. The second part refers to the consequence gradient hypothesis. It deals with which overall
presidential evaluations are altered and to what extent. The president can be evaluated in terms of his competence, leadership, and integrity (see Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). It’s expected that news on a certain issue will not affect all the aspects of the presidential evaluations aforementioned. Instead, the one that’s most relevant to the issue will be activated thus more likely be influenced than others. The gradient hypothesis has been generally confirmed by priming studies.

The dosage hypothesis concerns states that the larger amount of media coverage on an issue that’s been received by the audiences, the more impact it has. The resistance hypothesis considers the effect of knowledge on the priming effect. The argument is that controlling for dosage, higher level of political knowledge should presumably be associated with more resistance to the effect. Though seemingly intuitive, these two hypotheses didn’t receive unanimous support due to many reasons discussed in the previous section.

All these hypotheses will be examined in this study.

A schema (Figure 2.1) has been created to show the relationship of the key constructs involved in the priming model.

![Figure 2.1: Relationships among the key concepts of media priming](image_url)
An extended priming study

Though almost solely studied in the domain of the job evaluations of the President, priming is not just about that. It can certainly be extended to the evaluations of political leaders at other levels, such as governors, senators and congressmen, and with an equal importance, to the assessments of public policy issues.

The core of democracy is to let people instead of a few policy makers rule. It’s essential to examine how people derive candidate and policy preferences, in addition to the evaluations of the mass public’s competence to govern. Besides studying the evaluations of the governor, this study will address one aspect of the big question—the electoral consequences of priming. The factors that influence the voting choices in the governor’s election will also be examined as an extension to the standard priming research.

Only one priming study has so far tested the impact of the preoccupations of news on the considerations voters have in elections. Iyengar & Kinder (1987) attempted to determine whether differences in the focus of TV news cause different criteria voters applied in congressional elections. According to the literature, congressional elections typically happen in circumstances of low interest and limited information, therefore, voters tend to follow simple rules of thumb. In light of the facts about the congressional elections, Iyengar and Kinder expected the voting choices to be influenced by four considerations: candidates’ party identification, their comparative visibility (a surrogate of the incumbent’s advantage), their personal qualities, and national economic conditions. And if the priming theory holds, when news emphasizes the national economy, then the weight of the economy that voters accord to their considerations will increase. The same
thing should happen to the other three aspects if news focuses on them. The findings supported the economy and candidate quality propositions but not the candidate visibility and party ID ones. They concluded that priming operates on the voting choices people make.

Therefore, one of the many tasks this study will fulfill is to test how media coverage changes the priorities in people’s mind when they are about to make decisions on whom to vote for as the governor. The governor’s election in Ohio is also in a low-information setting and the challenger was almost invisible in the local media and had a poor name recognition among the voters. Before the 2002 election, the incumbent Bob Taft agreed to have three debates with the challenger Timothy Hagan on television, which increased the challenger’s visibility to some extent. Still, the incumbent has huge advantage in terms of finance and visibility. The election results were as expected: The incumbent Bob Taft was reelected with about 58% of the vote, as opposed to Tim Hagan’s 38%. As a result, we expect that both the candidates’ comparative visibility and economic perceptions were considerations when people voted for the governor as they were primed by the news media.

In order to test the consequences of priming in the governor’s election, some changes to the model are necessary. The Iyengar & Kinder (1987) study used experiments to test the hypothesis. Since newscast was the manipulation, any effect observed from the study can be attributed to the newscast. Different from it, this study used survey data, as a result, media variables ought to be included in the model to estimate media effects.
Concepts related to the reasoning chain

**Ideology and the consistency of the belief system**

A political ideology is a coherent and consistent set of beliefs about who ought to rule, what principles rulers ought to obey, and what policies rulers ought to pursue (Lane, 1962). Political ideology, namely liberalism or conservatism, can be the connecting thread of issue positions, party identification, and the evaluation of political parties and candidates. So to speak, it is a simplifying heuristic that can help make judgments based on limited information (Glynn et al., 1999). Whether people have a political ideology can be measured in two ways: (1) by seeing how frequently people speak in terms of broad political categories-liberal or conservative-when they discuss politics; and (2) by measuring the extent to which we can predict a person's view on one issue by knowing his or her view on another issue.

Since the 1960's, one enduring question in the study of political behavior has been whether or not there is ideological thinking among Americans (Conover & Feldman, 1981). The authors of *The American Voter* found that only about 11.5% of the respondents in the 1952 National Election Study used ideological concepts to judge political parties and candidates (Campbell et al., 1960). Converse (1964) concluded that citizens at large are ideologically innocent and show very little ideology constraint (Converse, 1964).

However, many scholars over the years have found consistency and stability in public opinions on political issues. Among them, Lane (1962) takes an idiographic perspective and asserts that people do have political beliefs, but they just do not use the same abstract, ideological principles to organize those ideas as political experts do. Nie,
Verba & Petrocik (1976) further demonstrate that there are higher levels of constraint in the mass public than there were in the studies of the 1950s on which Converse based his arguments. On the other hand, V. O. Key Jr. (1961) admits that most people have a fuzzy mind about political issues, but he believes that “in the large the electorate behaves about as rationally and responsibly as we should expect, given the clarity of the alternatives presented to it and the character of the information available to it” (V. O. Key Jr., 1966, p7). He suggests that since issues of politics are not of a central concern for most people, there in fact exists an “issue public” which consists of citizens who are interested in, attentive to, and well informed about a certain political issue.

Another piece of research by Stimson is crucial in shaping the reasoning and choice research. Stimson (1975) switches the focus of research on the consistency of the mass belief systems from a yes-no question to the study of the moderators. Essentially he investigated how consistency in the reasoning and choice varies with different levels of cognitive ability. Stimson demonstrates that well-educated and well-informed people have well-organized issue preferences, while poorly-educated and poorly-informed only minimally do so. According to Stimson, there is a continuum of political reasoning running from well organized to hardly organized at all. Sniderman et al. (1993) acknowledge Stimson’s contribution in showing how mass belief systems vary predictably across mass publics. However, Sniderman et al. also contend that the less well informed and less well educated organize their political thinking differently, rather than simply being unable to do it. In Sniderman et al.’s views, people use heuristics to make political judgments even though they may not have enough knowledge. Moreover, different people have different paths of reasoning, depending on their cognitive capacity.
Affect

Affect is a generic term which encompasses preferences, moods and emotions (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Simon, 1982). It refers to “a subjective state which involves the arousal of autonomic nervous system or the interruption of attention” (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Simon, 1982; cited in Conover & Feldman, 1984, pp. 51). Affect had long been overlooked in the studies of public opinion (Kinder, 1994). For many years, the emphasis had been on cognition, in other words, how people process information, until Zajonc (1980) and other scholars brought the concept back on the stage in the early 1980s. There have emerged plenty of theories dealing with affect, but they differ in their statements about the nature of affect, about the conditions that cause distinct emotional experience, about the extent to which affective processes interact, according to Kinder (1994).

Affect is important to political attitudes and behavior. The 1980 National Election Study shows that positive and negative feelings toward the presidential candidates had more predictive power on candidate preferences than party identification or issue positions, and about equal to trait ratings of the candidates in predicting power (Roseman, Abelson & Ewing, 1986). According to the authors of Reasoning and Choice, affect is one important heuristics that people employ to derive their political judgments (Sniderman et al., 1993). One affect-related heuristic in the book is the “likability heuristic.” It refers to the use of affect toward a certain social group, for example, the blacks, or the different levels of affect toward competing candidates as the base for political judgments and preferences. The authors argue that for the less politically sophisticated people, affect can serve as a “calculational crutch,” because of the
“accessibility” of feelings and the “immediacy” of affect-driven inference. But they also warn us that it doesn’t mean that the reasoning of the more sophisticated is free of affect. They showed instead how pronounced and supportive the likes and dislikes of those people are.

**Economic perception**

Economic perceptions refer to an individual’s sense of the economic well-being. It has basically two dimensions: pocketbook judgments and sociotropic judgments. Pocketbook perceptions are self-interested and based on perceived benefits of one’s self, family and other psychologically close entity. Sociotropic perceptions are general judgments about the national economy.

Voluminous literature has shown that the perceptions of the national economic well-being are more important determinants of both electoral outcomes and candidate evaluations than pocketbook judgments (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979, 1981; Fiorina, 1981; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Markus, 1988; Mutz, 1992, 1994). Mondak, Mutz & Huckfeldt (1996) raised a point about things that are possibly missing in the past work. As they stated, perceptions of personal well-being and perceptions of national well-being are only two points along the continuum; in between is a broad area which consists of “successively larger collectives with whom people may interact either through interpersonal or mass mediated communication.” They found that people are most likely to use the state of the national economy, the social context most relevant to presidential evaluation, then in descending order, the neighborhood economic conditions, followed by the immediate family financial situation.
We have so far discussed the relationship of the presidential election and the economic perceptions. What will be the case for the governor’s election? Does the sense of the national economy, the state’s economy or the self well-being play the most important role in voters’ evaluations of the governor? As Beyle (1992) has stated (cited in Svoboda, 1995), when the national economy went bad in the early 1980s, state governments could do little to reverse it, yet they were forced to respond with more stringent budgets, which in turn affected the evaluations of the state governments in most states. But most research in the 1980s suggested that national economy is a dominant factor compared to the state economic conditions (see the review of Niemi et al. 1995; Svoboda 1995). However, Svoboda (1995) argues that because of the state executive reforms and the rejuvenation of “Federalism,” state governors are more visible and powerful than before, thus gubernatorial elections may be affected by the state’s economy more today than in the past. More recent studies have begun to show significant impact of state economy on gubernatorial elections. Stein (1990) found that voters who assigned the blame for the state’s economic problems to the governor are not likely to vote for the incumbent. In contrast, the pocketbook perceptions had no effect on state-level voting choice. In the analysis of the 1982 and 1986 CBS/NY Times Exit Polls on gubernatorial elections, Svoboda (1995) found that voters’ retrospective evaluations of the state economy have a significant impact on individual vote choice. Howell & Vanderleeuw (1990) also found a strong relationship between the perceptions of the state’s economy and vote choice in Louisiana using survey data. Using the 1986 ABC/Washington Post exit polls in 34 gubernatorial races, Niemi et al. (1995) shows that
the state economy, increases in taxes, and voters’ personal finances all contributed to votes against the incumbent governors.

In the current study on voters’ reasoning of judgments on the governor’s performance, it is reasonable to suggest that the state economy and the community’s economic situation will be given more weight than other issues in voters’ evaluations of the governor in the time when the economy is not in a good shape.

