Testing the Second Level of Agenda Setting: Effects of News Frames on Reader-Assigned Attributes of Hezbollah and Israel in the 2006 War in Lebanon

By Leslie A. Rill and Corey B. Davis

An experiment involving 485 participants provided evidence for second-level agenda-setting effects of manipulated print media stories about the 2006 war in Lebanon. Investigators (1) measured readers' perceptions of the war's involved parties, Israel and Hezbollah, and (2) compared specific attributes that readers in each condition assigned to Israel and Hezbollah. Results demonstrated significant differences in attributes and perceptions of Israel and Hezbollah among five conditions. Computer content analysis of open-ended responses demonstrated a relationship between the version of the news story read by participants and the attributes that the participants assigned to Israel and Hezbollah.

Since McCombs and Shaw' first suggested the link between media coverage and voters' assessment of issue importance, scholars have sought to not only confirm this link but to make it bolder and multifaceted. Agenda-setting research is no longer limited to the précis that, as Cohen^ claimed, the media only tell the public what to think about. Indeed, there is now evidence that media also tell readers and viewers how they should think and feel about what they have been told to think about. This so-called second-level or attribute agenda setting provides the focus for the current investigation.

The present investigation employs experimental testing of the second level of agenda setting. Using as the issue of focus the 2006 war in Lebanon waged between Israel and Hezbollah, this study will use four differently framed versions of a news story about Hezbollah and Israel and their respective roles in the conflict. A fifth control article about an unrelated issue will provide a point of comparison, as well as providing a random sample of participants whose knowledge about this issue, presumably, comes from actual news coverage.

This study will provide experimentally controlled evidence of second-level agenda setting not provided by existing survey-type research. Leslie A. Rill and Corey B. Davis are graduate students in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri.
or content analysis research in agenda setting. The controlled study provides a distinct advantage because it can determine whether the participants who are assigning attributes actually read the news story that is assumed to have influenced the agenda. Using this design, the investigators will (1) be able to measure readers' perceptions of Israel and Hezbollah, (2) compare how these perceptions were shaped by the different frames presented in the different news stories, and (3) identify and compare the specific attributes that readers from each condition group assigned to Israel and Hezbollah.

Review of Literature

**Agenda Setting.** McCombs and Shaw concluded that there is a significant relationship between the emphasis the media (in that instance, newspapers) give to the issues and the importance voters place on the issues. This conclusion has evolved into a theoretical framework that has become an important focus of politics and media research over the course of the last three decades.

The current study breaks from the trend in traditional agenda-setting studies and follows the paradigm frequently referred to as attribute agenda-setting effects, also known as second-level agenda setting. Rather than focus on participants' assessments of the importance of news topics, it focuses on the attributes that news stories assign to issues, groups, and individuals. Further, it focuses on news stories' influence on evaluations that media audiences make of the subjects of those news stories.

**Framing and Second-level Agenda Setting.** Entman explained that framing involves selecting a subject of news coverage and making it salient in the public mind. More recently, some distinguished framing from priming and agenda setting, which Scheufele and Tewksbury labeled "accessibility-based models." In other words, priming and agenda setting posit that the more frequently an issue is accessed, the more salient that issue will become. Scheufele and Tewksbury differentiated framing as "the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences." However, the distinction between framing and second-level agenda setting is less clear.

The second level of agenda setting emerged from work by McCombs and his colleagues and describes the tendency of the media to attribute traits to political figures and issues and the resulting tendency of media audiences to make those same trait attributions. In this manner, it is theorized that the media influence public opinions and perceptions of issues and political figures. According to Wanta, Golan, and Lee, the second level of agenda setting is the result of researchers' merger of agenda-setting and framing research, in which "the attributes linked to newsmakers influence the attributes members of the public link to the newsmakers."

**Media Frames vs. Audience Frames.** Scheufele argued "two concepts of framing need to be specified: media frames and audience frames." Audience frames are the pre-existing filters by which an audi-
ence member frames her or his reading or viewing of a news story. Scheufele\textsuperscript{17} equates audience frames with Entman's definition of schemata: "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information."\textsuperscript{18} Audience frames are also formed by other characteristics such as demographics and media literacy. Druckman\textsuperscript{19} found that certain audience frames such as expertise, age, and discussion with peers can alter the effects of media frames.

