Priming in Campaigns

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**Abstract**

There is a growing body of research which debates the priming hypothesis and its effect on campaigns. Political priming is when a campaign will focus on one or two issues and then the voter’s attitudes about those issues will be linked to the candidate and their voting preference (Iyerngar & Kinder, 1987). Recent research suggests that media priming is the primary way voters are influenced. That media priming hypothesis involves cases “when news coverage raises an issue’s salience, voters align their overall evaluation of the president with their assessment of him on that issue” (Hart & Middleton, 2014, p.581). This paper evaluates the media priming hypothesis in the US, Netherlands, and Germany against the other explanations, including projection, learning and opinion change. Overall, the paper finds support for the media priming hypothesis.

Priming in Campaigns

Political scientists have been trying to answer the question, “Do campaigns really matter?” by studying the effects of voter behavior through the means of looking at voter turnout and voter choice. Campaigns help to give information about our candidates so that the people can make informed decisions. No matter the type of electoral system, a government’s goal remains the same. The political campaign's goal is to try to influence the voter’s attitudes on all candidates and salient issues. Multiple research studies have reported that campaigns do matter, but the next question is ‘for whom’ and ‘under what conditions’ campaigns matter (Hillygus, &Jackman, 2003, p. 583). The answer to these questions is not found as there is a growing body of research finding that the different levels of political awareness cause different answers.

Different answers are found for this said question because of a large amount of research found that people who are more politically unaware will be more easily influenced by campaign tactics (Belt, Crigler & Just, 2007; Iyengar, & Kinder, 1987; Claassen, 2011), and that people who are more politically aware have greater responses (Druckman, 2004). The level of political awareness matters because for a campaign to change a voter’s mind, they must generate and fortify associations between candidates and issues (Claibourn, 2008). Whether the voters are more politically unaware or politically aware, campaigns use tactics such as projection, learning, opinion change and priming.

It is important to understand that each approach is different but can have the same effects. These tactics are not necessarily explicitly chosen, because campaigns try to influence as many people as they can. But, for political scientists, it is important to understand how voters are being influenced and what approach creates the strongest response. Gabriel Lenz, a political scientist, argues that priming does not really work, and it is learning and opinion change that influences voters the most (2009). Hart and Middleton argue that it is projection, not priming, that influences the voter’s attitudes and vote choice (2014). Even with the three other approaches, there is still a lot of research in favor of the hypothesis that priming is one of the approaches that best influences the voter.

In this project I will answer the question, ‘Does media priming affect voters’ opinion and vote choice?’ First, I will explain what priming is and explain the media priming hypothesis. Then, I will address three competing hypothesis campaign tactics, projection, learning, and opinion change. Lastly, I will evaluate these arguments in elections in the United States, Canada, Netherlands, and Germany. I will argue that voting behavior is more affected by media priming than it is by projection, social change, and learning.

H: Compared to people not exposed to media priming, people primed by media should be more likely to share the political opinion or make the vote choice favored by that media.

**Priming**

To understand political priming, we first must understand the psychological context of priming. Priming is a when exposure to a stimulus influences a person’s response to a later stimulus, such as their judgment about a topic, without them realizing the influence the first stimulus had on their behavior. Political priming in campaigns occurs when an issue is repeatedly brought up by a candidate to make it salient. This influences the voter’s attitudes about those salient issues, the candidate, and their voting preference (Iyerngar & Kinder, 1987; Peterson, 2015; Higgings, 1996; Schoen, 2004; Dragojlovic 2011; Belt, Crigler, & Just, 2007). Priming is an unconscious process, so when a person is unaware that the prime is occurring, the prime becomes more effective (Higgins 1996). If the person is aware of the prime, the prime will not work as effectively because the individual knows that they are being influenced. When a voter comes across a political issue, the unconscious prime can come to the front through the voter expressing the attitudes of a specific candidate, thinking they had created those attitudes on their own. Take for example, a voter who is watching a commercial on a political candidate where they are discussing what they want to change in the government. In the middle of the commercial the text on the screen changes too fast for the viewer to consciously read the word, however the word was unconsciously processed and later influences the person’s view of the candidate. This was done during the United States election of 2000 campaign the G.O.P made an advertisement that primed voters to think of rats when thinking about democrats (Weinberger & Westen 2008). RATS, at first look, it is just a commercial on the attack of prescription drugs. But then an announcer starts to talk about George W. Bush’s proposal for dealing with prescription drugs and criticizes Al Gore’s plan. At the end of this advertisement it declares, “The Gore prescription plan: bureaucrats decide”. Most people didn’t give this advertisement more than a view, but there was one person who really dissected it frame by frame. What was found, that “rats” was shown a second before “bureaucrats decide” was faded in (Berke. 2000).