**Effects of media use on the reasoning process**

This study attempts to explore how people incorporate mass mediated information into their reasoning about the governor’s evaluations. Pan & Kosicki (1996) outline four dimensions of news media presentations based on previous work on media effects. First, news media provide factual information. But they argue that news is not likely to have a direct influence on people’s opinions, instead it may enhance the weights of certain factors involved in reasoning and choices. Second, news media provide ideas, images, instances and episodes which serve as exemplars of abstract concepts or principles. Third, news media present affective and emotional appeals related to a certain issue. Lastly, news media frame public issues in particular ways using various symbolic devices.

When considering media’s role in the reasoning chain model, Pan & Kosicki (1996) suggest that mass media be considered external to the mental process. They specify two ways in which media content affects the reasoning process. First, one can examine how media exposure affects each of the factors in the reasoning model except ideological orientations. The second approach is to assess the effects of media on the weights attached to each of the predictive factors. With the formulation, the authors
found information-oriented media use has impact on the relative weights people put on ideological thinking in the reasoning process. It supports the idea that people incorporate information provided by the media in their thinking about public issues.

Conceptual Relationship—reasoning

The reasoning chain

In the book “Reasoning and Choice”, Sniderman et al. (1993) challenge the conventional way of characterizing the structure of people’s belief systems and offer a new perspective on how people work through the policy preferences and form opinions, even though they have been shown to possess limited information about politics and lack consistency in their considerations (e.g. Converse, 1964).

Following Converse (1964), research on attitude consistency, opinion stability and levels of conceptualization all showed that public opinion tend to be minimally consistent, minimally stable, and can minimally conceptualize the reasons for their attitudes. Later, scholars find this line of research overdrawn. They do find consistency and stability in public’s attitudes across issues and over time. Sniderman et al. (1991) reconsider the role of consistency and attempt to give a causal account of how the connections of the elements of political thinking arise.

The conventional view of public opinion emphasizes both the scarcity of political information the public possesses and their ineptness at manipulating the information they happen to have. The authors of “Reasoning and Choice” do not dispute the first contention, but question the second. They argue that people frequently can compensate for their limited information about politics by taking advantage of judgmental heuristics.
A central aim of Sniderman et al.’s research has been to identify some of these judgmental heuristics.

They formulated a number of specific heuristics throughout a series of studies. One is “likability heuristic,” which refers to feelings toward groups such as liberals and conservatives. Those likes and dislikes can provide people with an affective tool to figure out the issue positions of strategic groups and aid in making their own judgment. Through this way, people can form judgments seemingly along the liberal-conservative dimension, even though they may be quite unable to define or explain what liberalism and conservatism stand for as systems of ideas as criticized by Converse (1964). Sniderman et al. show that politically less sophisticated people use this heuristic effectively. Another is the “desert heuristic,” a rule to decide whether a certain group deserves assistance according to whether they can be held responsible for giving rise to the problem they are facing. Using this rule, people can decide that, for instance, blacks are entitled to government assistance if the problem results from external causers and, on the contrary, that they are not entitled to the assistance if the problem is caused by internal factors.

They use a metaphor of a “reasoning chain” to describe the process which starts with abstract premises then proceeds to the concrete and specific preference. The notion is built on the belief system model (Converse, 1964; Feldman, 1988), yet adds dynamics to show how voters derive their opinions on public policies from abstract principles including one’s ideology and attitudes toward the principle, and other cognitive and affective factors (Pan & Kosicki, 1994).
The research is based on the assumption that people do not choose positions on issues such as racial equality or abortion on a whim, rather, they rely on shortcuts in reasoning. It also assumes that people make up their minds in different ways, which is termed “heterogeneity” in the thesis. Built upon Stimson’s (1975) analysis of constraint and complexity in mass belief system, Sniderman et al. contend that the traditional way of treating the public as a whole when characterizing the political reasoning is misleading. Their theory rests on a double-winged contention: First, citizens compensate for a lack of information about political issues by relying on shortcuts in reasoning, and second, the heuristics that people take advantage of vary according to levels of cognitive ability, among them, education and political awareness. In their studies, they test the contingent role of political sophistication and specify who is likely to make use of a given heuristic and who another. They also demonstrate that people organize thinking about politics in different ways depending on levels of political sophistication: The more politically sophisticated tend to utilize ideological inferences, while the less sophisticated tend to use affective inferences.

One limitation of the reasoning chain is the presumption of deductive reasoning. Sniderman et al. showed with evidence that sometimes people start at the beginning of an argument, then jumping directly to the concrete conclusion, and only then filling the middle part.

Despite the limitations, the perspective is helpful in depicting the processes in which people form their opinions about certain public issues and potentially about candidates (though the latter notion was not tested in their thesis). Communication scholars are interested in finding out how news media influence audiences’ attitudes,
though largely indirectly and contingent upon other factors. In doing so, one way is to link the analysis of media discourse on specific issues with the study of people’s reasoning processes in forming their judgments.

In order to show media’s influence, we can now build media variables into the reasoning model. Media can indirectly exert an impact on people’s judgments by enhancing the relevance and shifting the weights of the factors that people take into consideration in forming their policy preferences or candidate evaluations. Drawing on Sniderman et al’s model, Pan and Kosicki (1996) mimic white people’s reasoning process of racial policy preference and investigate news media’s influences in several ways. The model posits that white people’s racial policy reasoning relies on both ideological principles and affect. They also show that white people rely on “immediate reasoning premises” such as causal attribution and reality judgments of racial inequality to form the judgments. Most important, the process is contingent upon media use. The analysis shows information-oriented media use strengthens the role of ideology and internal causal attribution in the reasoning.

**An Integrated Model and hypotheses**

The foundation of both priming and the reasoning chain is the fact that individuals have cognitive limitations. People abstain from effortful and exhaustive calculations when they are prompted to make judgments about a policy issue or a political leader. Instead, they employ a shortcut, i.e., what’s most accessible in their minds at that moment. And the accessibility of the particular element that gets used is presumed to be influenced primarily by news media coverage. Both the priming model and the reasoning chain
model stress the impact of media in providing the cues for the formation of opinions about political leaders and policies.

Scholars in the two areas have also been able to detect the moderating role of political sophistication in the opinion formation process. Although the direction of the effect of political sophistication in the priming model has not been conclusive, the reasoning chain studies have identified that people with high level of political expertise will undertake a more ideological thinking and go through more paths than those with low expertise in their reasoning process.

When studying the evaluations of a certain political actor, the integration of the two approaches is promising, because it brings together the two elements of the opinion formation process research and enables the explication of the mechanism underlying it. More specifically, priming deals with how media alter the standards by which political actors are evaluated. The standards usually include how well they do their jobs in a certain domain, for instance, the economy. Nevertheless, the priming model is not aimed at unfolding the process of forming the domain-specific evaluation of a political leader. It’s presumed that before priming happens, people already have an opinion about how well a political leader performs in the domain that has received substantial amount of attention in media coverage. This is where the reasoning chain model comes into play. It depicts the reasoning process of the formation of domain-specific evaluations of a political leader. With the integrated model, we’ll be able to show the complete picture and examine the impact of media exposure and attention on the whole process of establishing the judgment of a political leader.
This particular study attempts to test how media coverage of the economy increases the weight accorded to it in the evaluations of the Ohio governor in that particular domain when people are asked to give an overall evaluation of him; in addition, it aims to explore the heuristics people employ in their reasoning of assessing the governor’s performance in the domain of the state economy. By incorporating these two models, I’m hoping to provide a more complete picture of the formation of opinions about the governor’s performance than would be available otherwise.

The hypothesized conceptual model on the formation of the overall evaluations of the state Governor Bob Taft is shown below:
Figure 2.2: Hypothesized conceptual model on the formation of the overall evaluations of the state Governor Bob Taft
The analysis has two parts. First, it seeks to test the priming effect in the job evaluations of the governor. Based on the media content analysis shown before, it’s clear that the state press was dominated by economic news during the study period, so it’s expected that the issue of economy was primed by the media more than any other issues in the evaluations of the governor. A hypothesis which combines Miller & Krosnick’s target gradient hypothesis and dosage hypothesis of priming effects was formulated for the purpose:

Hypothesis 1: The greater attention paid to news media, the greater the weight given to Governor Taft’s handling of the economy issue than that given to his handling of the school funding issue in forming the overall evaluations of him.

In order to determine if the news coverage primes the audiences’ judgment of the governor’s character, the two factors extracted from the character assessments will be interpolated into the model as dependent variables. Furthermore, the differences between the magnitude of priming on the overall performance and that on each of the two character factors will be compared. This is compatible with Miller & Krosnick’s consequence gradient hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: The priming effect will be stronger in the evaluations of the overall performance of the governor than in the evaluations of his competence, and the effect in the evaluations of his competence will be greater than that in the evaluations of his integrity.

To test the moderating role of political sophistication (Miller & Krosnick’s resistance hypothesis), the following hypothesis was derived:
Hypothesis 3: Those with higher levels of political sophistication are less susceptible to the priming effect than those with lower levels.

The following hypothesis aims to test whether media emphasis on the economy and the incumbent’s visibility affects the importance voters attached to them in deciding between the two candidates:

Hypothesis 4: Primed by the media, economic perception and candidates’ comparative visibility will have significant effects on people’s vote choices. Candidates’ quality difference is not a significant predictor. Party identification will also influence voting choices.

The second goal is to integrate the priming paradigm and the reasoning chain by mimicking people’s reasoning process in the formation of the judgment about how well the Governor has handled the state economy and examining how the domain-specific evaluation and other factors influence the overall evaluation of Governor Taft. Meanwhile, the effect of media exposure and attention will also be studied. Hypotheses were derived from the arguments regarding media effects discussed before:

Hypothesis 5: Domain-specific evaluations of the governor will have strong direct effects on the overall evaluations of him.

Hypothesis 6: Both the economic reality judgment and future economic expectation variables will have direct effects on the domain-specific evaluations.

Hypothesis 7: Both ideology and affect will have direct effects on the economic reality judgment and future economic expectation variables.
Hypothesis 8: The inclusion of the economic reality judgment and future economic expectation items will reduce the direct effects of ideology and affect on the domain-specific evaluations.

Hypothesis 9: Both ideology and affect will have direct effects on the overall evaluations as well.

Next, the effects of media use on people’s evaluations of the governor and the considerations in the reasoning process will be examined.

Hypothesis 10: Media use will enhance the effects of both ideology and affect on the economic reality judgment, future economic expectation, domain-specific evaluations and overall evaluations.

The final task is to explore how political sophistication will influence the reasoning process.

Hypothesis 11: People who are more political sophisticated will take a different reasoning route than those who are less sophisticated. The former will be more likely to take an ideological reasoning path and the latter an affective path.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This chapter presents details of the research design of the study, the measurement of each concept introduced in Chapter 2, and the detailed plan of data analysis.