Media frames refer to the way in which a news story is framed through its presentation or content. Specifically, Scheufele\textsuperscript{20} suggests that the organization or story line that a news report follows is central to conceptualizing a media frame. Media frames are measured much more often in the framing literature.\textsuperscript{21} Examples would include experiments, such as the current investigation of second-level agenda setting, which manipulate media frames and measure audiences' perceptions of the newsmakers in the news story. Scheufele and Tewksbury\textsuperscript{22} acknowledge that framing informs second-level agenda setting. However, they reject equating the two concepts.

McCombs provides a clear distinction between frames and attributes, arguing that frames are specific types of attributes; specifically, a frame is "a dominant attribute in a message."\textsuperscript{23} McCombs further differentiates between aspects, "a general category of attributes," and central themes, "attributes defining a dominant perspective on an object."\textsuperscript{24} "In other words, attributes defining a central theme are frames."\textsuperscript{25} The news stories manipulated here provide aspect attributes that contribute to specific central themes or frames. The central themes or frames will be measured by gauging research participants' overall perceptions of Hezbollah and Israel. Aspect attributes will be measured through comparison of numerous descriptors or keywords used by both the news story and the news consumer.

Framing and second-level agenda setting are not equivalent concepts. As Scheufele and Tewksbury suggest,\textsuperscript{26} framing informs our understanding of second-level agenda setting. Specifically, the distinction between media frames and audience (individual) frames is of great importance. Following the example of Price, Tewksbury, and Powers,\textsuperscript{27} media frames are manipulated as independent variables and measure audience frames are measured as dependent variables. Further, McCombs'\textsuperscript{28} distinction between aspect attributes and frames is also important to our study. As with agenda setting, the focus is on how media stories make particular issues or attributes more salient. More important, though, is how attributes assigned to newsmakers (Israel and Hezbollah) in news stories (through media frames) cause individuals to assign those attributes to Israel and Hezbollah.

**Theory and Research in Second-Level Agenda Setting.** Second-level agenda-setting theory explains that through media coverage of an event, the public will develop an opinion about the event based on the type of coverage the news gives to those specific attributes. By covering attributes in either a positive, negative, or neutral tone, the media help the public not only decide on the importance of the issues being covered but also how to feel about the issues.\textsuperscript{29}
Research has continually supported this theory. Golan and Wanta\textsuperscript{30} found that the characteristics of presidential primary candidates that were more frequently covered by newspapers were evaluated by the public as important attributes. Wanta, Golan, and Lee\textsuperscript{31} examined the news coverage of foreign nations in conjunction with a national public opinion poll thermometer, finding a clear link between news coverage of the foreign nations and how the public viewed the nations. Wanta, Golan, and Lee\textsuperscript{32} noted that their sample of news coverage contained stories that were mostly either balanced or neutral. They suggest that future research should “examine stories that have a mix of positive and negative information.”\textsuperscript{33} Although the current investigation does not provide an article that contains positive and negative information together, it does provide balanced information in a neutral control article as well as two articles with distinctive positive frames and two articles with distinctive negative frames.

\textbf{Agenda Setting in International Contexts.} Although agenda-setting research originated in the United States with the study of U.S. presidential elections, the field has expanded to include comparative studies of agenda setting in the United States and in other countries,\textsuperscript{34} as well as studies of agenda setting in non-U.S. elections.\textsuperscript{35} Other studies have focused on how news coverage of international events and agenda setting differs from country to country.\textsuperscript{36} In this study, the effects of media frames on perceptions of an international event are investigated.