For priming to work, two mechanisms must be used: recency and frequency. These mechanisms are the foundation of priming (Claibourn, 2008). Priming works when *recent* exposure to a stimulus activates a person’s working memory, and then that accessible recent information creates or strengthens judgments. *Frequency* ensures a lot of exposure to the priming stimulus to make that stimulus more accessible in a person’s working memory (Claibourn, 2008). In other words, how recent the salient issue is received and how many times the brain processes that issue will control the strength of the priming effect. For example, an individual frequently watches a 60 second advertisement for a candidate speaking about education. The person who watches the advertisement are more likely to later say that education is a top issue when asked. The priming effect will last longer each time the commercial is viewed, and the association will get reinforced with each viewing. Although campaigns try to make sure that these effects happen, sometimes they cancel each other out. They cancel each other out because two candidates can offset each other’s impacts, which will kill the priming effect (Claibourn, 2008). For example, when a voter sees two mailings regarding tax cuts at the same time for two opposing candidates of whom they do not know much about, the two messages will cancel each other out.

Priming does not affect people all the same way because each person has preconceived ideas about politics in general (Belt, Crigler, & Just, 2007). Not only do they have preconceived ideas, but every person has a different level of political knowledge. Research states that there is a bigger effect of priming on those people who are less politically intelligent (Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Claassen 2011; Belt, Crigler & Just, 2007). Weber and Thornton (2012) found that when traditional Christians have less information, the candidates are more effective in using priming. The primes are better seen through research on these types of individuals because there is a stronger and more visible effect. There is a strong effect because these individuals have less general knowledge about politics. On the other hand, research has found that if a person receives new information about a candidate through priming but that information is not in agreement with previous knowledge, then that person will reject the new knowledge, and thus strengthen their previous opinion. In sum, priming has different effects on individuals because of their previous knowledge and beliefs.

Priming can be confused with multiple different tactics and approaches. Later in this paper I will talk specifically about three, projection, learning, and opinion change. One other tactic that needs to be mentioned is persuasion. Priming often talks about influencing the recipient and that does sound a lot like persuasion, but there is difference. Persuasion is the change of attitude whereas priming is the change of strength of the attitude (Classen, 2010). This means that as people receive information, they also must accept and process that information. It would be persuasion if when the voter learns information that is negative towards their candidate, they then switch candidates. Priming is when the voter learns new negative information about the opposing candidate and reinforces their attitudes that are already formed about their chosen candidate. Persuasion and priming both have impact on the voter’s choice on which they are going to vote for by focusing attitudes. Persuasion has an effect when the voter is more politically intelligent. Priming has an effect when that voter is uncertain about the candidates (Peterson 2014). Campaigns provide information to “increase accessibility, attitude importance, and decrease uncertainty in each case make the attitude stronger” (Peterson, 2014). So, while priming and persuasion on the surface are similar mechanisms, they do have their differences. Priming happens in everyday life and it happens through media.

**Media Priming Hypothesis**

The media holds a certain power over people, but this is shown especially in politics. Depending on how the story is told, the media has the power to influence the public. Previous research has told us that mass communication could only alter voter choices at the margins, but the media priming theory counters this assessment. Media priming theory holds the belief that news media alters the criteria which the public use to evaluate elected officials because it determines what content is shared (Hart, & Middleton, 2014).