Data

The data came from a two-wave panel study conducted by the Center for Survey Research at the Ohio State University. The first wave is based on telephone interviews conducted from September 23, 2002 to October 13, 2002, with 414 randomly selected adults throughout the state of Ohio.

The respondents who agreed to be contacted again for a follow-up interview (85% of the total sample) were called between November 8, 2002 and December 12, 2002, right after the 2002 gubernatorial election. The 260 respondents who completed both interviews (62.8% of the original sample) constitute the sample for the analysis.

For the survey in wave one, a random sample of computer-generated telephone numbers was used to reach households throughout the state regardless of whether their number was listed or unlisted. Within each household, one English-speaking adult was
selected by a random procedure to be the respondent for the survey. All interviewing was completed from the OSU survey center.

In wave one, a total of 1,700 randomly-generated telephone numbers was used for this survey, with many being called as many as 10 times to try to reach a respondent at a time that was convenient for her or him to be interviewed. Of these numbers, 1,127 were presumed to reach a household in Ohio with an eligible respondent. From these households, interviews were completed in 37% of the cases. Among those households in which it was known that interviewers actually spoke with the eligible adult respondent, interviews were completed in 75% of the cases.

The study involves questions about people’s media use, views of media, and important topics facing the State of Ohio. Topics include issues regarding the upcoming election for the Ohio governor, the attitudes about the state governor and the legislature, views of the economy and a variety of items about people's use of media and general communication behavior.

There are two features of the data. One is that they are from a survey study which deals with a mix of real-world events and media contents, and with a unique period of the governor’s election in Ohio. Second, the study has a panel design so that the reciprocal causal effects can be eliminated.

**Measures**

**Evaluation of the political actors.** Respondents were first asked to rate the overall performance of Governor Taft on the letter grade scale from “A” to “F”. Then they were
asked to rate how he has handled the state’s economy and the school funding problem respectively on the same scale. These variables were reverse coded from “F” to “A.”

News exposure and attention. The newspaper exposure measure is based on the question asking respondents to indicate how many days they read or looked at a daily newspaper during the past seven days. Respondents were then asked about their attention to newspaper news on four topics: the national economy, the local economy, the state budget, which was being deliberated by the legislature, and the governor and legislature. TV news exposure is a similar measure to newspaper exposure. Since TV news gives little coverage on the state government and the Governor, attention to TV news questions only include stories about the national economy and the state and local news. New media (the Internet) use was also measured in the study. Respondents were asked to report the amount of attention they gave to each of the following three areas: online national news, online state and local news, and online economic news. The media attention items were asked on 11-point scales ranging from no attention (0) to very close attention (10). Following Eveland & Scheufele (2000)’s approach, media attention and exposure of newspaper, TV, and the Internet are first standardized and then combined into a single index ($\alpha = .83$).

Political sophistication. Since different measurements of political sophistication may influence its role in priming effects, it was analyzed in this study using two different indicators. The first index of political sophistication was constructed from three items about general political facts of the legislature, the Supreme Court and the campaign for the upcoming governor’s election in Ohio. The response choices for political knowledge items were all converted to dichotomous, with “correct answer” scored 1 and “wrong
answer” scored 0. Then the scores for the three items were added up. This measure thus ranges from 0 (gave wrong answers to all three questions) to 3 (gave correct answers to all three questions). The alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is .54. Considering the measures tap different topics on state-level politics, the reliability level is acceptable.

Political sophistication was also assessed by issue discrimination. It refers to the ability of respondents to differentiate political candidates on the basis of their distinctive issue positions (Kosicki, 1987). The format of the questions was based on standard NES questions on issue discrimination. The three key issues on which candidates Bob Taft and Timothy Hagan were positioned include the installation of video lottery machines in Ohio’s horse race tracks, the legalization of marijuana use for medical purposes, and the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. Respondents were asked to place Taft and Hagan respectively on a seven-point scale of each issue, where 1 means favor the action and 7 means oppose the position. The perceived Taft position was subtracted from the perceived Hagan position. The resulting differences were summed up to give an overall index of issue discrimination. The two political sophistication measures are moderately correlated (r=.34***).

Affect. Affective responses were assessed by a question asking respondents’ feelings toward certain political figures. The scale runs from “favorable”, “neither favorable nor unfavorable” to “unfavorable.”

Economic perceptions. As mentioned before, economic perceptions include two dimensions, perceived self-interest and sociotropic perceptions. This study only asked about sociotropic perceptions about economic conditions in Ohio and in the part of Ohio that the respondent resides. The sociotropic perceptions were measured by six questions
asking respondents whether (1) Ohio (2) their region will have good times financially or bad times during the next 12 months; (3) their region is in an economic recession now; (4) it is a serious, a moderate, or a mild recession, if yes to (3); (5) they expect economic conditions in their region to get better, get worse or stay the same five years from now; (6) their region is in better economic shape, worse shape, or about the same shape as the rest of Ohio. Item 3 and 4 were combined and collapsed to form a single measure of recession perception (Item 3new, 3-point scale, 1=in a serious recession and 3=not in a recession). Item 1, 2, 5 and 6 were reverse coded (3-point scale, 1=bad times/worse, 2=depends/the same, and 3=good times/better).

Personal character assessment. Respondents were asked to evaluate how well each of the seven character traits described Taft and Hagan respectively. Four of the traits include “inspiring,” “providing strong leadership,” “weak,” and “knowledgeable” were intended to measure competence; the other three including “dishonest,” “power-hungry,” and “moral” were intended to represent integrity.

Candidates’ qualities. The “providing strong leadership” item from the above trait assessment list will be used. Those who said yes to Taft, but no to Hagan will get a score of +1; those who said either yes or no to both Taft and Hagan will receive scores of 0; those who said no to Taft but yes to Hagan get scores of -1.

Candidates’ visibility. In the questions about people’s affect toward the two candidates, an option of “haven’t heard of the person” was provided. Those who were able to give a feeling score to Taft but not to Hagan get a score of +1; those who gave answers to both candidates or haven’t heard of either one get a score of 0; and those who
were able to give answers to the Hagan question, but not to the Taft question receive scores of -1.

**News source.** In the survey, respondents were asked if they got most of the economic information from the news, from friends and family, from own observations, or from some other sources. Since the study attempts to test the role of media messages in activating the stored evaluations of Governor Taft on economy when prompted to give an overall evaluation of him, information that’s not mediated by news organization is not of our interest. The news source item originally with 5 categories was transformed into a dichotomous variable (1=media and 0=non-media). It serves as a control variable in each ordinary least square regression in the test of priming effects.

**Ideology.** Ideology is a 7-point scale self-identification measure (0=extremely conservative, 1=somewhat conservative, 2=slightly conservative, 3=moderate, 4=somewhat liberal, 5=slightly liberal, and 6=extremely liberal) recoded from one question about ideological orientations and three branching questions about how liberal/conservative the respondents are.

**Demographics and political values.** These variables will serve as control variables in the future analysis in the study. Five demographic variables, i.e., gender, age, education, race, and income were included. All were measured at wave 1 of the study. The respondent’s gender was observed by the interviewer and females were coded 0. Age was measured by asking people for the year of birth. The number was then subtracted from the year of the survey (2002) to obtain a figure coded in years. Age was further grouped into 4 categories, with 1 representing “18-29,” 2 representing “30-44,” 3 representing “45-59,” and 4 representing “60 and up.”
Education was assessed by asking the highest grade or year of school respondents have completed. It was recoded into 4 categories, ranging from “less than high school,” “high school,” “some college,” to “college degree and higher.”

Respondents were also asked for their race or races and they were allowed to give up to four answers. It will be coded as “white” if the answer is either “white” or “Caucasian;” and as “black” if the answer is either “African American” or “black.” All the other categories and combinations will be treated as “other.”

The study asked for the respondents’ household income from all sources, before taxes for 2001. For those who refused to give the answer, a ladder question followed up in order to get the income range.

Party ID is built up on a main question about party affiliation and two branching questions asking for the strength of the affiliation. A seven-point scale was created ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

Interaction variables. A series of interaction variables were created to test the interactions between and among the independent variables and the moderating role of political sophistication.

The wording of all the above-mentioned variables is shown in the Appendix.

Analytical plans

The pre- and post-election data sets were merged, resulting in 260 cases with two time-point measures for the key questions. Regression models will be built to test the hypotheses. To test the general priming effect, the following model is employed:
Overall evaluations = Constant + b1 (Evaluation on economy) + b2 (Evaluation on school funding) + b3 (News source) + b4 (News media) + b5 (Evaluation on economy * News source * Media use) + b6 (Evaluation on school funding * News source * Media use) + b7 (gender) + b8 (race) + b9 (age) + b10 (education) + b11 (income).

The domain-specific evaluation variables have been centered by subtracting the mean from the original value so that multicollinearity can be minimized.

The following equations attempt to test the consequence hypothesis of priming:

Competence evaluations = Constant + b1 (Evaluation on economy) + b2 (Evaluation on school funding) + b3 (News source) + b4 (News media) + b5 (Evaluation on economy * News source * Media use) + b6 (Evaluation on school funding * News source * Media use) + b7 (gender) + b8 (race) + b9 (age) + b10 (education) + b11 (income).

Integrity evaluations = Constant + b1 (Evaluation on economy) + b2 (Evaluation on school funding) + b3 (News source) + b4 (News media) + b5 (Evaluation on economy * News source * Media use) + b6 (Evaluation on school funding * News source * Media use) + b7 (gender) + b8 (race) + b9 (age) + b10 (education) + b11 (income).

Next, the sample are split into two based on the level of political knowledge to test the moderating role of political sophistication. I have chose to do so instead of building interactions terms involving political knowledge. As mentioned earlier, multicollinearity caused by interactions will lead to unstable estimates. In addition, if political knowledge were included in the interactions, the existence of many three-way and four-way interaction terms would have made the exposition and interpretation extremely complicated. And my justification for using the split-sample approach is that
the price is a statistical power reduction, not an inflation of the real strength of relationship of the involving variables.

To test the electoral consequences of priming, the following equation is used:

\[
\text{Vote choices} = \text{Constant} + b_1 (\text{Party identifications}) + b_2 (\text{Candidates’ qualities}) + b_3 (\text{Candidates’ comparative visibility}) + b_4 (\text{Economic perception 1}) + b_5 (\text{Economic perception 2}) + b_6 (\text{Media use} \times \text{Candidates’ comparative visibility}) + b_7 (\text{Media use} \times \text{Economic perception 1}) + b_8 (\text{Media use} \times \text{Economic perception 2}).
\]

One improvement to the way the electoral consequences were tested in Iyengar & Kinder (1987)’s study is that media variable will be directly built into the equations.

Because the dependent variable “vote choices” is a dichotomous variable, logistic regression will be conducted.