\textbf{The Hezbollah-Israel Conflict.} On July 12, 2006, members of the militant Shia group Hezbollah crossed the border from Lebanon into Israel, killing eight Israeli soldiers and abducting two. The raid prompted Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to declare the attack an act of war.\textsuperscript{37} Olmert notified the Lebanese government, which includes members of Hezbollah, that Israel held Lebanon responsible for the attack and demanded the return of the Israeli soldiers. The U.S. government charged that not only was Hezbollah responsible, but that Iran and Syria, noted supporters of Hezbollah, should also be held responsible for the group’s actions.\textsuperscript{38} Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah confirmed that the group was holding the two soldiers and declared that they would only be released in exchange for the release of Hezbollah members being held prisoner by Israel. Within hours of the incursion, Israel had launched a counter-strike into Lebanon, bombing the airport in the capitol city of Beirut and “a range of targets in southern Lebanon which it said were connected with Hezbollah.”\textsuperscript{39} Hezbollah forces responded by launching multiple rockets into northern Israel over the course of the subsequent weeks. The conflict lasted a total of thirty-four days and resulted in more than 1,000 deaths.\textsuperscript{40} On August 15, 2006, following a U.N.-negotiated cease-fire, Israel began to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, and Lebanese troops, aided by U.N. peacekeepers, began their efforts to stabilize the region.\textsuperscript{41}

This event was of substantial significance, widely covered by news media outlets throughout the world. However, various international media covered this story in very different ways, or with very different frames. Given the gravity of this event, and the variety of frames available
to news audiences, the Hezbollah-Israel war in Lebanon provides an ideal case study for this investigation.

Hypotheses. One important area of second-level agenda-setting research concerns the audience’s tendency to adapt aspect attributes present in news stories when they talk about the news stories with others. Thus, media audiences should echo keywords or aspect attributes that are used by media producers. Using experimental methods that integrate manipulated news frames, the following hypotheses will be tested:

**H1:** Participants who read positively or negatively framed news stories about Hezbollah or Israel will more frequently use keywords/aspect attributes from those news stories in their descriptions of Hezbollah or Israel than research participants who read other articles.

Individual keywords or aspect attributes contribute to an overall dominant theme of a news story. These dominant or central theme attributes create the overarching media frame for a given news story. Second-level agenda-setting research suggests that media frames (central theme attributes) should be adopted by the news consumers, providing the second hypothesis:

**H2:** Exposure to negatively framed articles about Israel’s role or Hezbollah’s role in the 2006 conflict in Lebanon will yield more negative perceptions about Israel or Hezbollah than positively framed articles.

News consumers have preexisting filters or audience frames which shape how they will judge news content. In order to demonstrate that research participants’ assessments of Israel and Hezbollah were influenced primarily by the stimuli rather than outside sources (preexisting filters), it is necessary to compare responses of participants who read framed news stories to those of a control group who did not read framed news stories about Hezbollah or Israel. Thus, the two remaining hypotheses:

**H3a:** Participants who read negatively framed stories about Hezbollah or Israel will have more negative perceptions of Hezbollah or Israel than research participants who do not read any articles about Hezbollah or Israel.

**H3b:** Participants who read positively framed stories about Hezbollah or Israel will have more positive perceptions of Hezbollah or Israel than research participants who do not read any articles about Hezbollah or Israel.

To examine links between print news coverage of the 2006 Lebanon conflict between Hezbollah and Israel and U.S. readers’ per-
ceptions of foreign (non-U.S.) entities, an experiment was conducted in which participant responses to open-ended questions were compared to fabricated news stories discussing the conflict. This permitted determination of whether the central themes in media coverage of the war set the agenda for the public’s perceptions of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict. Additionally, it was possible to examine the attribute-assigning function of second-level agenda setting in news stories.

Participants. Undergraduate students (n = 485) at a large Midwestern university served as the participants for this study. The sample consisted of 190 men (39%) and 295 women (61%) whose mean age was 19.85 (with ages ranging from 18 to 28), sd = 1.43. Participants reported reading the newspaper an average of 2.79 days per week (sd = 1.75), watching television news an average of 3.41 days per week (sd = 1.77) and using the Internet for news an average of 4.38 days per week (sd = 1.99). These results are slightly behind the national average of news consumption.42

Design. Using a between-subjects design, all participants were randomly assigned to one of five conditions and were given a modified news article (stimulus). Each participant was assigned to read an article with either (1) a strong positive bias for Hezbollah (n = 99), (2) a strong negative bias against Hezbollah (n = 96), (3) a strong positive bias for Israel (n = 99), (4) a strong negative bias against Israel (n = 97), or (5) a control article about a dolphin that received a prosthetic tail, which mentioned none of the involved parties in the 2006 Lebanon war (n = 95).

