Political Public Relations
Concepts, Principles, and Applications

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Chapter 7

Political Public Relations and Strategic Framing
Underlying Mechanisms, Success Factors, and Impact

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Contentious issues—such as irregular migration, physician-assisted suicide, or gun control—tend to be very complex. Thus, attempts to reference all nuances of such an issue when communicating are bound to fail, or to result in lengthy treatises incompatible to most people's willingness and capacity to process. For this reason, when communicating, political actors select some aspects of the issue they are addressing, and build their reasoning surrounding their selection. Their communication then emphasizes the aspects of the issue that were selected and advances an interpretation of what the problem is, what caused it, how it should be dealt with it and by whom, and what to make of it (see Entman, 1993, p. 52). Such interpretations of issues are known as frames; they act as "*organizing principles* that […] *structure* the social world" (Reese, 2001, p. 11).

Described in this way, the act of framing—i.e., of conveying and advancing frames—seems like an inevitable dimension of communication. Certainly, this is an accurate description. Yet, framing *can* take on a strategic character, especially in the political realm. Political actors use frames strategically to articulate their views on contentious issues, sway others, and advance their agenda. In the words of Hallahan (1999, 2011), at least seven areas of public life and debates are subject to strategic framing: situations (relationships between individuals, for instance in organizational negotiations); attributes (the way objects, events, or people are characterized); choices (e.g., tying particular positive or negative aspects to certain choices); actions (pointing to positive or negative aspects concerning actions in order to achieve compliance with organizational goals); issues (e.g., using particular descriptions of social problems); responsibility (e.g., trying to attribute a cause to individual or systemic problems); and news (ways of presenting stories).

On account of its focus on these acts of selection and emphasis, and given the possibility to do so deliberately, scholarly interest in framing has been high in public relations research (Lim & Jones, 2010; Zoch & Molleda, 2006), in political communication research (Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2015; Strömbäck & Esser, 2017), and in political science (De Bruycker, 2017; Helboe Pedersen, 2013; Klüver &

Mahoney, 2015). In all these fields, communication materials are not only intended to inform audiences, but also to convince them to accept preferred interpretations (see Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Setting up and sustaining common frames with regard to issues of mutual concern is crucial for effective relations between an organization and its publics (Hallahan, 1999, 2011). Thus, framing is an essential part of political public relations (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2015), understood as

> the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals.
>
> (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011, p. 8)

We define strategic framing in the political realm along the lines proposed by Strömbäck and Esser (2017):

> *Strategic framing* refers to structuring the meaning and significance of a political message in order to influence the version of the story that the media will feature. This process of putting a favorable interpretation on information is intended to determine the parameters of a debate before it even begins
>
> (Strömbäck & Esser, 2017, p. 75)

Yet, we propose that strategic framing should be conceptualized more broadly to include audience effects (direct and mediated) and effects on policy. Traditional and social media are just a tool, albeit an important one, in this regard.

Scholarly investigations into strategic framing and the consequences it brings about are valuable as they acknowledge political actors' interests, knowledge, skills, resources, and status (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Dan & Ihlen, 2011; Hallahan, 2011; Pan & Kosicki, 2001), and factor these conditions in the analysis of their communication. Much of the research uninformed by this strategic perspective risks taking frames in communication for granted and acts as if frames "were not part of a larger conversation, serving particular interests, and undergoing changes over time" (Reese, 2007, p. 149).