To test the reasoning chain model, path regression analysis will be conducted. An additional path from domain-specific evaluation to overall evaluation was added in order to test the integrated model and overall evaluation becomes the ultimate dependent variable. The equations are as follows:

\[
\text{Economic reality judgments} = \text{Constant} + b_1 (\text{Ideology}) + b_2 (\text{Affect}) + b_3 (\text{gender}) + b_4 (\text{race}) + b_5 (\text{age}) + b_6 (\text{education}) + b_7 (\text{income}).
\]

\[
\text{Future economic expectations} = \text{Constant} + b_1 (\text{Ideology}) + b_2 (\text{Affect}) + b_3 (\text{gender}) + b_4 (\text{race}) + b_5 (\text{age}) + b_6 (\text{education}) + b_7 (\text{income}).
\]

\[
\text{Evaluations of Taft on economy} = \text{Constant} + b_1 (\text{Ideology}) + b_2 (\text{Affect}) + b_3 (\text{Economic reality judgments}) + b_4 (\text{Future economic expectations}) + b_5 (\text{gender}) + b_6 (\text{race}) + b_7 (\text{age}) + b_8 (\text{education}) + b_9 (\text{income}).
\]
Overall evaluations of Taft = Constant + b1 (Ideology) + b2 (Affect) + b3 
(Economic reality judgments) + b4 (Future economic expectations) + b5 (Evaluations of 
Taft on economy) + b6 (gender) + b7 (race) + b8 (age) + b9 (education) + b10 (income).

The split-sample approach will be applied again to test the different reasoning 
routes being taken by people with different levels of political sophistication. The four 
equations presented above will be run twice, one on politically sophisticated people, one 
on politically unsophisticated people.

Finally, to examine media’s influence on the whole process, each of the main 
variables in the reasoning chain model, i.e. ideology, affect, economic reality perception, 
economic expectation, and Taft’s economic performance evaluation will be allowed a 
chance to interact with the media use index. Multiple regression models to predict each of 
the endogenous variables will be tested separately. Then each multiplicative term will be 
examined to test its effect on the particular endogenous variable under study. If the 
interaction terms are significant, it suggests that media use function as contingent 
conditions which strengthens the role of ideology and affect in the reasoning process. The 
equations are presented below:

Economic reality judgments = Constant + b1 (Ideology) + b2 (Affect) + b3 
(Ideology * Media use) + b4 (Affect * Media use).

Future economic expectations = Constant + b1 (Ideology) + b2 (Affect) + b3 
(Ideology * Media use) + b4 (Affect * Media use).
Evaluations of Taft on economy = Constant + b1 (Ideology) + b2 (Affect) + b3 (Economic reality judgments) + b4 (Future economic expectations) + b5 (Ideology * Media use) + b6 (Affect * Media use) + b7 (Economic reality judgments * Media use) + b8 (Future economic expectations * Media use).

Overall evaluations of Taft = Constant + b1 (Ideology) + b2 (Affect) + b3 (Economic reality judgments) + b4 (Future economic expectations) + b5 (Evaluations of Taft on economy) + b6 (Ideology * Media use) + b7 (Affect * Media use) + b8 (Economic reality judgments * Media use) + b9 (Future economic expectations * Media use) + b10 (Taft’s economic performance evaluation).
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of data analysis. The goal is to investigate the role of media in priming a certain issue in people’s evaluations of the state governor, the electoral consequences of media priming, the role of ideology and affect in people’s reasoning about the governor’s domain-specific and overall performances, and the differential role of subgroups based on level of political sophistication in these processes.

Descriptive analysis

The descriptive analysis proceeds by groups of variables. These groups contain the performance evaluation of the governor, media, political sophistication, abstract reasoning factors (ideology and affect), and demographics.

Performance evaluation of Taft

The descriptive statistics in Table 4.1 summarize Governor Taft’s domain-specific and overall evaluations before and after the election. The table shows that the evaluations of Taft overall were higher than the evaluations in Taft’s handling of either the economy or the school funding problem both pre and post election. The evaluations in economy
were slightly higher than those in school funding in both times. Besides, there was no significant change in the evaluations from Time 1 to Time 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-election</th>
<th>Post-election</th>
<th>Difference (T2 – T1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall evaluation</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.06)</td>
<td>(1.03)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=238</td>
<td>N=240</td>
<td>N=229</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.15)</td>
<td>(1.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=235</td>
<td>N=231</td>
<td>N=220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School funding</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.19)</td>
<td>(1.11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=220</td>
<td>N=230</td>
<td>N=204</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. For each sample mean, the standard deviation is inside the parentheses under it.
b. The scales run from 1= F to 5= A.

Table 4.1: Evaluations of Taft’s performance in 2002: pre-election and post election*: sample means and standard deviations

Media measures

The post-election study contained fewer media measures and only two of them were measured in the pre-election study as well. As a result, test of the stability of media behaviors over time can not be obtained. For this study, only the media measures in Time 1 will be used to investigate their effect on the overall evaluation of the governor in Time 2. The table suggests that on average, people paid more attention to TV news than to newspaper news, which is expected. For both media, more attention was given to local economy news than national economy news. Average scores of newspaper attention to political issues were lower than those of attention to economic issues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-election</th>
<th>Post election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper exposure (days)</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.84)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper attention to national economy news</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper attention to local economy news</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>5.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.33)</td>
<td>(3.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper attention to state budget news</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.96)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper attention to news about the governor</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV exposure (days)</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.47)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV attention to national economy news</td>
<td>6.51</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.12)</td>
<td>(3.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV attention to local economy news</td>
<td>6.52</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.10)</td>
<td>(3.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper attention to campaign commercials</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper attention to campaign news</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet attention to national news</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.53)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet attention to state and local news</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.39)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet attention to economic news</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.45)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=260</td>
<td>N=260</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. For each sample mean, the standard deviation is inside the parentheses under it.

Table 4.2: Exposure and attention to news about economy and state government on TV and newspaper: sample means and standard deviations"
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Newspaper exposure</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(days)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Newspaper attention</td>
<td>.43***</td>
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<td>.17**</td>
<td>.51***</td>
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<td>9. Internet attention</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<td>10. Internet</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Internet</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.89***</td>
<td>.85***</td>
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<td>financial news</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

***=p<.001, **=p<.01, *=p<.05

Table 4.3: Correlations of media exposure and attention measures
The correlations of all the media variables in Time 1 are presented in Table 4.3. All the media measures were standardized and an index was created by summing all the z-scores. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of the eleven variables is .83 and the index would not be improved by dropping any of the items.

Political sophistication

Two sets of variables were aimed at measuring political sophistication. The first set asked people three factual questions about the politics in Ohio in Time 1. The second set asked people to differentiate the issue positions of the two candidates for the governor on three issues in Time 2. Two indices were built upon these measures. The knowledge index is a 4-point scale and has a mean of 1.40 with a standard deviation of 1.06. About 52 percent of the sample got none correct or only one question correct and 48.1% got two or all three correct. The issue discrimination index has a mean of 4.69 and the standard deviation of 4.22. Around 59.6% of the sample scored 5 or lower on the 18-point scale and 40.4% scored 5 or higher.

Abstract reasoning factors

Ideology and affect are the two major abstract factors that people use in the earliest stage of the reasoning process. Ideology is on a 7-point scale from “extremely conservative” to “extremely liberal.” The mean is 2.56, somewhere between “slightly conservative” and “moderate” and the standard deviation is 1.64. Affect toward Taft was

1 The “don’t know” and “refused” answers were coded as 0, the lowest score.

2 If either answer about the two candidates on the same issue was missing, the mean was used to replace it.
on a 3-point scale ranging from “unfavorable” to “favorable.” It has a mean of 2.23 and a
standard deviation of .82.

Demographics and party identification

Demographic variables include gender, age, education, race, and income. About
58% of the panel was female, 42% male. The mean age of the sample is 49.3. About 40%
percent of the sample had less than high school or high school education, 32.7% had
some college education, and 27.7% had college degrees or graduate education. Eighty
seven percent of the respondents were white, 9.6% black. About one third of the
respondents had an annual household income of $30,000 or less, 25% had an income of
$30,000-$50,000, and 40% had an income of $50,000 or more.

Party identification ranged from “strong Democrat” (0) to “strong Republican” (6).
The median is 3 (Independent) and mode is 6 (strong Republican).

Factor analysis

Taft’s character assessments

The responses to the seven character measures of Taft were factor analyzed to
confirm the two dimensions that underlie them based on past research. Principal axis
factoring methods were employed with oblique rotation. The factor structure is presented
below in Table 4.4. Two factors were extracted as expected with 61.9% of the total
variance being explained. The first factor consists of four of the traits—“knowledgeable,”
“inspiring,” “weak,” and “providing strong leadership.” It represents Taft’s competence.
The second factor is made up of the other three traits—“moral,” “dishonest,” and
“power-hungry” and was intended to represent integrity. Although correlated ($r = -.43$), the two dimensions are conceptually different and empirically distinct. Two factor scores were created using regression estimates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pattern Matrix</th>
<th>Structure Matrix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>-.46</td>
<td>-.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>-.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonest</td>
<td></td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing strong leadership</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-hungry</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalues: 2.24 1.05  
Percent variance: 44.88% 21.08%  
Cumulative variance: 65.96%  
Pearson correlation between the two factors: -.43

Table 4.4: Factor analysis of Taft’s character assessment in Time 1

Economic perception

Two factors were extracted from a principal components analysis using oblique rotations, accounting for 66.0% of the total variance. The first factor consists of four items—expectation of Ohio’s economic conditions in the next 12 months (Short-term expectation state), expectation of the regional economic conditions in the next 12 months (Short-term expectation regional), whether the respondent’s region is in a recession (Judgment of recession), and the regional economic conditions compared to the rest of the state (Economic comparison). The second factor is made up of only one item, i.e., the expectation of the regional economic conditions in the next 5 years (Long-term
The two factors were named “economic reality and short-term economic expectation” and “long-term economic expectation” respectively. Table 4.5 shows the factor structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pattern Matrix</th>
<th>Structure Matrix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reality/short-term expectation</td>
<td>Long-term expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term expectation (state)</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term expectation regional</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment of recession</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic comparison</td>
<td></td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term expectation</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalues: 2.24 1.05
Percent variance: 44.88% 21.08%
Cumulative variance: 65.96%
Pearson correlation between the two factors: .13

Table 4.5: Factor analysis of people’s perceptions of the economic conditions

Model testing results

This section presents results from the multiple regression analyses and path analyses to test the hypotheses posed in Chapter 3 regarding the media priming effect and the integrated model with the reasoning chain. All the multiple regressions controlled for demographics, because it is ideal to show the media effect after stringent controls.
Media priming

The dependent variable for the basic priming effect is the overall evaluation of Taft in Time 2. The results in Table 4.6 are zero-order correlation between the dependent variable and each of the independent variable, which shows the full uncontrolled relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall evaluation of Taft</th>
<th>Taft’s performance in economy</th>
<th>Taft’s performance in school funding</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall evaluation of Taft</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in economy</td>
<td>.60***</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in school funding</td>
<td>.53***</td>
<td>.65***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p< .001

Table 4.6: Bivariate correlations of overall evaluation and domain-specific evaluations

The correlation shows that both the evaluation of Taft’s handling of the economy and the school funding are positively and strongly correlated with the overall evaluation of him, meaning higher evaluation of Taft in the both domains resulting in higher overall evaluation.