There are two different types of media primes - issue primes and affective primes. Both primes are different, however they do not need to be used separately. Many people argue that news media is biased to favor one political party or another (Alterman, 2003). Others argue that television news is balanced (Eisinger, Veenstra & Koehn, 2007; Nieven, 2001), or that the principal bias of the mass media is structural rather than political; that it focuses on negative and insignificant news (Nieven, 2001). Despite these different views, researchers all agree that the content of the media influences the population in terms of agenda-setting, priming, and the framing of debates (Coleman & Banning, 2002; Kinder 2003).

It is the tone in which the news covers issues and candidates is likely what influence the voter’s approval of the candidate (Belt et. al., 2007). The media covers everything in political campaigns, especially the higher-ranking campaigns like the ones for the position of President of the United States. One factor that media covers and strongly influences people’s voting choice is the candidate's image. One way to prime a candidate's image is through focusing on the issues that the candidate feels more strongly about, which is already salient because “of the political context” (Belt et. al., 2007). The choice of issue is not the important part, but the tone in which the media reports on those issues that primes voters (Belt et. al., 2007).

Affective media priming is used to evoke emotions. Political advertisements induce affective priming by the words, visuals and music paired with a message to create a specific emotional reaction from the viewer (Belt et. al., 2007). Media priming not only includes policy issues, but qualities of the candidates as well (Belt et al., 2007). Affective priming is thought to have less of an impact for the incumbent as they have had time to create emotional bonds with voters over their time in office (Belt et. al., 2007). This is because the candidates have forged relationships with the constituents and have a record in office, so many who know this information will not be affected by affective priming. Not only is this a factor for incumbents, but for publicly well-known candidates as well (Kinder, 1994). An example of affective priming could be a 60 second advertisement made by a third party with no voice over or music playing. This advertisement would be perceived differently than a commercial with positive music, which would improve the voter’s appraisals.

The media priming hypothesis uses these types of influences in trying to shift the voter’s judgments. The media priming effect happens, “in response to an issue’s increasing salience in the news, an individual reevaluated a politician’s tenure in office based on considerations of the new salient issue” (Hart, & Middleton, 2014 p. 582-583). Priming voters this way can be harmful because people take what the news says as truth, even if the news is wrong. However, primes only work if the two mechanisms of regency or frequency or both are present. It is even possible to change a voter’s judgment criteria for leader evaluation quickly from one issue to another.

**Projection, Learning, and Opinion Change**

Priming is hard to study due to the difficulty in finding an exact causation without previously used explanation from previous as options. There are other explanations because the previous studies have limitations. If the research is done in a laboratory, the internal validity is high, but the external validity is low. The external validity is low because most people have opinions on ‘real’ candidates in an election, not just a fake one. A real candidate is classified as an individual who has actually run for office and a fake candidate is an individual who was created by the researchers to run for office. The past studies of the media priming theory have also only shown that exposure to, for example, LGBT+ rights has a correlation between voter’s approval for the president’s managing on LGBT+ rights and their overall approval of the president. Even broader research examples have only shown an increased correlation because the voter changes their overall approval to match their prior issue approval. Therefore, research has been done which has been in favor of projection, learning, and opinion change instead of priming.

Gabriel Lenz believes that priming appears to work, but only because of unrelated processes: learning and opinion change. Learning is to expose voters to the campaign, the candidate, and salient issues and informs the voters about their stance. Learning is comprised of unbiased facts (Classen, 2011). Opinion change is when the voter adopts their party’s or candidate’s beliefs as their own (Lenz, 2009). With these two mechanisms together, Lenz says that they have the appearance of priming, but priming is not happening. Lenz (2009) makes a claim in his introduction that his method of research is limited to policy issues not valence or performance because that is the data he had access to. He looks at few cases in which he examines if it is learning or priming.

Lenz states that in most priming research, the treatments are designed to make an issue more salient, but the treatment has other effects. It does not matter if the treatment consists of “watching television or campaign ads or experiencing a campaign in the field” (p. 823). It is that the treatment teaches the participants about the issue that they are being primed for. For example, they can teach the participants about the immigration policy being introduced and/or the parties’ stance on that policy or similar policies. Lenz uses the Truman vs. Dewey election because most people had low levels of knowledge for the New Deal policies. He infers that Truman’s campaign simply informed the masses that it was Truman who supported and Dewey who opposed the New Deal policies. And then the people changed votes for Truman because they learned who was in support of the New Deal policies (Lenz, 2009).