This chapter first provides a brief introduction to framing theory before it sheds light on the specific ways in which political actors use frames strategically and to what effect. We provide a review of the literature on 1) the factors influencing the chances that actors articulate frames that are able to succeed (*framing expertise*); 2) actors' relations to others when engaging in framing (*framing contests; framing coalitions*); and 3) the way strategic framing impacts media coverage (*frame building*), the members of the audience (*audience effects*), and political decision makers (*policy effects*). These phenomena and processes are illustrated in Figure 7.1. Throughout
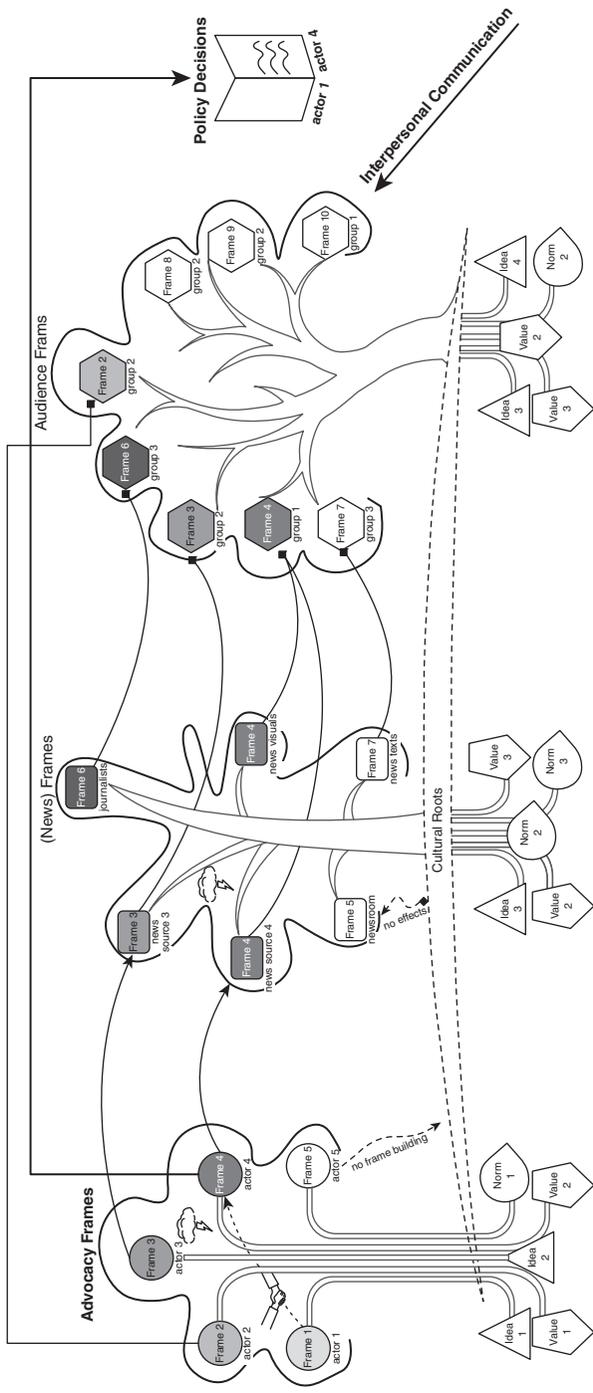
Figure 7.1 The Process of Framing

the chapter, we refer back to this figure when we address each of the components. In the conclusion, we bring together the main research findings and highlight gaps to be addressed in future studies.

A Brief Introduction to Framing Theory

The writer and journalist Walter Lippmann (1922/2004) was the first to acknowledge that (mass) communication does not simply *express* reality, but rather actively *constructs* it. This idea set the stage for the emergence of the social constructionist paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and, subsequently, for that of framing theory. The foundation of what we now refer to as framing theory was laid in the late 1960s and early 1970s in at least three disciplines: social anthropology (Bateson, 1972), cognitive psychology (Bartlett, 1967), and sociology (Goffman, 1974). Framing entered communication studies in the 1980s, a development that owes much to the work of media sociologists such as Tuchman (1978/1980), Gitlin (1980), and Gamson (1989).

Perhaps the most influential article published in a communication journal during this time—and arguably long after—was authored by Entman. In his 1993 article in the *Journal of Communication*, Entman delineated a research program based on framing theory and argued that it should be able to turn communication studies into "a master discipline" (p. 51). Since then, framing theory became almost indispensable in investigations into the social construction of reality and its effects. About a decade later—after the majority of framing scholars had focused exclusively on the verbal components of communication, such as news texts (Matthes, 2009)—Messaris and Abraham's (2001) seminal publication managed to pique scholars' interest in investigating visuals for the frames they entail. Another decade passed until Grabe and Bucy (2009) and Coleman (2010) truly fueled research into visual framing. Recently, scholars grew critical of verbal-only and visual-only framing studies. Elsewhere, we devised and implemented methodological advice on how scholars can analyze frames in multimodal material (i.e., verbal and visual) (see Dan, 2018b).

The mixed background of framing theory has enabled research into the entire process of meaning making, ranging from strategic communication, through news reporting, until media effects. Media effects scholars relied more on the psychological underpinnings of framing, whereas those interested in the content of communication stayed true to the sociological tradition.