Table 4.7 reports the estimates from the basic priming effect model with only the domain-specific evaluations as the independent variables. Both the economic performance and the school funding performance measures have a significant impact on the overall evaluation, although the standardized coefficient of the economy performance
almost doubled that of the school funding performance. It may seem unexpected at the first moment. But the results do make sense in that school funding is still an unresolved and hot topic in Ohio among the public, although the media has shifted its focus to the economic conditions since October 2001 as shown in the figure in Chapter 1. Therefore, the issue of the economy may be primed by media and the school funding issue by personal experience and interpersonal communication in people’s judgment of the governor’s overall performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>T-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance on economy</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>5.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance on school funding</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p< .001, **=p< .01, *=p< .05

Table 4.7: Regression results: Predicting overall evaluation of Taft by the evaluations of his performance in economy and school funding to test the basic priming effect

To test the media effect, the media use index was added to the model next. Before showing the regression results, let’s first take a look at the correlation between media use and the evaluation variables reported in Table 4.8. It is clear that media use is not correlated with any of the evaluation items.
Table 4.8: Bivariate correlations of evaluation variables and media use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall evaluation of Taft</th>
<th>Taft’s performance in economy</th>
<th>Taft’s performance in school funding</th>
<th>Media use</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall evaluation of Taft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in economy</td>
<td>.60***</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in school funding</td>
<td>.53***</td>
<td>.65***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
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</table>

***=p< .001

Nevertheless, the goal of the media priming test is not to find out the direct effect of media on the change of the job evaluation of a political leader, but to explore how media attention to one particular issue increases the impact of that issue and shifts the impact of other issues. In the sequent multiple regression analyses testing the priming effect, interaction terms between media use and the domain-specific evaluations were built into the equations besides the media index, because the main effect of media use is limited, according to prior research and is not of major interest.

The results were shown in Table 4.9. All the main variables were centered to alleviate the impact of multicollinearity. First, I expected that the main effects of economy performance and school funding performance would both be positive and significant, reflecting that the overall evaluation of Taft was based partly on each of the
two issues. The media priming effects were tested by the two-way interactions between media use and the two domain-specific assessments. I further expected that the interactions would be significant for the economy performance indicating more weight being accorded to economy by media, but not significant for the school funding indicating the shift of the weight. The first prediction turned out to be true, but not the second. Neither of the interactions was significant. As expected, media didn’t have a direct impact on the evaluation of Taft’s overall performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>T-value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in economy</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
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<td>Taft’s performance in school funding</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>3.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media use* Performance in economy</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
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<td>Media use* Performance in school funding</td>
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<td>-1.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
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<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p< .001, **=p< .01, *=p< .05

Table 4.9: Regression results: Predicting overall evaluation of Taft by the interactions between media use and the domain-specific evaluations

After pondering over the potential causes of the null findings, I realized that most of the real-world issues found to be primed by media in previous priming research were out of the public’s direct experience, for instance, the Iron-Contra affair, the Gulf-war, etc. The information about them can only be obtained from mass media. Different from
those issues, the economic conditions are of interest to almost everyone, and people can gather news about the economy, such as news about prices, jobs, business, or the stock market from multiple sources, such as from the media, from discussing with friends and family, from their own observations, and from mixed sources. In order to test priming effect of news media, the source from which people get the economic news ought to be controlled in the model.

Table 4.10 presents the regression results after controlling for economic news source. The dichotomous variable of economic news source (1 for “media” and 0 for “other sources”) was entered as a main variable, and given a chance to multiply with the interaction terms between media use and the domain-specific evaluation as well. As speculated before, the interaction between media use and evaluation of economic performance was significant for people who got economic news from media, compared to those who got it from other sources; whereas the interaction between media use and evaluation of school funding performance was not significant. It indicates that media attention to the economic conditions during the study period increased the weight of the economy, but not school funding in people’s evaluation of the governor’s overall performance. The results strongly support the media priming effects speculated in Hypothesis 1.
Table 4.10: Regression results: Predicting overall evaluation of Taft by the interactions between media use and the domain-specific evaluations, controlling for economic news source

| Performance vs. Character in media priming |

Media coverage influences not only the standards audiences apply to the performance of a political leader, but also the standards they apply to the character that mainly falls on two dimensions—competence and integrity (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

But graded priming effects are expected—the greatest effect on the overall performance, an intermediate effect on competence, and a weak effect on the integrity, because the relevance of an attitude in an issue domain determines the extent to which the attitude toward a political leader overall will be affected. In Taft’s case, the economy issue has little to do with his integrity.
Regression results of priming effects on the overall performance, the competence, and the integrity of Taft are presented in Table 4.11. As hypothesized, the interaction term between media use and economy performance controlling for news source had a bigger value in predicting the overall performance than in predicting competence. The interaction term in predicting integrity was the smallest among the three and was not statistically significant. It indicates that Taft’s integrity was not influenced at all by his economic performance. The consequence gradient hypothesis as specified in Hypothesis 2 was largely supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall performance</th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Integrity&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in economy</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>.46***</td>
<td>-.29***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in school funding</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic news source</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use* Performance in economy* Source</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.03*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use* Performance in school funding* Source</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p< .001, **=p< .01, *=p< .05

Table 4.11: Regression results: Predicting Taft’s overall performance, competence, and integrity by the interactions between media use and the domain-specific evaluations, controlling for economic news source

<sup>3</sup> The coefficients of the major predictors in the integrity model have opposite signs compared to the other two models, because "integrity" is scored in the opposite direction than the others ("dishonest" and "power-hungry") and the whole factor is in the negative direction.
Political sophistication as a moderator in priming

To test whether the politically unsophisticated are more susceptible to priming than the politically sophisticated, the sample was divided into two based on the levels of political sophistication. The same regression equation was estimated twice, once for the politically unsophisticated and once for the politically sophisticated. As mentioned before, there are two indicators of political sophistication, i.e., political knowledge in Ohio politics and issue discrimination. Both were used as a criterion when splitting the sample into two groups to test the moderating role of political sophistication.

Table 4.12 present the results of priming for the two sub-groups based on the issue discrimination measure. To compare the magnitude of the effects between these two groups, unstandardized coefficients were presented. Hypothesis 3 predicts the vulnerability of the less politically knowledgeable people to priming. The findings provided strong support for the hypothesis. Among more politically knowledgeable people, the overall evaluation of Taft was significantly influenced by his economy-related evaluation, but the relationship was not affected by media use, as the interaction term involving media use and the economy-related evaluation was not significant. In contrast, among less knowledgeable people, the overall evaluation was influenced by the domain-specific evaluation in both economy and school funding, but only the interaction between media use and the economy performance was significant, reflecting media priming effect.
Table 4.12: Regression results: Predicting overall evaluation of Taft by the interactions between media use and the domain-specific evaluations, separately for the politically sophisticated and the unsophisticated by issue difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politically sophisticated</td>
<td>Politically unsophisticated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in economy</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in school funding</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic news source</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em><em>Media use</em> Performance in economy</em> Source**</td>
<td><strong>.02</strong></td>
<td><strong>.07</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use* Performance in school funding* Source</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p<.001, **=p<.01, *=p<.05

When partitioning the sample using factual knowledge index, just the opposite results to the previous ones turned out. People with more political knowledge were subject to the media priming effect, however, the effect was not shown among people with less political knowledge. The evaluation of Taft’s performance in economy was still a strong predictor of his overall evaluation for both groups, although the magnitude of the effect was weaker among sophisticated people than among unsophisticated people. Nevertheless, media seemed to strengthen the priming effect among the former, but not the latter. The conflicting finding when using factual knowledge items to represent political sophistication may suggest that factual knowledge does not represent people’s cognitive complexity as well as issue difference does.
Table 4.13: Regression results: Predicting overall evaluation of Taft by the interactions between media use and the domain-specific evaluations, separately for the politically sophisticated and the unsophisticated by knowledge in Ohio politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Politically sophisticated</th>
<th>Politically unsophisticated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in economy</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in school funding</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic news source</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em><em>Media use</em> Performance in economy</em> Source**</td>
<td><strong>.06</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>.03</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em><em>Media use</em> Performance in school funding</em> Source**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p< .001, **=p< .01, *=p< .05

The Electoral consequences

Since the study was conducted in the context of the governor’s election, it’s meaningful to extend the study of priming to voting in the election. Party identification, incumbency, the economic conditions, and the qualities of the candidates are potential considerations. Among them, economic conditions were given more attention in the media compared to other issues, thus more weights presumably were afforded in voters’ consideration of whom to vote for. When the measure of candidate quality difference between the candidates was included in the equation, only 58 out of 260 cases were included in the model due to the large number of missing cases in that measure. I decided to drop the variable in order to retain as many cases as possible. The resulting sample size
in the equation is 120. The results shown in Table 4.14 strongly supported Hypothesis 4. Incumbency was a significant predictor of voting choice as expected, indicating that Taft’s high visibility caused voters to vote for him more likely than they do for Hagan. Furthermore, the interaction term between incumbency and media use was also significant, which suggests media’s role in strengthening the causal relationship of those two. Economic expectation was significant, but not the reality perception. Media also reinforced the effect of economic expectation on voting choices. Significant effect was found for party identification. Being a Republicans increased the odds of voting for Taft by 2.9. Among the demographic predictors, only age was significant, which indicated that older people tended to vote for Taft. The results seemed to suggest that priming has real consequences in the governor’s election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
<th>Wald</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>2.91***</td>
<td>21.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates’ comparative visibility</td>
<td>3.88*</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic reality perception</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic expectation</td>
<td>1.99*</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use * Candidates’ comparative visibility</td>
<td>1.29*</td>
<td>5.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use * Economic reality perception</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media use * Economic expectation</td>
<td>.89*</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell $R^2$</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 Log likelihood</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p< .001, **=p< .01, *=p< .05

Table 4.14: Predicting voting choices by party identification, incumbency, the economic conditions, and the qualities of the candidates
The reasoning chain model

