

## **2017 Senior Thesis Abstracts**

### ***The Effect of Symbols and Media Framing on Emotion, Attitude Change, and Attribution of Responsibility***

Antonia Drummond

Americans are constantly inundated with news stories and images from the media, yet we know little about how such exposure influences attitudes. Extant literature has shown significant correlations between attitude change and text framing, as well as between attitude formation and image presentation. However, the literature on framing in news stories is inconclusive and almost never includes the effects of image presentation. This study attempted to analyze the effects of images and textual framing when the two are paired together – a common news media format. Confederate symbols in the United States, paired with either a “positive” or “negative” image of a Confederate flag rally, or with no image. I measured respondents’ emotional engagement, attribution of responsibility, and attitude change between conditions. I hypothesized that respondents in image conditions would have the strongest emotional reactions, that respondents in thematic conditions would be most likely to attribute societal responsibility to preventing violence against African Americans, and that high emotional engagement and societal attributions of responsibility would lead to attitude change towards opposition to the display of Confederate symbols. This study has two main findings. First, images may not have as strong of effects as predicted. Secondly, the effects of demographic variables showed that news stories may serve to reinforce, rather than change, attitudes. Contrary to my hypotheses, I found that episodic text, regardless of image, was most likely to elicit engagement in some emotions among respondents. However, societal attributions of responsibility did lead to attitude change toward opposition to Confederate symbols, as did reported sadness and hope.

### ***The Politics of Capacity: No Child Left Behind***

Sophia Keskey

I explore the conditions under which states decide to comply with federal interventions tied to funding. I focus on the assessment component of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), legislation requiring states to create tests and report student achievement in order to receive federal education funds. I argue that both political indicators – governor partisanship, the election calendar, and teachers’ union strength – and the costs of compliance were central to NCLB compliance decisions. State wealth, Black and Hispanic/Latino populations, student achievement on exams, and state funding from the federal government affect the cost of compliance and therefore played a substantial role in decisions to comply. To test the relative influence of these political factors and measures of state capacity, I create an original dataset to test my hypotheses. Using logistic regressions, I find that capacity is significantly related to compliance although, interestingly, student proficiency did not play a role. Gubernatorial partisanship, teachers’ union strength, and the presence of an election year also demonstrated significant influence over the decision to comply. My findings suggest that compliance with federal mandates is a function of both capacity and political consideration.

### ***Can Human Rights Treaty Ratifications Influence Neighboring Country Practices?***

Matthew Malis

In assessing the effects of international human rights treaties (HRTs) on state practice, most research looks only to the practices of ratifying states. The present study seeks to examine the effect one state's HRT ratifications can have on human rights practices of other states within its network. Ratifications are expected to influence foreign government practices through two causal mechanisms. First, rights-affirming states are theorized to ratify HRTs as a signal to their neighbors of future intent to prioritize human rights concerns in other areas of foreign policy, and to impose material costs for poor human rights practices. The credibility of the signal derives from the ex-ante costs of ratification, and the ex-post costs of failing to act in accordance with international human rights concerns following ratification. Second, in much the same way that a country's own ratification of human rights treaties can prompt domestic groups to mobilize to demand compliance, those same groups are expected to mobilize in response to ratifications among neighboring governments.

Using time-series cross-sectional data from 1976–2015, each country-year's network ratification rate is calculated as the average portion of available HRTs ratified by neighboring countries, weighted according to various connectivity criteria. The relationship between that rate and a country's subsequent human rights practice, as measured by the Political Terror Scale, is tested. Separate analyses are conducted across the U.N.'s core human rights treaties and their optional provisions allowing for stronger reporting mechanisms, and across networks for trade, defense alliances, arms transfers, geography, shared language and shared religion. The results are mostly inconclusive, with some model specifications producing the anticipated effects and others yielding results to the contrary. Implications of these findings for future research are discussed.

### ***Political Rhetoric and Media Partisanship: Language Resemblance versus Media Bias***

Erica Sloan

In a democracy like our own, the media ideally function to effectively disseminate information on political issues, with language that treats equally the viewpoints of both Democrats and Republicans. An existing literature on media bias seeks to determine how, when, and why the media may, instead, favor the perspective of one party at the expense of the other. In this paper, I explore the underlying rhetorical mechanisms driving the appearance of such media favoritism through a comparative phrase frequency analysis of congressional and media language on three high partisan social issues: gun control, abortion, and gay rights. Based on the results of the analysis, demonstrating the particular types of partisan language adopted and avoided by the media, I argue that language resemblance between Congress and the media is an *insufficient* measure for media bias – despite literature that conflates one with the other. By illuminating the nature of both congressional and media language, the phrase frequency analysis serves to shed light on the complex, circular relationship between the two.

### ***Greener Grass: Exploring Enviro-Chemical Injustices Posed to Migrant Farm Workers***

Neil Stein

Though they do not receive as much attention today, the struggles of migrant farm workers have been, for many years, a topic that has captured the attention of media and society. Most commonly associated with dynamic leaders like the late Cesar Chavez, the leader of United Farm Workers, migrant labor supporters fought passionately for environmental health and safety standards to be equally applied to

all workers, regardless of origin or nationality. The primary thrust of Chavez's work, as well as mine, centers on the plight of migrant workers in grape orchards and vineyards. My research is focused on the years since his passing in 1993, tracking the changing agricultural industry in California. By means of a Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) analysis conducted on a variety of longitudinal data sources, this paper analyzes how chemical agents are affecting migrant and undocumented workers, and finds a positive relationship between the growth of the California wine industry and the increase in chemical exposure risk to migrant populations.

***A Candidate by Any Other Name: Religious Identity and Electoral Outcomes***

Max Yanowitz

Voters use myriad information cues when making decisions. I explore the role of candidate religion and electoral outcomes via an original survey experiment. In the US, Protestants are typically viewed as conservative while Jews are perceived to be a liberal group. I manipulate a candidate's religion (no religious cue, Protestant, Jewish) as well as their last name (Smith, Cohen) to form six candidate profiles. While the direct religion cues are explicit, the name cue of Cohen, a traditionally Jewish name, allows for a subtler cue which is less likely to tip off respondents. I find that respondents perceive both Protestant candidates as more conservative than the control (no religious cue, Smith), the religiously un-cued Cohen candidate as more liberal, and both explicitly Jewish candidates as ideologically the same. I then demonstrate that these induced perceptions impact feelings of favorability towards the candidate, and that these effects differ between conservative and liberal respondents. I hypothesize that respondent self-monitoring muted partisan reactions or adverse responses to the Jewish candidates, then comment on the broader implications of stereotypes in politics.