Each of the "founding" disciplines and each of those in which framing was used has left an imprint on framing theory and has molded it into the shape it is today (see D'Angelo, 2018; Reese, 2018). Still, scholars generally stay true to the key premise of framing theory, i.e. to the acts of selection and emphasis addressed in the introduction to this chapter.

Strategic Framing in the Political Realm

As already pointed out, many of the issues that are subject to public debate are controversial. This implies that numerous (political) actors holding different views will get involved and attempt to advance their frames. In the literature, these frames are generally known as *advocacy frames* (Dan, 2018a). They are located on the left-hand side of Figure 7.1.

In this dynamic process (Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Kimball, & Leech, 2009), political actors have two options. They can work against others and engage in *framing contests*, or they can work together with others and form *framing coalitions*. In Figure 7.1, framing contests are illustrated by a lightning symbol (affecting actors 3 and 4), while a handshake symbol is used for coalitions (involving actors 1 and 4). In this section, we address these two processes in more depth. But first, we take a closer look at the skills and resources involved in strategic framing, i.e. *framing expertise*.

Framing Expertise

"Framing expertise" is an umbrella term for the knowledge and the skills in designing and promoting frames (Dan & Ihlen, 2011). In Figure 7.1, those actors who exhibit high degrees of framing expertise (actors 2, 3, and the coalition between actors 1 and 4) succeed in influencing the media coverage, audiences, and policy decisions. Actor 5, who was unable to reach his framing goals (an arrow pointing to the ground depicts this in Figure 7.1), can be assumed to score low on framing expertise. While it seems plausible to attribute success in strategic framing to knowledge and skills, we caution that actors' status, credibility, and resources are also likely to play a role (also see the indexing hypothesis Bennett, 1990; Busby, Flynn, & Druckman, 2018; Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Entman, 2004; Geiß, Weber, & Quiring, 2017; Reese, 2018; Ryan, 1991; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009). Thus, journalists, audiences, and politicians might ignore underdogs even if the latter exhibit high levels of framing expertise.

Knowledge about the priorities, habits, and views of regular people, journalists, and politicians constitutes a prerequisite to actors' ability to develop compelling frames. Such knowledge concerns the underlying culture, media conventions, and politicians' proclivities. Yet, however multifaceted, knowledge alone does not suffice. Framing expertise involves the capacity to derive advantage from this knowledge (Dunwoody & Griffin, 1993; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Ihlen & Allern, 2008). This entails actors' capacity to highlight how their interpretations resonate with prevailing ideas, values, and norms; to exploit media conventions; and to present their interpretations as serving society and the public interest (see Dan & Ihlen, 2011).

Thus, framers exhibiting high levels of framing expertise are able to delineate frames that are rooted in ideas, values, and norms that are prevalent in the underlying culture (Dan & Ihlen, 2011). They select those cultural elements that are compatible with their interpretations (see the lower third of Figure 7.1), and employ them strategically in communication. The act of construction inherent to framing is thus obscured and the frames advanced appear to be the natural interpretation of the issue at hand. This increases the chances that frames achieve *cultural resonance* and become "socially shared" and "persistent over time" (Reese, 2001, p. 11; see also Dan & Raupp, 2018). For example, in Norway seasoned practitioners working for pro-asylum NGOs achieved cultural resonance for their framing of asylum seekers as worthy, innocent, and deserving sympathy and support. Their strategy was to recount the stories of individuals who were unambiguously innocent—e.g., children—or particularly worthy—e.g., outspoken and well-integrated women (Ihlen, Figenschou, & Larsen, 2015; Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014a). By selecting these individuals over others, they made use of the hierarchy of innocence in place in many Western cultures, in which children and women are perceived to be more innocent, and thus worthier and more relatable, than boys and men (see Moeller, 2002).

A second characteristic of framing experts is that they *exploit media conventions*. They draft frames that are compelling, unambiguous, appeal to emotions, use engaging (audio-)visuals, a familiar narrative, allow the use of a dramatic or conflict-laden storyline, and are easily applicable to the issue at hand (Busby et al., 2018; Chong & Druckman, 2007a, 2007b; Geiß et al., 2017; Ihlen, 2015; Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014b). Framing experts, as "careful students of journalistic news values"[1] (Price & Tewksbury, 1997, p. 174), know when to "dumb down" complex matters and boil them down to catchy slogans to achieve unambiguousness. In a recent environmental conflict, activists' rejection of gas-fired power plants was featured in news when they compared carbon dioxide emissions with those from cars (the plants would "pollute like 600,000 cars"; Ihlen & Allern, 2008, p. 238). Framing experts also know how to craft (audio-)visuals in ways that are both aesthetically pleasing and "promote desired qualities and favorite themes" (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 85). For instance, juxtaposition with children or depictions against a backdrop of cheering veterans would accomplish this. A subtler way to communicate issue standpoints and ideology is through the consistent use of subtle backdrop cues in publicly distributed images (e.g., a cross hanging on the wall)—this practice can be considered a visual extension of what is known as dog-whistle politics (see Haney-López, 2018).