The stability of ideology

Before the reasoning model was tested, the stability of the liberal-conservative dimension was investigated. Despite of the fact that stability typically fads with the passing of time (Jennings, 1992), a high level of consistency was expected for the panel under study, because there was only a maximal two-month interval between the two waves. Nevertheless, the comparison of the ideology measures in two times indicated a big instability. Among the people who participated both waves (N=260), only 94 people (42.7%) were able to give the exact answer in wave 2 as they did in wave 1. Over one third (37.8%) gave answers that were off by 1 point and 15% of the panel gave answers that were off by 2 points. The frequencies of the differences were presented in table 4.15 and the distribution histogram in Figure 4.1. Those who gave “Don’t know” or “Refused” answers in either wave were treated as missing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15: Frequencies of ideology (7-point scale) difference scores
Looking at the breakdowns of the change in each category, I found that the bulk of the difference lies in category 2, 3, 4, and 5 and drastic changes were rare. The crosstabulation results are presented below. On the diagonal are the numbers of people who remained unchanged within each category of ideology. Altogether, 37.5% of the respondents who gave inconsistent answers in two waves were shifting between “somewhat conservative/liberal” and “slightly conservative/liberal” (Numbers shown in bold).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideology at time 1</th>
<th>Ideology at time 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 extremely conservative</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 somewhat conservative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 slightly conservative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 strictly moderate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 somewhat liberal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 slightly liberal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 extremely liberal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.16: Crosstabulation of ideology at time 1 and ideology at time 2
Based on the above analysis on the stability of ideology in the sample, it seems logical to collapse the 7-category ideology measure into a 5-category one. With the 5-point scale, 63.2% of the panel remained unchanged, which is a substantial improvement. The frequencies of the differences were presented in table 4.17 and the distribution histogram in Figure 4.2. Clearly, the difference scores are more centrally distributed for ideology on the 5-point scale than on the 7-point scale, which suggests that the 5-point scale ideology measure is more reliable. Consequently, the 5-point scale ideology measure was used in the subsequent analyses. For the modified ideology measure, the mean is 2.69 and the standard deviation is 1.06.
Table 4.17: Frequencies of ideology (5-point scale) difference scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2: Distribution of ideology (5-point scale) difference scores
Path analysis results of the basic reasoning model

To investigate the reasoning process of the job evaluation of the governor, only those people who participated in both waves were retained. Table 4.18 presents the bivariate correlation coefficients of the key variables examined in the reasoning model. From the table we can see that ideology is not correlated with the two economic perception reasoning factors, nor is it correlated with the evaluation of the governor’s performance in economy. But ideology is associated with the overall evaluation of the governor. The conservatives in general gave Taft higher ratings as compared to the liberals. Affect is moderately correlated with the economic reality perception and strongly correlated with the overall and domain-specific evaluations of Taft. The two economic perception factors are both positively correlated with the evaluation of Taft in economy. The coefficient of correlation between the overall evaluation and the domain-specific evaluation shows a strong association between them.
Ideology --- --- --- --- ---
Affect toward Taft -0.19*** --- --- --- ---
Economic reality and short-term expectation -0.12*** 0.25*** --- --- ---
Economic long-term expectation 0.07 0.08 0.13*** --- --- ---
Taft’s performance in economy -0.13*** 0.61*** 0.40*** 0.20** --- --- ---
Overall evaluation of Taft -0.14** 0.58*** 0.23** 0.14* 0.60*** --- --- ---

***=p<.001, **=p<.01, *=p<.05, #=p<.10

Table 4.18: Bivariate correlations of the key variables in the reasoning model

Table 4.19 shows the relationships between the evaluation of Taft in handling the economy and the remaining variables except the overall evaluation as shown in Table 4.18. A regression model is fitted to the data for each dependent variable. The results indicate that the sample as a whole didn’t use abstract ideological terms to reason on the evaluation of a political leader in a specific domain, rather, they used affect to reason. Economic reality perception is also a significant predictor of the evaluation of the governor in how he handles the economy. The better economic condition people perceived and the better short-term expectation they had, the higher ratings they gave to the governor in the domain of economy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>T-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>7.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic reality</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic expectation</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p<.001, **=p<.01, *=p<.05

Table 4.19: Regression results: Predicting Taft’s economic performance evaluation by ideology, affect, and economic perception factors

The above table shows that ideology doesn’t have a direct effect on the domain-specific evaluation. This is not surprising. The reasoning model proposed that people do not start with an argument and immediately make a conclusion. Rather, they start with some general considerations, which are ideology and affect toward Taft in this case, then they use some more specific issue heuristics and finally arrive at the conclusion. Based on the hypothesized model, the relationship between the two intermediate considerations—economic reality perception and expectation—and the general considerations were examined next to see if ideology and affect exert the influence on Taft’s economic performance evaluation through their impact on people’s economic perceptions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p< .001, **=p< .01, *=p< .05

Table 4.20: Regression results: Predicting economic perceptions by ideology and affect

The results reported in Table 4.20 showed that affect but not ideology had a significant effect on one of the economic perception factors. Table 4.19 and 4.20 combined suggested that in reasoning about the evaluation of a political leader in a specific domain, people in the sample as a whole didn’t follow an ideological path, but an affective path. All the predictors in the final path model explained about 47% of the variance in the equation, which suggests a reasonably good model in predicting the domain-specific evaluation of Taft.

The integrated reasoning model

Next, the priming model was incorporated into the basic reasoning model of Taft’s domain-specific evaluation to mirror people’s reasoning about the governor’s overall evaluation. The ultimate dependent variable became the overall evaluation and relationship between the economy-related evaluation and the overall evaluation was proved previously by the priming model and was manifested in the integrated model as well. Regression results of predicting the overall evaluation by all the reasoning
considerations were displayed in Table 4.21. In the integrated model, ideology again did not have any effect in the reasoning process, however, affect was a significant reasoning factor. The full reasoning path of the whole sample was displayed in Figure 4.3. For ease of comparison of the effect with the two sub-samples discussed later, unstandardized coefficients were presented in the figure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>T-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic reality</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic expectation</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in economy</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***=p<.001, **=p<.01, *=p<.05

Table 4.21: Regression results: Predicting Taft’s overall performance evaluation by ideology, affect, economic perception factors, and the evaluation of Taft’s economic performance
Figure 4.3: Reasoning path with unstandardized regression coefficients of the full sample
The role of political sophistication in the reasoning chain

Besides testing the reasoning process of the public as a whole, it is theoretically more important to explore the different reasoning paths political experts and novices take. The same equation was applied twice to the two groups. Table 4.22 presents the unstandardized regression coefficients for both groups in predicting the economic perception variables by ideology and affect and Table 4.23 presents the results in predicting Taft’s economic performance evaluation by the abstract reasoning factors and the economic factors.

Affect had a strong direct effect on the evaluation of the governor in economy for both political experts and novices with the same magnitude. Ideology was not significant in predicting the evaluation of Taft in economy for both groups, but the magnitude of the relationship among the sophisticated was much larger than among the unsophisticated (See Table 4.23). Ideology didn’t have a direct impact on the evaluation of the governor in economy for the political experts as affect did, but it influenced the domain-specific evaluation through its impact on the economic reality perception. Affect also had an indirect impact on the domain-specific evaluation through economic reality perception for the novices. The results in the two tables confirmed that despite the direct influence of affect on the evaluation among both groups, the experts did take a more ideological path, while the novices utilized more affective inferences.

It is also interesting to note that as shown in Table 4.22, ideology seems to have opposite effects among the two groups on the economic reality perception variables, although the coefficient for the novices is not statistically significant. In general, for the
The different reasoning paths of the politically sophisticated and the unsophisticated people are displayed in Figure 4.4 and 4.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic reality</td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic expectation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>Novices</td>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>Novices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.22: Regression results: Predicting economic perception variables by ideology and affect, among political experts vs. political novices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>Novices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td>.61***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic reality</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic expectation</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.23: Regression results: Predicting evaluation of Taft in economy by ideology, affect, and economic perceptions, among political experts vs. political novices

experts, the conservatives tend to think that the economy is in good shape compared to the liberals; whereas for the novices, the liberals tend to consider the economy as good.
Figure 4.4: Reasoning path diagram with standardized regression coefficients of the politically sophisticated people
Figure 4.5: Reasoning path diagram with unstandardized regression coefficients of the politically unsophisticated people
When partitioning the sample with factual knowledge measurement, results turned out to be unexpected and strange. Among sophisticated people, ideology had no effect in the reasoning process, however, affect significantly predicted economic reality perception, the economy-related evaluation, and the overall evaluation. Among unsophisticated people, affect only had a significant effect on the economy-related evaluation. The results suggest that the reasoning of the unsophisticated was not affect-driven, but sophisticated people made affective inferences instead.

The role of media in the reasoning process

Interactions between media use index and each of the main variables in the reasoning model were built to test the effect of media in the process. But mostly I’m interested in the extent to which media use influences the strength of ideology and affect’s impact in the reasoning process. The effects of the multiplicative terms of media use with ideology, affect, and Taft’s economy-related evaluation are presented in Table 4.24. The results show that media use is a significant contingent condition that strengthens the role of both ideology and affect in the reasoning chain model, which provides support to the hypothesis.

Let’s take a further look at the individual parameters. The interaction between ideology and media use is significant in predicting the economic reality perception, which suggests that increased media use is associated with greater impact of ideology on the economic reality perception. Since economic reality perception has a strong influence on Taft’s performance evaluation on economy (B=.32***), and the economy-related performance evaluation has a strong influence on the overall evaluation of Taft, it’s
concluded that media use enhances the indirect impact of ideology on the overall evaluation of Taft.

The interaction between media use and affect shows a different story. The item is not significant in predicting the economic perception variables, nor is it in predicting the domain-specific evaluation. But it significantly predicts Taft’s overall evaluation, which indicates that media use strengthens the direct impact of affect on the overall evaluation.

The significant effect of the interaction between media use and the economy-related domain-specific evaluation on the overall evaluation provides a further support of the media priming hypothesis.

Although only two out of eight interaction terms in the model involving ideology and affect were significant and media use didn’t exert its influence through as many paths as one would hope, the results presented here did show evidence of the media effects in the reasoning process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
<th>Ideology * Media use</th>
<th>Affect * Media use</th>
<th>Taft’s economic performance * Media use</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic reality</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic expectation</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s performance in economy</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft’s overall evaluation</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.24: Effects of ideology and affect in reasoning contingent upon media use
Review of the major hypotheses

H1: The combined target gradient hypothesis and dosage hypothesis received a full support. Greater exposure and attention to the news was associated with greater weight accorded to the economic issues in the overall evaluations of the governor, but not to the school funding issue.

H2: The consequence gradient hypothesis was largely supported. Priming effect in the competence assessment was found and was in a lesser degree compared to the effect in the overall job evaluation. Priming effect in the integrity assessment was not found, but given the nature of the issue under study, it was not unexpected.