**Case Examples**

There is a great deal of research done on priming containing to United States elections. For this paper, I will only be going into detail on two research studies. I chose these studies due to the content, research methods, and because they were recently completed. The first article is an experiment using subliminal priming in preexisting television advertisements drawn from 2000, 2002, and 2004 congressional and presidential campaigns (Lodge, Weber, & Taber, 2005). The second research article is on the 2008 Presidential Election between Obama and McCain. The researchers wanted to understand the role that stereotypes played in this unique election by the role of implicit primes (Palmer & Peterson, 2009).

There is not a lot of research containing to political media primes in the Netherlands. I did however choose to add this to my research as the findings were important. The findings were important because of the research method used made it hard to have any other explanations other than priming.

Along with the Netherlands, Germany does not have much research on political media primes. I choose to add this case study because of Germany’s political system and the findings. Germany’s political system is party centered which makes the relationship between party ID and candidate interesting because the coalitions are always changing. In the article, the findings were not all uniform, as they found that one condition did not prime people, but the other conditions did.

**United States Elections**

Lodge, Weber and Taber in 2005 tested subliminal priming in campaign advertising. They decided to use positive and negative primes that were embedded within preexisting television campaign ads drawn from 2000, 2002 and 2004 congressional and presidential campaigns. The research method was a novel method because they employed a within-subjects design and measured media awareness, political knowledge, and issue positions and affect towards the candidates within each advertisement, along with a series of demographic variables (Lodge, Weber, & Taber, 2005). From the research design, they were able to manipulate the advertisement tone (positive or negative), subliminal primes (present or absent) and whether the candidates were known or unknown.

The affective primes were drawn from the Affective Norms for English Words (ANEW) and International Affective Picture System (IAPS). These lists classify common English words and pictures by emotional valence (Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1997). Using expert graduate student coders, only the advertisements among the top and lower of statistical value were used. The tone of the prime stimulus was congruent with the tone of the advertisement. An attack advertisement was paired with a negative tone prime picture or word. The subliminal prime condition had the prime appear six times during the advertisement. In the no prime condition, the advertisement was shown in its original state. It was carefully planned to make sure the sequence function of which advertisements were viewed did not come into effect for the results. All advertisements that were edited were edited by sophisticated video editing software, which allowed frame-by-frame manipulation of the video file (Lodge, Weber, & Taber, 2005).

Participants view seven political advertisements; three were positive in tone and three were negative in tone. The RATS advertisement was used in this experiment as the seventh advertisement and the participants were asked if the prime originally appeared. Out of these advertisements, four advertisements referred to unknown political candidates and the remaining advertisements were from Bush’s 2000 and 2004 campaigns and Clinton’s 1996 campaign (Lodge, Weber, & Taber, 2005). The 100 participants were randomly selected into with or without subliminal primes groups. Advertisements referring to specific issues were matched on an emotional scale. An example is if, “veteran’s benefit ads was used, participants would view both a positive and negative ad referring to vet benefits” (Lodge, Weber, & Taber, 2005).

The sample of participants were made up of 100 undergraduate Stony Brook students, there were 55 females and 45 males. Lodge, Weber and Taber (2005) tested many statistical tests and due to the topic of this research, I will only be reporting and explaining some of their findings. Participants were asked to rate the candidates on nine items on a 7-point scale after each advertisement that was shown to them. They found that participants in the prime condition rated the targeted candidate less positively compared to the no prime condition. There was no effect on subliminal priming on candidate evaluations in the positive advertisements. There was a significant effect for subliminal priming in negative campaign advertisements. More specifically, participants in the priming condition rated targeted candidates more negatively than in the no prime condition. They found that no matter if the candidate was Clinton, or Bush, or an unknown candidate, the affective prime resulted in less positive evaluations of the candidates (Lodge, Weber, & Taber, 2005). They also found that the priming effects are strongest when they targeted a well-known candidate. This is a surprising find because it is thought that the more unknown the candidate is, it would be easier to influence the public because they have less political knowledge on the subject (Lodge, Weber, & Taber, 2005).