Finally, experts enhance the legitimacy of their interpretations by aligning their self-centered frames with what is generally perceived to be the interest of society and serving the *public interest* (Oberman, 2017). Lobbyists were shown to use this strategy to pave the way for political

decisions beneficial to their respective employers. This was revealed, for instance, in a recent four-country study on issues as varied as the privatization of railroads, the use of palm oil, tax-free arrangements, and non-disclosure policies of emission data (Ihlen, et al., 2018).

Framing Contests and Framing Coalitions

Framing Contests

When political actors identify their discursive enemies and work against them, they engage in a process called a frame competition (Chong & Druckman, 2007c; Geiß et al., 2017; Guggenheim, Jang, Bae, & Neuman, 2015) or, as we prefer, a *framing contest* (Dan & Ihlen, 2011; Ihlen & Allern, 2008; Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014b). Framing contests occur when a strategic frame encounters other frames that present other problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and/or recommendations. For instance, a mass shooting could be framed as a pointless loss of life suggesting the need for more restrictive firearm regulations; as a direct consequence of violent video games; or as an unforeseeable tragedy caused by mental illness (Guggenheim et al., 2015).

As political actors routinely engage in in framing contests (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 2001; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004), their analysis is very informative to those interested in the way power is acquired and maintained in the political realm (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011). Yet, framing contests have not been the focus of much research (Chong & Druckman, 2007a), and our understanding remains limited (for a notable exception, see Detenber, Ho, Ong, & Lim, 2018). Previous research suggests that winners of framing contests tend to be framing experts. Frames designed in accordance with the advice reviewed in the section above stand good chances of becoming "strong frames" able to prevail in the framing contest (Chong & Druckman, 2007a, 2007b). Yet, this is by no means guaranteed, as many have failed despite following similar pieces of advice (see Allern, 2001; Ihlen & Allern, 2008; Ihlen & Nitz, 2008). Actor-related factors such as credibility, status, and resources also play a major role (see above). Furthermore, winning actors are skilled in increasing the frequency to which their frames are featured in communication and thus the chances that they become more salient—i.e., more noticeable—than alternative views (see Entman, 1993).

Framing Coalitions

When it suits their needs, political actors might choose to join forces either tacitly or explicitly. This is what Pan and Kosicki (2001) and Ryan (1991) referred to as strategic alliances. In newer publications, similar efforts are labelled *framing coalitions* (Croteau & Hicks, 2003; Mayer, Brown, &

Morello-Frosch, 2010). Building framing coalitions is a logical extension of the mentioned insight about the need to frame issues as being in the public interest: If something is "truly" in the public interest, it should be possible for the political actor to form a coalition. Coalitions give actors a competitive edge by adding weight to their political demands and increasing the legitimacy of those demands (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Rommetvedt, 2003, 2005). Accomplishing a major (discursive) break-through single-handedly is far less likely and far more difficult (Baumgartner et al., 2009). The literature abounds in recounts of instances in which actors were able to reach their goals by joining forces with others. In Norway, for instance, bureaucratic decisions were overturned as the result of pro-asylum NGOs forming coalitions with local communities, editors, politicians, public persons, and celebrities (Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014a).

These advantages of building coalitions notwithstanding, it is important to understand how difficult it can be for political actors to find compatible and reliable partners. As different actors are likely to have different ideologies and interests, willingness and ability to compromise are key. The task thus consists of finding commonalities between their individual interests and thus something to bond over. For instance, Mayer et al., (2010) described how labor unions and environmental organizations were equally concerned about health matters, and were able to delineate a collective action frame based on this. Such an approach is reminiscent of Croteau and Hicks's (2003) call to develop a "consonant frame pyramid" to align the frames of the involved individuals and organizations.