Stimuli. To create the stimuli, researchers first gathered articles about the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict from mainstream news sources. Next, the researchers crafted new articles for each condition incorporating partially factual information about the conflict from the original source complemented with exaggerated information and framing the article as more positive or negative depending on the condition for which it was being used. This element of the design served two purposes: (1) to create articles with strong positive or negative perceptions of Israel and Hezbollah and (2) to allow the researchers to manipulate and measure aspect attributes linked to each group.

To enhance validity and reliability of the fabricated news stories, researchers conducted a pre-test prior to data collection. A random sample of participants, who did not participate in the experiment, (n = 10) read the fabricated news stories and were asked if they represented (1) a strong positive bias for Hezbollah, (2) a strong negative bias against Hezbollah, (3) a strong positive bias for Israel, (4) a strong negative bias against Israel in the Israel-Lebanon conflict, or (5) nothing to do with the conflict or any parties involved in the conflict. Results from the pre-test corroborated the researchers’ assumptions. All ten participants agreed that each story reflected one of the previously stated positions, thus affirming the researchers’ intended frames.

Procedures. To test the hypotheses, this study analyzed self-report data collected from questionnaires administered to participants after reading one of the five stimulus articles. Data collection took place in fall 2006, soon after the height of the Israel-Lebanon conflict. Participants
completed the study in a campus lab where they were randomly assigned to one of the five conditions. After reading the stimuli, the respondents completed an open-ended electronic questionnaire asking them to describe their knowledge and opinions about the roles of Israel and Hezbollah in "the recent war in Lebanon." Additionally, the questionnaire solicited demographic information, measures of the respondents' media diet, and "feeling thermometers" (10-point scales ranging from extremely unfavorable [1] to extremely favorable [10]) for Israel and Hezbollah.

Finally, when data collection was completed, the researchers sent an electronic mail message debriefing the intent and design of the study as well as a list of seven media sources that the researchers used to compose the stimuli articles. Participants were encouraged to read those articles and other sources if they wished to develop a more informed opinion about the actual events and involved parties in the 2006 war in Lebanon.

Data Analysis. Using participants' responses to their favorability ratings of both Hezbollah and Israel, a one-way ANOVA was used to look at the difference between groups.

Next, computer content analysis was used to compare keywords found in the stimulus articles with the open-ended responses provided by the participants. To develop the list of search terms for data analysis, we employed the Concordance computer software program, which produced a list of every word appearing in each text (a "full" Concordance). First, words that did not pertain to attributes of the Israel-Lebanon conflict, such as "and," "the," and "a" were deleted. Next, the remaining terms were grouped by frequency for each stimuli article and participant response. A list of the top ten terms for each article was compiled and then compared with the respondents' open-ended answers about Israel and Hezbollah to find similarities among attributes as well as evidence of second-level agenda-setting effects. Ultimately, the top ten words that appeared in both the stimuli and participant responses for each condition were used in the analysis. Lastly, the keywords were entered into SPSS to determine frequencies among conditions, and a one-way ANOVA was run to determine the difference in reported attributes. For the purpose of this study, the phrase, "keywords" will be used to represent attributes used to describe Israel and Hezbollah in participant responses and stimulus articles.

**H1** posited that participants who read positively framed news stories about Hezbollah would more frequently use keywords from those news stories in their descriptions of Hezbollah than research participants in any of the four other groups (see Table 1). The results supported the hypothesis, indicating a significant difference between groups, $F (4, 438) = 91.95, p < .001$. Additionally, the Scheffé post hoc analysis revealed a significant difference between groups. Therefore, individuals reading the positively framed story about Hezbollah's role in the conflict more frequently used keywords from the posi-

**Results**

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**Testing the Second Level of Agenda Setting:**