This research cannot have the other explanation of projection or learning. The fact that this research was done in a lab and the fact that the participants were not judging performance on salient issues, but on the advertisements and overall emotional effect of the advertisements makes it impossible for a projection explanation. Learning could have some value of explanation, but it is highly unlikely. It is unlikely because the participants were asked the questions after each advertisement and while there were two advertisements on the same issue, they were not presented next to each other. In the long term, these advertisements could lead to some opinions to be changed on Clinton and Kerry, however, with the information given and the purpose of the research, I cannot say if the other explanation of opinion change is possible here.

The 2008 election between Barack Obama and John McCain was a campaign that provided a great opportunity to study the effects of priming as there were two salient issues that were important; race and age. People were questioning and talking about Obama’s race and McCain’s age. Carl Palmer and Rolfe Peterson (2009) did research on the effects of group stereotype primes on candidate trait evaluations. The research method was a two-wave experimental design using 516 undergraduates from political science courses at the University of California, Davis in 2008. The first wave took place three weeks prior to the Presidential election and the second wave was conducted two weeks after. The subjects were randomly assigned to three conditions; the race stereotype prime condition, the elderly stereotype prime condition, or the no prime condition (control) after completing a political awareness battery (Palmer & Peterson, 2009).

The subjects arrived at an experimental lab and seated at a computer. In all conditions the participants were asked to read a newspaper article in which the treatments were embedded. The newspaper article was about voter registration in California along with a picture. The image was the prime stimulus. In the control condition the picture was of a figure illustrating trends in voter registration as described by the article. In the priming condition, the pictures were of African Americans, or the Elderly (Palmer & Peterson, 2009). Palmer and Peterson (2009) used both the article and picture together because together they represent common media that people would or could encounter in their everyday lives.

The results of this research are interesting. The race prime condition had some un-expecting results, for the prime did not have the negative effect on Obama as predicted (C. Sigleman, L. Sigelman, Walkosz, & Nitz, 1995; Terkilden, 1993), but a positive effect. They found that “independent of individual’s inherent stereotypical predispositions toward blacks, receiving an implicit black cue increase, rather than decreases support for Obama” (Palmer & Peterson, 2009). Palmer & Peterson (2009) did also find that age primes did not affect evaluations on both candidates, but they did observe that stereotypes do condition responsiveness to implicit cues. When individual’s conscious stereotypes were primed toward the elderly, Obama became more favorable. The opposite was also found, that individual’s conscious stereotypes were primed toward African Americans, McCain was more favorable. Simultaneously, the implicit age prime on stereotypes toward the elderly did make evaluations of McCain significantly less favorable (Palmer & Peterson, 2009).

This research cannot have the other explanation of projection, learning or opinion change. Projection is the evaluation of performance on salient issues and this research was focused on the stereotypes of age and race, while they were salient issue in people minds, individuals cannot make a judgment of the performance of age and race. These issues are fact not opinions. Learning cannot be an alternate explanation as the article was not on the candidate, but on voter registration. This means while the participants learned about voter registration, they did not learn anything to change their knowledge about Obama and McCain. Opinion change does not have an effect here because the individuals are not changing their beliefs to match Obama’s, McCain’s or the parties’ beliefs.

**The Netherlands**

In 2015, a group of political scientists (Takens, Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, & Van Atteveldt, 2015) looked at the Netherlands’ party leaders and voting behavior in the 2010 election. Their research was to help bridge the gap between the “effects of exposure to personalized coverage to personalized coverage in the weight of party leader evaluations in the voting decisions” (p.249). They used the priming theory -assume that exposure to personalized coverage would lead to heavier leader evaluations.

The Netherlands’ government system is a great form of government that allowed them to complete a longitudinal study using real-world data. The Netherlands has combined government systems of constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy (Political System of Netherlands, 2015). This means that while there is a monarchy, the Dutch people vote on a political candidate from a certain party. There are several different political parties in the Netherlands and many do try to compete for the most seats, which allow them to acquire the prime minster position as well. Just like in England, while they are technically voting for a party, the voters do know who the prime minster would be. Voters get most of their information on the different parties from many different newspapers and television news broadcasts (Takens, Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, &Van Atteveldt, 2015).