The Consequences of Strategic Framing

Strategic framing can impact audiences (media effects or direct effects), the media coverage (frame building), and political decision makers (policy effects). This section reviews these main areas in which the consequences of strategic framing have been studied.

Frame Building: The Impact on News Coverage

Frame-building research denotes attempts to uncover the factors that influence the frames used by journalists in their news stories—such as organizational pressures, ideology, and advocacy frames (Hänggli, 2012; Lengauer & Höller, 2013; see for a review Dan, 2018a). The ultimate success in media relations is when the media adopts an advocacy frame that helps further the organization's interests (Ihlen & Nitz, 2008). To date, researchers have largely neglected the building actions behind news frames, so that our knowledge about the extent to which news frames stem from journalists' views (as opposed to being pilot-operated by strategic actors) remains limited (see also Brüggemann, 2014; Reese, 2007).

Despite the limited scholarship available, two main findings can be regarded as established. First, a strong association between journalists' reliance on news sources and their use of both verbal (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012) and visual frames (Dan, 2018a) exists. For instance, Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2012) found that, in election news in Sweden and the U.S., the strategic game frame was associated with the use of campaign operatives and media analysts as news sources. By contrast, issue framing was related with the use of ordinary citizens, while conflict framing was linked to domestic political actors.

A second key take-away from frame-building research stems from the work of scholars who compared advocacy frames to news frames in the same study. They generally found a high degree of overlap—once again both in the verbal (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001) and the visual (Grabe & Bucy, 2009) stream of information. To illustrate, Grabe and Bucy (2009) contrasted the strategically crafted images of politicians with their news coverage and found many similarities between the "visual frames orchestrated by image handlers" and visual news frames (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 128). Similarly, Fröhlich and Rüdiger (2006) found that frames in the German news coverage of immigration were associated with those advanced by political actors. Yet, just like Callaghan and Schnell (2001), the findings of Fröhlich and Rüdiger (2006) suggest that journalists actively co-constructed the frames transmitted to audiences.

The building processes behind news frames are also illustrated in Figure 7.1 using arrows running from the left-hand side of the figure to its center (see frames 3 and 4). They illustrate advocacy frames picked up by journalists. At the center of Figure 7.1, we also accounted for factors influencing news frames other than advocacy frames and news sources, including journalists' views (frame 6) and views in newsrooms (frame 5).[2] Finally, given the possibility to build news frames through words and visuals, we accounted for the possibility that news texts convey different frames than news visuals (see frames 4 and 7). This is quite characteristic for views often reprimanded when verbally stated that may remain under the radar when expressed visually (e.g., racism).

Media Effects and Direct Effects: The Impact on Audiences

Framing-effects research seeks to unveil how differences in what aspects of an issue are selected for presentation and emphasized impact the way people think, feel, and (intend to) behave. In Figure 7.1, audience frames, also known as individual frames, are located on the right-hand side. The figure illustrates not just the process by which frames flow from political actors to the media (frame building, discussed above), but also how, from there on, they are passed on to the public. This two-step process was also illustrated in Entman's (2003, 2004) cascading activation model. In Figure 7.1, we expand this model to include not just audience

effects caused by strategic communication detouring through news (frames 3 and 4), but also effects that stem directly from strategic communication (frame 2) and news, respectively (frames 6 and 7). The frames citizens accept likely referenced ideas, values, and norms that resonated with them. Furthermore, for the sake of completeness, Figure 7.1 illustrates that audience frames may be independent of advocacy and news frames. This is the case with effects caused by interpersonal communication, which may differ by group characteristics (frames 8, 9, and 10).

Framing effects are distinct from those yielded by agendas and primes (for a more detailed account see Price & Tewksbury, 1997). As already discussed, framers attempt to link certain ideas, values, and norms with a specific issue. When a framing effect occurs, audiences accept these cultural references as applicable to that issue, and use them to sort their thoughts and feelings. For instance, they could deem xenophobia or rather humanitarianism as applicable to the issue of irregular migration. For this reason, a framing effect can be understood as an *applicability effect*. By contrast, an agenda-setting effect deals with a transfer of importance of topics and/or topics' attributes from the media to the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Weaver, 2008). Hence, this effect is best described as an *accessibility effect*: By increasing the frequency and the number of stories on certain (aspects of) issues, the media bring the issues/aspects to the top of one's head (i.e., makes them more accessible) and increase the chances that they are considered in subsequent processing. Finally, a priming effect occurs when the fact that certain considerations are presented causes citizens to take them into account when processing a piece of information; as such, a priming effect is also an accessibility effect. It is thought to precede a framing effect, and may be prepared by an agenda-setting effect (Entman, 2007; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017).