H3: The testing of the moderating role of political sophistication in priming effects showed contradictory results using two different means of operationalization of the concept. Using the measure of issue difference, politically less sophisticated people were more susceptible to priming effect than sophisticated people as hypothesized.

H4: The hypothesis of the electoral consequences of priming was mostly supported. The candidates’ comparative visibility, long-term economic expectation and party identification are all significant predictors of voting choices. Media was showed to have played an important role in according more weight to Taft’s visibility and the economic expectation in the public’s voting considerations.

H5 – H9: The reasoning chain model predictions on the full sample were partially supported. Affect was an important factor, along with economic perceptions, however, ideology didn’t have an impact in the reasoning process as expected.
H10: As predicted, people with higher levels of political sophistication follow a cognitive reasoning path, while people with lower levels of political sophistication make affective inferences.

H11: To some extent, media enhanced the impacts of ideology and affect in the reasoning process.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This final chapter reviews the major results of the study, discusses the theoretical implications of the results and proposes the directions of future research.

Goal of the study

This study attempts to examine the reasoning process of the public in making judgments about the state governor’s job performance and media influence in the process by linking the media priming model with the reasoning chain model. Using an RDD survey collected from a panel of Ohio’s residents before and after the 2002 Governor’s election, the study first tested several media priming hypotheses to see if economic conditions in Ohio—the particular issue which dominated in the state news media from October 2001 to the end of the study period—was given more weight than the school funding issue, the second important issue facing Ohio in the period of time, and became the criterion by which citizens in Ohio judged their governor’s overall performance. Next, building the media priming model into it, the study formulated an integrated reasoning model to investigate the role of ideology and affect as abstract reasoning factors in the reasoning of the governor’s performance evaluation and to test media’s effect in
strengthening the effects of ideology and affect in the reasoning process. The moderating role of political sophistication in media priming and the reasoning model was also evaluated.

Major findings

**Media priming model**

The empirical test of media priming was successful. Counting news stories in the Columbus Dispatch from March 2001 to November 2002 through the Lexis-Nexis database, the study first found out that the school funding issue and the economic conditions changed position in relative dominance in the local media. The period from March 2001 to September 2001 was mostly dominated by the school funding news; while from October 2001 to November 2002, the newspaper coverage was dominated by news about economic conditions. The period when the panel surveys for this study were conducted falls into the “economic issue regime”, borrowing Pan & Kosicki (1997)’s term in defining a period when an issue dominates the public arena.

Based on the aggregate-level results of local media coverage, the individual-level measure of audiences’ media exposure and attention was directly built into the regression equations where the effect of the domain-specific evaluation on the overall evaluation and media’s effect in strengthening the relationship were tested. Regression results showed that evaluation of the governor in the domain of the economy was a significant predictor of his overall evaluation, and media use enhanced the weight of the economy-related evaluation in the overall evaluation. The evaluation of the governor in the domain of school funding was a significant predictor of the overall evaluation as well, but media
didn’t play any role in the relationship. The use of this particular heuristic by the public when making judgments about the governor’s overall performance may be attributed to the public’s personal experience with and the interpersonal discussion on the school funding problem. Building the media use index directly into the equations provides stronger evidence of media effect than if this effect were only inferred from the aggregate-level news counts.

The controlling of sources of economic news in the media-domain interaction model helps partition the priming effect into two parts, the part that’s due to media and the part that’s due to other factors, such as interpersonal influences. Results clearly showed that the priming part that’s due to interpersonal influences was not significant.

The consequent gradient hypothesis was also tested and supported by the results. News media strengthen not only the relationship between the evaluation of the governor’s economic performance and the overall evaluation, but also the relationship between the economy-related evaluation and the assessment of his competence, just to a lesser degree. The impact of the domain-specific evaluation on integrity, the other dimension of the character assessment of a political character, was not influenced by media, simply because the issue under study—economic conditions in Ohio—has nothing to with the governor’s integrity.

As expected, political sophistication had a diluting effect on media priming. Politically more knowledgeable people were immune to media priming effect, while less knowledgeable people were not. It is consistent with the findings by Iyengar et al. (1984) and Krosnick & Kinder (1990), but is contradictory to the findings of Krosnick & Brannon (1993) and Miller & Krosnick (2000). The finding is congruent with the
traditional view of the role of political sophistication. Greater cognitive complexity is 
associated with greater resistance to media influence and greater capability of taking 
more factors into account rather than using the heuristic that’s primed by intensive media 
coverage in making political judgments.

Political leaders’ job evaluation is very consequential and has important 
implications for voters’ candidate preferences. Therefore, the timing of the panel 
interviews, i.e., right before and after the governor’s election in 2002 was an advantage to 
this study in that the consequences of media priming on the election can be studied. The 
candidates’ comparative visibility, or in other words, Taft’s visibility significantly 
increased the odds of voting for him; a positive long-term economic expectation also 
increased the odds of voting for Taft. Media played an important role in according more 
weight to Taft’s visibility and the economic expectation in the public’s voting 
considerations.

At least one empirical study using content analysis of local news showed that 
local media didn’t intentionally gave more weight to Taft in the news coverage of the 
campaign for the governor’s election (Whittenton, 2003), although the incumbent largely 
supersedes the challenger Tim Hagan in terms of finance and name recognition. 
Nevertheless, as a fact, the incumbent still got more coverage as the governor during the 
campaign period. And the model here clearly showed the candidates’ comparative 
visibility and media’s aid to it.
Reasoning chain model and the integrated model

Results of testing people’s reasoning process about the governor’s economy-related evaluation showed a deductive path. The findings suggested the role that affect plays in organizing their belief systems. People process their thinking from abstract factors, to the ones specifically related to the judgment to be made, then to the conclusions. In this study, people started from affect, then they walked their way through the assessment of the economic reality in Ohio, and finally made the judgment of the governor’s performance in economy. Linking the priming model with the reasoning model, besides the path through the economic reality perception, affect exerts its influence directly on the economy-related evaluation and the overall evaluation.

Compared to ideology, affect plays a dominant role in the reasoning of the governor’s evaluation for the public as a whole, because affective inferences demand much less cognitive efforts. In contrast, ideological reasoning tends to be more complex and is more likely to be employed by people with greater political sophistication. As a result, in the reasoning about the governor’s performance, whether they like or dislike him plays an important role in influencing the public’s judgment both directly and indirectly.

As Sniderman et al. (1993) suggested, it does not make sense to study the organization of the belief system of the public as a whole, because the connectedness of the elements in the belief system varies remarkably in not only the strength, but also the causal mechanism that underlies them. The difference mainly depends on cognitive complexity for which political sophistication is a proxy in this study.
The findings regarding the moderating role of political sophistication in reasoning were consistent with those by Sniderman et al. (1993): more sophisticated people follow a more ideological path, whereas less sophisticated people follow a more affective path, although affect is an important consideration for both groups. This further demonstrated that politically sophisticated people take into consideration not only their beliefs but also their feelings in working out the evaluation of the governor. It is wrong to assume that they rely solely on rationality.

Media effects in the reasoning process were also examined. Media use was shown to influence the relative weight people placed on the abstract reasoning factors. Media help enhance the role of ideology in influencing the economic perception, and through the latter, enhance the indirect effect of ideology on the overall evaluation of the governor. Media also arouse people’s likes and dislikes of the governor and amplify the relationship between affect and the evaluation of him.

The non-significant effect of long-term economic expectations in any of the reasoning chain equations may have to do with the lack of variation and the highly skewed distribution of the measure. Over two thirds of the respondents in the panel hoped that economic conditions in their region would get better five years from now, while only 12.7% thought the conditions would get worse.

Features of the study

The significance of the integration of priming and reasoning chain

The priming model sees to the heuristic people use in forming an opinion of the performance of a political leader. The heuristic is usually his/her performance in a
specific policy domain out of a wide range of domains. There is a question that remains unresolved by the priming model, that is, what is the working mechanism that lies beneath the formation of people’s domain-specific evaluation of a political leader? Do people consider all the possible factors within the policy domain and calculate the pros and cons or just pick some pieces of information that come to mind automatically? Do people just make the judgments by whim or follow a deductive thinking path? Do media also play a primary role in helping people make the decision? All these questions can be addressed with a satisfactory answer by the reasoning chain model and here comes the opportunity to link there two public opinion research models together.

The base of the integration of these two models lies in same mechanism underlying them. The mass public is notorious for lacking consistency in the belief system (Converse, 1964). Citizens pay limited attention to politics, yet they are able to establish judgments of a good many policy issues and political leaders’ performances. Both models acknowledge the findings from psychological research that when prompted for their opinion on a certain issue, an average person rarely takes into account all the factors in play in order to make a decision, nor would he/she carefully consults his/her pre-existing opinions in order to make the position consistent with the overall outlook. Heuristics become a handy tool for people to work out their opinions. With the integrated model, the study initiates an effort in exploring what people consider in determining their judgments of the political leaders.
The extension of the traditional models

Although priming models can be applied to the evaluation of any political figure or issue, virtually all the priming studies have dealt with presidential evaluations. The perceived advantage of studying the president lies in the fact that a president’s approval ratings are easily associated with major and controversial national and international policies and issues, and the study’s topic has a kind of obvious national significance. On a practical level, the simple availability of data may also help account for the focus on presidential evaluations. There are ample opinion polls that document a president’s popularity, which make the study easy to carry out. The President, although the most prominent political leader, is by no means the only one that’s worth studying in public opinion research. Congressmen, senators, and governors are all potential subjects of the priming research. This study extends the subject of the priming study to the evaluations of state-level political leaders. Because of the rejuvenation of “Federalism,” state governors are more visible and powerful than before. It will be meaningful to study how the foundation of a governor’s evaluation shifts in accordance with the change in the salience of certain policy domains brought about by media coverage. In the current study, the relative weight of two domains, namely school funding and economy, were studies to test its impact on the overall evaluation of Ohio’s governor.

The study also extends the subject of the reasoning chain to the evaluation of political leaders. The original reasoning chain studies in Sniderman et al.’s book all cope with public’s policy preferences. The same theoretical tool can be utilized to examine formation of the evaluation of political leaders, which is perhaps equally important as the formation of policy preferences in public opinion research.
The inclusion of new media use

In the media use index, the attention to various kinds of online news was included. The reason to do so is because the rapid advance of the new internet-based technologies has drawn a great deal of attention of communication and other scholars and the substantial social and political implications of new media use have been recognized by scholars. Despite the warning about the possible antisocial effects of the users’ ability to customize news and public affairs information on the Internet (Stroll, 1995; Sunstein, 2001), many researchers were also able to show the benefit new media may bring to democracy, due to the fact that new media make it much easier for people to get information and contact each other and they eventually promote political actions (Bimber, 1998; Jones, 1995; Browning, 1996; Rheingold, 1993; Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001; Kosicki & Yuan, 2001).