Takens, Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, and Van Atteveldt (2015) completed this study, by analyzing one public and one commercial news broadcast, four subscription newspapers, two free dailies, and one news website, as well as an 11-wave panel survey (one wave is equivalent to one week). They used articles that covered all national politics from February 19, 2010 to June 9, 2010. They had a total of 5,742 newspaper articles, 386 news broadcast transcripts, and 496 news website articles. Each piece was coded by “the head-line and the lead of the newspaper articles, the introduction by the news anchor and the text of political commentators of the television news transcripts, and the integral text of the items of the news Website”(Takens, et. al., p.256).

As it is known that priming effects do not last very long, these researchers planned and took into account for this effect. Based on other research they found, “that the probability of retrieving campaign information is decreased by half after a week” (Takens, et. al., p. 255). Therefore, the respondents were linked to the content of the news of their choice based on the precise time and date at which they filled out the questionnaires to counter the fading of the prime.

The panel survey was to track leader-evaluations, party evaluations, and vote intention and to test the leader effect and the priming hypothesis. The data was collected through an 11-wave internet panel survey. The first 10 surveys were collected weekly between April 6, 2010 and June 8, 2010. The last survey was collected three days after Election Day which was held on June 9th (Takens et. al., 2015). They had a range of participants, due to the fact that it consisted of 11 surveys; the highest number of participants they had was 1,210 and the lowest number of participants was 836.

Through multiple analyses, Takens, Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, and Van Atteveldt (2015) found an interaction between leader evaluations and personalized coverage that had a significantly positive effect on the vote. This means that they did find a priming effect. The participants who were exposed to more personalized news weighed leader evaluations more heavily in their voting decision and any other considerations were temporarily less important. One of the post Hoc tests revealed that the priming effect remained significant once horse race news or attributions of successes, rather than failures of party leaders were included.

The way that Takens, Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, and Van Atteveldt (2015) constructed and conducted this research study shows that the causation was through priming effect and not projection. Because of the fact that this was a longitudinal study, it showed the priming effect of personalized news was not caused by projection. Also, that the priming effect was not a part of learning as personalized news did not strengthen the effect of issue agreement at the start of the campaign. If learning did occur, the personalized news would have facilitated voters to learn more about the issue positions of the candidates. They found that “personalized news coverage diminishes rather than strengthens the effect of prior party evaluations, prior vote intention, and prior issue agreement on one’s current vote intention” (Takens, et al., 2015, p. 263).

Takens, Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, and Van Atteveldt (2015) found that the exposure to personalized coverage did strengthen the effects of leader evaluations on vote choice, there by confirming the priming hypothesis. The exposure to personalized media coverage makes voters who think well of politician are even more likely to vote for that party leader, while voters who do not think highly of the politician are even less likely to vote for that politician’s party (p. 262).

**Germany**

Harald Schoen (2004a) completed an analysis on how Germany’s voting behavior changed in the German Federal campaign of 2002 and if that change contributed to the reelection of the red-green coalition. Schoen decided to analyze this election cycle because the parties tried different priming strategies with respect to the themes or issues that they used.

Germany is a Federal Republic since the constitution was adopted in 1949. There are three branches to the government; Executive, Judicial and Legislative. The Executive branch consists of the President and the Federal Cabinet. By indirect vote, the President is elected, and by Parliament, the Chancellor is elected. The Judicial branch consists of the constitutional court and is elected by Parliament. The Legislative branch contains the Bundestag and Bundesrat. The Bundestag is elected by plurality vote in single member constituencies and are allocated by popular vote through a mixed-member proportional system. The Bundesrat is filled by regional legislatures (globalEDGE Team, n.d.). Germany is plural multi-party systems with now a total of nine political parties (Germany, 2013). These parties do create alliances like the red-green alliance. The red-green alliance is the alliance between the social-democratic or democratic socialist parties and the “green” parties known to be the environmental parties. Schoen focused on the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/Christian Social Union (CSU) because these were the parties that we obvious in the fact they were priming.