At least in the political realm, a framing effect is caused both by differences in how the same piece of information is presented (e.g., 70 survived vs. 30 died; *equivalence framing*) and by differences in the specific considerations presented (e.g., cost vs. humanitarianism; *emphasis framing*). While we appreciate some scholars' efforts to bring clarity to framing-effects research by suggesting a sole focus on equivalence framing (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2015; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017), we deem this as too reductionist and instead embrace scholars' tendency to concentrate their efforts on emphasis framing.

Effects studies strongly suggest that framing effects exist. They have been found on a number of issues including war (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, & Sullivan, 1994; Brantner, Lobinger, & Wetzstein, 2011; Powell, Boomgaarden, De Swert, & de Vreese, 2015) and financial matters (Abdel-Raheem, 2017; Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, & Fan, 1998; Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997), using mostly verbal, but also verbal-and-visual stimuli.

Framing effects include effects on thoughts, feelings, and behavior/behavioral intentions such as voting decisions. Despite this clear tendency, it would be superficial to assume that frames necessarily yield the desired effects. Citizens are not blank slates waiting to be scribbled on. They may well mix-and-match components of the frames they are exposed to and form their own opinions (Edy & Meirick, 2007). Exposure to framing contests can lead framing effects to be overruled by whatever frame was presented last (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2016) and/or bring people to dismiss the frames sent their way and stick to their initial beliefs (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). Furthermore, framing effects are often diminished by higher levels of political knowledge (Chong & Druckman, 2007a; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2010), higher issue salience (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2016), and the existence of strong opinions prior to exposure to the message (Brewer, 2003; Price, Nir, & Capella, 2005). Notwithstanding these restrictions, scholars have found that—when they occur—framing effects tend to persist in time,[3] especially for frames that are negatively valenced (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2016).

Policy Effects: The Impact on Political Decision Making

Lobbyists operating for a certain organization can engage in the act of framing either individually or together with fellow lobbyists from other organizations sharing a common goal. Alternatively, lobbyists can work against each other (see above section on framing contests and framing coalitions). Combined with politicians' media use, this leads to a situation where decision makers are exposed to competing frames on many of the issues they deal with. While this characterization of framing in political decision making seems plausible to us, only a little empirical evidence is available (see Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008).

Scholars are only rarely given the opportunity to look into the black box of lobbying efforts. Only very few studies to date investigate how lobbyists choose and articulate their frames; our knowledge about processes of coalition building and frame contestation in the lobbying sector is equally limited (Boräng, et al., 2014; Klüver, Mahoney, & Opper, 2015). Even though some studies could show which frames are typically used under specific conditions, we still have little knowledge about "which frames are successful advocacy tools and which frames are more influential than others" (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 780). Furthermore, linking framing strategies of individual groups to the macro-level of policy debates has proved to be very difficult (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008; De Bryucker, 2017).

Despite these limitations, interest group research has made progress in an area in which framing research generally falls short: that of measuring success. We are now one step closer to understanding how successful interest groups are "in attempting to redefine debates, and how their own

opponents react when they see a rival's efforts to reframe the debate" (Baumgartner et al., 2009, p. 122), and answering Reese's (2018) call to find "a way of keeping score in framing 'contests'" (p. xv). In interest group research, this is accomplished by comparing the congruence between lobbyists' frames with those conveyed by politicians (Boräng & Naurin, 2015; see also Helboe Pedersen, 2013; Klüver & Mahoney, 2015). This is reminiscent of some scholars' approach to frame building research, where advocacy frames are compared to news frames, as described above.