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TABLE 1  
Means and Standard Deviations of Key Word Use by Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive Hezbollah</th>
<th>Negative Hezbollah</th>
<th>Positive Israel</th>
<th>Negative Israel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td>4.36&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.93&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.65&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.52&lt;sub&gt;d&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Words</strong></td>
<td>(1.94)</td>
<td>(.66)</td>
<td>(.99)</td>
<td>(1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td>96&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.57&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.19&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.84&lt;sub&gt;d&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hezbollah</strong></td>
<td>(1.09)</td>
<td>(2.40)</td>
<td>(1.28)</td>
<td>(1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Words</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Israel</strong></td>
<td>1.40&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.09&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>2.92&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.98&lt;sub&gt;d&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Words</strong></td>
<td>(.73)</td>
<td>(.97)</td>
<td>(1.97)</td>
<td>(1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Israel</strong></td>
<td>2.23&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.91&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.89&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.08&lt;sub&gt;d&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Words</strong></td>
<td>(1.00)</td>
<td>(.90)</td>
<td>(1.28)</td>
<td>(1.84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Means (on a scale of 1 to 10) represent the average number of top 10 words that appear in the condition and in participants' responses. Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at p < .001. Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

In addition, those reading a positively framed story about Israel's role in the Lebanese conflict reported similar keywords in their open-ended responses more frequently than those exposed to different stimuli, $F (4, 436) = 36.31, p < .001$. A significant difference was found between participants in the positive Israel condition and those in the negative Israel condition, positive Hezbollah condition, and the negative Hezbollah condition. This indicates that those reading the positively framed article about Israel used keywords found in the stimuli when discussing Israel in their open-ended responses.

Further, **H1** stated that individuals reading the negatively framed story about Hezbollah would report keywords featured in the negatively framed story about Hezbollah more frequently than those exposed to stories that were framed differently. The results also supported this hypothesis, $F (4, 440) = 73.14, p < .001$. The post hoc analysis further supported the hypothesis, locating significant differences between the negative Hezbollah group and the positive Hezbollah group, positive Israel group, and the negative Israel group.

Lastly, it was purported that participants reading the negatively framed news article about Israel's role in the conflict would use keywords.
from that article more frequently in their responses about Israel than those who were not exposed to the negative Israel condition. The results supported this hypothesis, $F (4, 440) = 73.14, p < .001$. Those reading the negatively framed article about Israel more frequently used keywords associated with that article than participants reading the positively framed Israel story, positively framed Hezbollah story, and the negatively framed Hezbollah story when commenting on Israel. The results of $H1$ illustrate that the media-framed attributes of Hezbollah and Israel were used by participants in their individual framing of Hezbollah and Israel.

$H2$ posited that those reading a news story with a negative frame of either Hezbollah or Israel would report more negative perceptions of Hezbollah or Israel than those reading the news story with a positive frame (see Table 2). For perceptions of Israel, a one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences in favorability across the conditions, $F (4, 481) = 18.69, p < .001$. Scheffé post hoc analysis established that individuals in the negative Israel condition ranked Israel lower on the 10-point feeling thermometer than participants in the positive Israel condition. Additionally, significant differences between groups in the rating of Hezbollah’s favorability were confirmed, $F (4, 480) = 51.38, p < .001$. The post hoc analysis revealed that participants who read the negatively framed news story about Hezbollah ranked their favorability of Hezbollah significantly lower than participants who read the positively framed news story about Hezbollah.

By further analyzing the differences in perceptions of Hezbollah and Israel between groups, $H3a$ asserted that participants who read negatively framed stories about Hezbollah would have more negative perceptions of Hezbollah than those who did not read any articles about Hezbollah. Because of an unequal number of participants in each group, the Scheffé post hoc test was performed to reveal differences among conditions. The results indicated that participants in the control
group and those in the negative Israel condition rated Hezbollah's favorability significantly higher than those in the negative Hezbollah condition. This indicates that those reading articles framed negatively about Hezbollah rated Hezbollah more negatively on the feeling thermometer than those not reading articles about Hezbollah. However, a significant difference was not found between the negative Hezbollah group and the positive Israel condition.

Additionally, H3a suggested that participants who read the negatively framed story about Israel would have more negative perceptions of Israel than those who do not read any articles focused on Israel. The Scheffè test indicated that all groups differed significantly. The control group, individuals reading the negatively framed Hezbollah article, and participants reading the positively framed Hezbollah article rated their favorability of Israel significantly higher than those reading the negatively framed story about Israel, supporting H3a.