The panel data used for this study showed that about 43% of the respondents went online to get news and information in the past few months and among them, about 21% of the users went to specific websites to get information about the election for the governor. The Internet election news study conducted by the Pew Research Center reported that 33% of the Internet users went online for election news during the 2000 campaign year. The report suggested that Campaign 2000 firmly established the Internet as a major source of election news and information. A majority cites convenience, not a desire to tap new or different information sources, as the main reason they go online for election news (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2000).

Due to the shortage of campaign funding, Tim Hagan, the challenger of the in the 2001 Ohio Governor’s election, took the advantage of the web and created his campaign
web site called [www.TimHaganForGovernor.com](http://www.TimHaganForGovernor.com). As a response, the governor incumbent also created a web site called [www.GovernorTaft.com](http://www.GovernorTaft.com). Although the reported usage of the above-mentioned campaign web sites was very limited, I have every reason to believe that the use of the Internet for news in general and for election news in specific in the campaign period has an impact on citizens’ judgment about the governor’s performance and voting choices, along with the use of traditional newspaper and TV use. And the results presented in the study supported this claim.

**Studying a different issue**

In the reasoning chain model, people are presumed to start from most basic premises of an argument and reach the most specific conclusion. What specific factors go between in the reasoning process depends on the issue being studied. Many issues have been studied using the reasoning chain model. They include racial equality policies (Chapter 4, 5 & 12 in Sniderman et al.’s book, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1996), AIDS and civil liberty (Chapter 3 in Sniderman et al.’s book, 1993), the Gulf war policies of President Bush (Pan & Kosicki, 1994), health care policies (Pan & Kosicki, 1997), among others. This study picks the issue of the economy. The studying of the governor’s evaluation in the domain of economy and the economic factors that can possibly affect the evaluation of the governor in a period when both the national and the region economy were sluggish makes a great deal of sense.

The issue of the economic conditions and economy-related job evaluation were analyzed and findings that are consistent with the previous ones were added, with the hope to broaden the scope of the line of research, to demonstrate the robustness of the
model in applying to different issue domains, and to generalize the findings to a larger body of public opinion research.

Issues worth considering

**Limited effect of ideology and robust effect of affect**

Ideology plays a limited role in the reasoning of the public as a whole. People in the study didn’t use general beliefs such as conservatism or liberalism to help them make judgments about the economic conditions or the governor’s performance in the domain of economy. I think this has to do with the nature of the issue under study. Economic conditions can be reflected in the variation of the unemployment rate, the change of the retail prices, and the ups and downs of the stock market index in an aggregate level. They can also be perceived by the change of the financial well-being of the person him/herself, the family, friends and relatives, and colleagues, etc. It’s not something that’s beyond people’s direct experience in the daily life, hence, the judgment of economic conditions does not require much cognitive complexity. Similarly, the assessment of how the governor does his job in handling the economy is easily related to the economic conditions at that moment and does not require people to consult their overall outlook in order to make a decision.

In contrast, whether people like or dislike the governor plays an important role in making judgments. For those who have favorable feelings toward the governor, they tend to perceive the economy not to be as bad as it seems; they tend to give the governor a higher rating regarding both his domain-specific performance and his overall performance. That is how the heuristic of affect works in the situation where citizens of
Ohio can figure out what they think about their governor without knowing much about the state politics.

But the study was also able to demonstrate the different reasoning path of the people based on different levels of cognitive capability. Politically more sophisticated people were shown to be likely to take advantage of ideology, while the less sophisticated people likely to utilize affect in the reasoning of the domain-specific evaluation of the governor.

**Measurement of knowledge: cognitive complexity**

In this study, two different measures of political knowledge were employed. One is the general factual knowledge of Ohio politics. The other is the degree to which differences perceived by the respondents of the two candidates for the governor’s election on some distinctive issues. The testing of the moderating role in media priming using these two measures yielded contradictory findings. In addition, the use of factual knowledge as a criterion of splitting the sample in the reasoning model produced uninterpretable findings.

Scholars have noted that there is no consensus on what’s the optimal means of measuring political sophistication. But just considering these two measures, issue difference is a more complex measure of political knowledge because it is a relational measure between two candidates’ issue positions. Plus, the factual knowledge index was built upon only three knowledge questions regarding Ohio politics which were not a comprehensive test of factual knowledge. Therefore, issue difference is a better measure
of cognitive complexity and the results based on issue difference ought to be more reliable.

**Reciprocal causality in reasoning chains**

Sniderman et al. (1993) warned of a pitfall in the notion of a chain of reasoning by showing the possibility of reciprocal causality. The authors noted that heuristics help make a theory clear and coherent, but it’s wrong to take every correlation independent variables and dependent variables as evidence of a new heuristic, just to make the explanation of the phenomenon simple. A judgmental shortcut can be a tool to help determine one’s position on a certain issue, but the heuristic itself can be a consequence of the judgment people make. Empirically, they demonstrated how some people start with their feelings toward blacks, then skip to the position on the racial policy of assistance for them, almost immediately. Then, they reason backward to an explanation of black people are worse off than whites.

Sniderman et al.’s findings regarding “reasoning backwards” imply that whether people really make orderly deductive inferences should be judged case by case. In this study, I think people do follow a deductive path because the issue being studied is economic conditions and governor’s performance in economy. Perceptions of the economy, unlike racial equality issue studied in Sniderman el al.’s chapter, does not require a great deal of cognitive efforts in order to make a judgment. It is quite possible for people to use affect to immediately arrive at the conclusion of whether black people deserve assistance from the government, then go back to think out the attributions of blacks’ inequality. However, it is not possible for people to first jump to the evaluation of
the governor in handling economy, then fill in the judgments of the economic conditions. It’s convenient for them to form an opinion on the economy without undergoing too much thinking, therefore, it’s not worrisome that “reasoning backward” mentioned by Sniderman et al. would happen in this case.

Panel attrition

As mentioned before, 37.2% of the original sample opted out of the second wave, which contributed to the big panel attrition. Survey researchers have been long concerned with the potential problem caused panel mortality, because the results based on the panel will be biased if the remaining sample differs in important characteristics significantly from the original sample. In order to explore the intactness of the remaining sample, Demographics, media use, political knowledge and responses to the key questions regarding the governor’s evaluation were examined to find out how they differ with those in the original sample. ANOVA results suggest that the remaining sample is not different significantly from the original sample in Wave 1, except for age. The remaining sample had a mean of 2.74 in the 4-category age measure, whereas the missing respondents had a mean of 2.46. It suggests that people consisting of the remaining sample were older on average than those who were missing (p= .01). The impact of age discrepancy on data analysis and conclusions based on it is unknown, but should be limited.

Future research

We don’t have panel data that cover the whole period when the shifting dominance of two issues happened. In a separate study using survey data conducted in
July 2001, I found that in the period when the school funding issue still dominated the local media, the foundation of Ohio residents’ evaluation of their governor was on the school funding issue (Yuan, 2002). The changing of the foundation of the governor’s evaluation can only be inferred in this study. It will be ideal to have panel data that span a period of time when the shift from one issue to another in terms of dominance in media coverage happens. But as both Krosnick & Brannon (1993) and Pan & Kosicki (1997) noted, the timing of data collection for the purpose of media priming testing is a tricky thing, because of the temporary feature of priming.

This study examined changing foundation of the governor’s evaluation due to the change of the relative dominance of the two issues in news media. There is an avenue to broaden the study by content analyzing overall positive or negative tone of the news coverage of the governor regarding each issue. This study showed that the better score people gave the governor in the domain of economy, the better score he got for his overall performance. But it’s not clear whether the issue of economy contributed positively or negatively to the governor’s evaluation. Same analysis can be done to the school funding issue. The study of the general valence (Zaller, 1992; Park & Kosicki, 1995; Pan & Kosicki, 1997) of an issue can help achieve the purpose.

Priming studies the effect of what’s presented in media. Attention should be paid not only to the presence of certain issues in the news, but to how issues are treated, as suggested by Cappella and Jamieson (1997). In other words, priming research can be extended into framing effects.
[Overall evaluation of Taft]
What letter grade would you give Governor Bob Taft for how he's doing his job?

[Evaluation of Taft in economy]
What letter grade would you give Governor Bob Taft for how he has handled the state's economy?

[Evaluation of Taft in school funding]
What letter grade would you give Governor Bob Taft for how he has handled the state's school funding problem?

[Affect] I'd like to get your feelings toward some people who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to tell me if you have a favorable impression of that person, an unfavorable impression, neither favorable nor unfavorable impression, or if you haven't heard of the person.

Bob Taft.
Timothy Hagan.

[Character assessments] I'm going to read a list of words and phrases people use to describe political figures. For each, please tell me whether the word or phrase describes the candidate I name extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all.

Moral, dishonest, power-hungry, inspiring, providing strong leadership, weak, and knowledgeable

[Newspaper exposure] In the past seven days, between [fill day] of last week and yesterday, how many days did you read or look at a daily newspaper?

[Newspaper attention] I'm going to read you a list of some recent news stories covered by newspapers. Using a 10 point scale, where 0 means no attention and 10 means very close attention, please choose a number representing how much attention you pay to each one.

Stories about the local economy
Stories about the state budget
Stories about Governor Bob Taft and the state legislature
[TV exposure]
In the past seven days, between [fill day] of last week and yesterday, how many days did you watch news on television?

[TV attention]
News about national economy
State and local news

[Online attention]
Online national news
Online state and local news
Economic news on the Internet

[Political sophistication 1]
First, which political party currently controls the Ohio Legislature? [if rand1 eq <1>]
The Republicans or the Democrats [else] The Democrats or the Republicans [endif all]?

Which political party has a majority on the Ohio Supreme Court? [if rand2 eq <1>] 
The Republicans or the Democrats [else] The Democrats or the Republicans [endif all]?

Which candidate for governor has raised more money so far for his campaign?  
[if rand3 eq <1>] Bob Taft or Tim Hagan [else] Tim Hagan or Bob Taft [endif all]?

[Political sophistication 2]
How would you rate Bob Taft's position on video gambling terminals in state horse tracks?  
How would you rate Tim Hagan's position on video gambling terminals in state horse tracks?

How would you rate Bob Taft's position on the issue that the use of marijuana for medical purposes should be legalized?  
How would you rate Tim Hagan's position on the issue that the use of marijuana for medical purposes should be legalized?

Where would you place Bob Taft's position on the death penalty?  
Where would you place Tim Hagan's position on the death penalty?

[News source]
Do you think you got most of your economic information from the news, from talking with friends and family, from your own observations, or from some other sources?
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