Existing scholarship suggests that policy effects are minimal and seldom. Baumgartner, et al. (2009), for instance, found that lobbyists had "little if any control over the definition of the problem at hand" (p. 185) and that only four of the 98 issues they studied had undergone some degree of reframing over the course of four years. This suggests that "limits to individual efforts in reframing debates successfully" exist (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008, p. 444). First, competing frames can arise from events and circumstances outside the field of influence of lobbyists—such as in the aftermath of "stochastic events, crises, scientific advance and new discoveries" or be caused by "social cascade effects within policy communities" (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008, p. 436). Second, in order to prevent appearing manipulative or too strategic, most lobbyists employ framing sparingly in the sense that they tend to pick a frame and stick to it for any given issue (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008). In the end, lobbyists argue, this strategy pays off, or more so than jeopardizing one's credibility by using different frames for different politicians/targets. The implication is that "some debates are actually highly structured with little room for framing" (Baumgartner & Mahoney, 2008, p. 443). However, reframing or winning framing contests is not necessarily a precondition for lobbying success, as matters on which lobbyists work are not always salient and part of a vibrant public debate. Thus, identifying framing effects in areas belonging to "silent politics" may not be possible. In these instances, case studies and process tracing might be the best way "to shed light on the mechanisms that contribute to policy change" (Voltolini & Eising, 2017, p. 354).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we offered a review and critical assessment of strategic framing in the political realm. We began by introducing readers to framing theory in general and strategic framing in particular. We defined frames in the emphasis-tradition—represented by the work of Entman and Reese—as differences in the considerations selected and emphasized in communication. Our definition of strategic framing—inspired by Hallahan, Strömbäck, and Esser—evolved around the deliberate articulation and use of frames in an attempt to influence the audience, the media, and ultimately policy to the interest of an organization.

Then, we reviewed the skills able to turn a political actor into a framing expert. In doing so, we cautioned that framing skills cannot fully compensate for actor-bound shortcomings—such as low credibility, low status, and low resources—at least not long term. We then reviewed the two main ways in which political actors interact with others when engaging in the act of framing (framing coalitions vs. framing contests), as well as the benefits and pitfalls associated with each of these options. Finally, we addressed the consequences of strategic framing on the audience, on the media, and on policy.

Here, we discuss avenues for future research and some practical implications. The research reviewed in this chapter clearly suggests that scholarly investigations of strategic framing can produce interesting results enabling a better understanding of the practice of political public relations, and of matters related to power and democracy. Moving forward, we would like to see a growing number of empirical studies on strategic framing. We would particularly welcome studies dissociating themselves from the media-centrism (Schlesinger, 1990) that has become so typical of current framing research. Limiting investigations of strategic framing to frames in the news means focusing on actors who have already won and potentially—without an analysis of the efforts of unsuccessful actors—drawing precipitate conclusions about what constitutes framing expertise and about its impact. Ideally then, future studies would choose input–output designs or, at the very least, record the sources associated with advocacy frames in the news. Relatedly, we would like to see experiments exposing study participants to realistic stimuli containing both framing contests and framing coalitions, as opposed to just one frame left unquestioned per experimental condition. Ideally, stimuli would be drawn from real-life situations, and experiments would be informed by content analyses. Progressively, research done in this spirit should get us closer to studying the framing process in full (see Figure 7.1). Furthermore, in content analyses and experiments, we would like to see an increased acknowledgment of verbal and visual means to articulate frames (Dan, 2018a; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017). Lastly, we believe that the changed dynamic created by social media begs a reconsideration of strategic framing: To what extent do direct audience effects actually occur? And, is there any indication that Entman's cascading activation model is crumbling under the pressure of activists making strategic use of social media?

From a practical perspective, we hope that the insights gathered here will be deemed helpful by practitioners new to framing, and expect to see an increased proliferation of visuals in strategic framing and dog-whistle politics. We also hope that practitioners will use the advice given here responsibly, i.e. to persuade rather than to manipulate. The main take-away for political actors is that they should accompany their pursuits of framing expertise by attempts to increase their credibility, status, and resources—as the best skills will not be able to compensate deficits in these

areas. Finally, we hope that practitioners of political public relations will become more willing to grant access to scholars.

Notes

1 News values are criteria applied by journalists in deciding whether something is newsworthy or not. By observing news values, framing experts increase the chances that journalists pick up their frames (for comprehensive lists of news values, see Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017).
2 It is important to understand that audiences can exert influence on the way an issue is covered and the way strategic communicators craft their messages; also, the media coverage can impact actors' strategic framing. For clarity purposes, these processes are not illustrated in Figure 7.1. Still, such reverse influences may be responsible for frame changing in time (Chyi & McCombs, 2004).
3 From a theoretical perspective, this suggests that longitudinal studies are the appropriate design for recording framing as opposed to merely priming effects (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009) and acknowledging the relatively stable nature of frames (see Chyi & McCombs, 2004).

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