The results of H3b were also confirmed, and the Scheffè post hoc analysis revealed a significant difference in favorability of Hezbollah between those reading the positively framed story about Hezbollah and those who did not read any story focused on Hezbollah. Participants in the control group, positive Israel group, and negative Israel group ranked Hezbollah lower in favorability than those who read the positively framed Hezbollah story.

It was also predicted that Israel would be rated more favorably by those who read positively framed stories about Israel than by those who did not read any stories about Israel. The post hoc procedure indicated a significant difference between those reading the positively framed story about Israel and the control group and individuals reading the positively framed story about Hezbollah. However, participants reading the negatively framed story about Hezbollah did not rate the favorability of Israel significantly lower than those in the positive Israel group.

To gain a deeper understanding of audience frames, the researchers examined respondents' open-ended responses to questions about their perceptions of Israel and Hezbollah. These responses provided insight into how keywords, as well as general frames, were adapted by respondents as they articulated their perceptions of Hezbollah and Israel. The participants associated different ideas, actions, and descriptors with Israel and Hezbollah based on the different frames that the participants consumed. For example, respondents who read the positively framed story about Hezbollah were more likely to describe Hezbollah as helpful and discuss Hezbollah's distribution of monetary and humanitarian aid to the civilian victims of the conflict. These trends were demonstrated by the following quotation:

I would say that Hezbollah really cares about their people and their main goal is to keep the people in the country safe. After a recent bombing, they handed out money to every household in Hezbollah to help them rebuild their homes. In total, they handed out $12,000, which is a large sum of money.
In contrast, those who read the negatively framed news story about Hezbollah were more likely to describe Hezbollah as an aggressor and discuss the organization's terrorist activities: “I would tell them that they are an Islamic extremist group that conducts acts of terror against surrounding countries like Israel.”

Respondents who read positively framed stories about Israel’s role in the Lebanon conflict frequently described the nation as a victim of Hezbollah rocket strikes. For example, one respondent wrote: “I would tell them [my friend] that Hezbollah has fired 600 rockets at Israel and kidnapped many of its soldiers... that many Israelis have lost their homes to bombs and are left homeless.”

Those who read negatively framed stories about Israel more frequently mentioned the nation’s retaliatory bombings of civilians in Lebanon: “I would tell my friend that Israel is ultimately destroying all of Lebanon. Israeli warplanes struck about 80 targets in Lebanon on Thursday, hitting roads, rocket storage facilities, rocket launching sites, and Hezbollah positions and headquarters.”

The current report provides a relatively rare experimental testing of and evidence for the media’s attribute-setting ability. The controlled laboratory setting demonstrated the influence of five individual news stories. Admittedly, the stimuli read by each of the five condition groups represented a small percentage of the participants’ overall media diet. However, the statistically significant differences across the groups’ randomly assigned participants suggest that the differently framed news stories are the variable responsible for those differences. To review, those differences include significantly different means for the feeling thermometers and significantly different word choices when discussing Hezbollah and Israel in the open-ended responses. Further, there was a clear relationship between the media frames consumed by participants and the audience frames that the participants assigned to Israel and Hezbollah.

Despite H3a’s lack of support (indicating no significant differences between the negative Hezbollah condition and the positive Israel condition in those respondents’ ratings of Hezbollah) and failure to yield significant differences between the positive Israel condition and the negative Hezbollah condition in those respondents’ ratings of Israel, this finding is rather logical. Given the dichotomy that the articles and the questionnaires set up between Hezbollah and Israel, it might be supposed that when one group is presented in a negative light, the other group would automatically be assumed to be positive and vice versa. Thus, this study’s findings of overall negative ratings for Hezbollah in both the negative Hezbollah condition and the positive Israel condition should be expected. Similarly, as was found in this study, it should be expected that ratings of Israel in the positive Israel group should be parallel to the ratings of Israel in the negative Hezbollah group.

Positive and negative frames were exaggerated in this experiment to provide clear differences among condition groups, but these differ-
ences reflect the variance in the frames of actual media coverage of international affairs. The facts may be reported somewhat consistently, but the individual keywords as well as the overall frame of real news stories can be quite different depending on the source. Thus, differences in actual news coverage of this conflict, though presumably more subtle, could also yield different perceptions and linked keywords for Hezbollah and Israel.