Schoen did the analysis through survey data gathered by the Forechungsgruppe Wahlen during 2002 from January 2nd until a week before the federal election. To keep numbers being representative of the country the analysis was not split into Western and Eastern Germany. He measured voting behavior for the SPD and Greens, CDU/CSU and FDP.

Both coalitions had different topics which they tried to prime people with. The red-green party primed people on economics, unemployment, and public finance. The governing parties want to distract people from those problems with primes about the candidates, the management of the flood crisis and the Iraq issue (Schoen, 2004a).

Schoen’s research findings showed that the priming effects contributed considerably to the election results. Schoen proved that priming did occur because voters did react the voting behavior echoed the choices offered by the political elite. The red-green coalition was able to succeed in priming candidate orientations, attitudes about the Iraq issue and the management of the flood crisis along the Elbe. Schoen was able to show with the three dimensions (candidate effect, flood effect, Iraq effect) that he studied, that the electoral influence was increased in 2002.

Looking at Schoen’s data, Lenz’s arguments of projection, learning, and opinion change would be invalid. The projection argument says that the voter’s overall approval of the candidate affects the impression of the performance on salient issues (Hart & Middleton, 2014). Unlike the United States, Germany has a party centered political system, which means that party identification normally decreases as the election process continues, but in this case with considering the sampling error, there was no variation over time. This is a similar finding in Kandidatenorientierungenim Wahlkampf. Eine Analysezu den Bundestagswahlkämpfen 1980–1998 (Candidate orientations in the election campaign. An analysis of the Bundestag election campaigns 1980 – 1998) (Schoen, 2004b). Learning might be happening in this case, because the small variations of the party’s economic competence happened around the televised debates. The variations, however, are small and do not last very long (only one week) meaning that people are not retaining the information therefore they are not learning but being primed. Opinion change cannot be an explanation because of the fact the Germany is party-centered. People choose a party based on what they believe and then the candidate is chosen to become prime minister, therefore people are not reflecting their party’s issue position, but the party is reflecting the collective position(s).

**Conclusion**

Based upon the previous studies, the location of the political campaign (whether it is in the United States or international) does not make the campaign immune to priming effects. Whether the prime is implicit or explicit, primes in political campaigns will influence voter’s attitudes and vote preference about salient issues. While priming hypothesis, has been under attack, I have found the answer to my question, ‘Does media priming affect voters’ opinion and vote choice?’ to be yes, media priming does have an effect.

That media priming hypothesis is “when news coverage raises an issue’s salience, voters align their overall evaluation of the president with their assessment of him on that issue” (Hart & Middleton, 2014, p.581). This project evaluated four case studies of elections and experiments in the United States, Netherlands, and Germany. The case studies for the United States were about an experiment using subliminal priming in preexisting television advertisements drawn from 2000, 2002, and 2004 congressional and presidential campaigns (Lodge, Weber, & Taber, 2005). The second research article is on the 2008 Presidential Election between Obama and McCain and the stereotypes of age and race (Palmer & Peterson, 2009). The case study from the Netherlands was about voting behavior in the 2010 election and the “effects of exposure to personalized coverage to personalized coverage in the weight of party leader evaluations in the voting decisions” (Takens, et al., 2015, p.249). The Germany case study was about the voting behavior that was changed in the German Federal campaign of 2002 contributed to the reelection of the red-green coalition (Schoen, 2004a).

In each case study, I made the argument that projection, social change, and learning were not an expectable alternate explanation. I understand that, yes, Lenz has found in his own research that he has found that projection, social change, and learning were present in those studies. In these studies, aspects of each of these other explanations were absent. Other than the case study from the United States by Lodge, Weber, & Taber (2005), research where I could not firmly conclude that opinion change did not occur, the other case studies were influenced by primes.

The case studies that I choose were because of the findings and because they were done more recent than other studies. While not all studies were about the results vote choice by primes, we can conclude that because of these primes that they experienced, would lead them to vote the way they were primed, confirming the priming hypothesis. Priming does not work on everyone and the research done has conflicting results such as negative primes work better then positive primes or implicit primes work better then explicit primes. The fact is the political primes work because influence people judgments.

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