Although the influence of the framing variable was significant in this study, the choice of topic for this experiment may have yielded more informed assessments of Israel based on the centrality of that country in the U.S. national agenda. However, the data suggest that the sample's preexisting notions of both Israel and Hezbollah ultimately held little sway when exposed to the stimulus. Despite the control group's feeling thermometer rating of Israel, the negatively framed Israel story lowered that rating significantly. The influence of the stimulus is further demonstrated when one contrasts the control group's feeling thermometer ratings of Hezbollah with the significantly higher rating of respondents reading the positively framed news story about Hezbollah. Thus, although replication of this method using a different topic of focus should be encouraged, there is no evidence that our chosen high-profile subjects of Hezbollah and Israel eroded the predicted effects of second-level agenda setting.

Future researchers should replicate this method with additional stimulus articles for each condition group. Further, since college-age students are not the most frequent consumers of news, a more age-diverse sample with more diverse media diets should be used, possibly providing further insights into the media's agenda-setting role. Additionally, framing effects for the age group sampled are likely stronger than effects for the general population due to their below-average news consumption. Although the homogeneity of the sample acts as a control against other confounding variables, the age of the participants does limit the generalizability of these findings to the general population.

Finally, the current investigation expands the research literature by providing a substantial laboratory testing of agenda-setting hypotheses that have previously been studied mostly in the realm of survey research. Future research should provide connections between this study's experimental data and an analysis of contemporary polling data and media analysis, further enhancing scholarly understanding of the intersection of framing and agenda setting.

**Conclusion**

This study has provided further empirical evidence for the second-level agenda-setting effects of the media. Using a controlled environment, we were able to demonstrate that readers of differently framed media stories reported significantly different perceptions of Israel and Hezbollah. Further, the collection and analysis of open-ended data indicated that research participants attributed qualities, ideas, and actions to Hezbollah and Israel consistent with the qualities, ideas, and actions attributed to Hezbollah and Israel in the news stories they read. Thus, we can conclude
that, consistent with the second level of agenda setting, the frames of news stories influenced readers’ perceptions of Hezbollah and Israel and their respective roles in the 2006 war in Lebanon. This study provides further evidence that, with all due respect to Cohen, the media do, indeed, tell the public what to think and not just what to think about.

NOTES


12. Scheufele and Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming."


17. Scheufele, "Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited."


20. Scheufele, "Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited."


22. Scheufele and Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda-Setting, and Priming."


24. McCombs, "A Look at Agenda Setting."

25. McCombs, "A Look at Agenda Setting."

26. Scheufele and Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda-Setting, and Priming."


38. Butcher and Short, “Israeli troops prepare to invade.”


41. Slackman, “Vast Lebanon Throng.”

42. “Online Papers Modestly Boost Newspaper Readership,” The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, July 30, 2006, retrieved October 14, 2006 at http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/282.pdf. According to Pew Center Research, two-thirds of young citizens report reading a newspaper less than three days a week, watching television news at least four days per week, and using the Internet for news four days per week or less.


44. Using computer terminals, participants typed their responses to this questionnaire into word processors, removing any spatial limits on the length of responses.

45. For the negative Hezbollah condition group, the top ten words (from most frequent to least frequent in the stimulus article) were Iran, Middle East, terror, violent, group, extremist, power, radical, forces, Syria. The ten most frequent words (from most frequent to least frequent in the stimulus article) in the positive Hezbollah condition were money, aid, Beirut, government, group, handout, $12,000, bomb, destruction, war mongers. For the negative Israel condition group, the
top ten words (from most frequent to least frequent in the stimulus article) were bomb, attacked, killing, Operation Dispelled Illusion, terror, abductions, civilians, soldiers, government, war-torn. The ten most frequent words (from most frequent to least frequent in the stimulus article) in the positive Israel condition were terror, freedom, soldier, Gaza, kidnapped, war-torn, fighting, peaceful, democracy, human rights.

46. Each research participant was asked to respond to the following open-ended questions: “If you had a friend who had no knowledge about the recent war in Lebanon, what would you tell them about Hezbollah?” “If you had a friend who had no knowledge about the recent war in Lebanon, what would you tell them about Israel?”

