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ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF NEWS MEDIA IN POLICY DEBATES REGARDING
TAXATION OF SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES

By

NICOLE GESUALDO

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Dissertation Director:

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The ways in which the news media contribute to public debate of policies in democratic societies have long been of interest to media scholars. The traditional conception of the news media's role suggests that they play an important part in informing citizens about policy matters while providing an arena for public debate of policies. This conception has been challenged recently by the changing landscape of the news industry, changes in the way people get and process news, and the ideological polarization of the political system in the United States and other Western democracies—all of which increasingly place the news media in the role of moderator of policy debate. This dissertation seeks to explicate the role of news media in the scope, nature, and dynamics of policy debates that play out in public. This updated conception of the news media's role goes beyond the traditional idea of journalists as gatekeepers who select the information and policy actors that are presented to the public to consider the part the news media play as legitimizers of policy proposals or positions. Of particular interest is exactly *how* journalists play this legitimizing role: that is, the range of strategies enacted by journalists and whether those strategies are driven by journalists themselves or by other policy actors who use news

coverage for that purpose. This study assesses the legitimacy function in the news media alongside three other functions performed by journalists as moderators of policy debate: informing and engaging news audiences and representing the positions of policy actors. It does so by analyzing a case study of news coverage of a controversial issue: proposals to tax sugar-sweetened beverages in two U.S. cities, Philadelphia and Santa Fe. A total of 528 news reports and opinion pieces from 15 news organizations across national and local media were quantitatively analyzed for evidence of the functions that journalists perform as moderators of policy debate: information, engagement, and representation. Then, content and thematic analyses were performed to identify strategies used by journalists and other actors in news media coverage to confer or diminish legitimacy. Findings suggest that there are three specific strategies that news sources can use to confer or diminish legitimacy, which journalists as gatekeepers allow to play out in the news media; three strategies that journalists themselves can use to legitimize that are external to their gatekeeping role; and one strategy—the use of evidence—that can be pursued both by news sources and by journalists. This research suggests that journalists’ role as moderators of policy debate still hinges in part on the traditional gatekeeping function, but that journalists also play an active role in policy debate through other forms of practice, including finding and presenting evidence, story construction, fact-checking, and editorializing. These findings can advance theory and research into the changing role of the news media in public debate of policies, and they call for additional inquiry into the intentionality with which journalists perform their professional roles, specifically with regard to the legitimizing or delegitimizing of policy proposals, positions, and actors.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The ability to rationally, critically, and collectively debate public policy has long been considered a hallmark of a functioning democracy (Elster, 1998). Citizens deliberate the value and consequences of proposed policy solutions and, in doing so, negotiate an opinion that can guide policymakers in their decisions (Cohen, 1997; Dahlberg, 2001). In this ideal model of democracy, the quality of debate is essential, as the most robust policies emerge from the most robust deliberations (Lafont, 2015).

In the democracies of ancient Greece, it was clear where this deliberation took place. People came together in open *agoras* to raise the issues of the day, extolling the virtues of certain policies and foretelling the detriment of others. In modern society, the answer was not as clear, leading scholars such as Habermas (1974) to consider the news media as a figurative alternative.

The notion of the news media as an arena for policy debate gained traction due to what Habermas and others perceived as a distinct set of advantages. The news media could take up any policy issue at any time; their broad mission allowed them to consider a wide range of topics, and their flexible broadcast and publication schedules liberated public discussion from the schedules of official hearings. The news media could reach a larger audience than any meeting room could hold (Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010), and could include, if they desired, the policy positions of anyone from the highest-ranking politician to the least-known citizen—a marked contrast to legislative sessions, some of which were closed to all but an invited few (Oleszek, 2013; Staton & Vanberg, 2008). Further support for the idea of the news media as an arena stemmed from their normative commitment to balanced and inclusive representation (Schudson, 2001; Vos, 2012). Together, these

factors fueled an expectation among certain scholars that the news media could host a policy debate that was as fair and inclusive as the democratic ideal.

Five decades of research have shown, however, that an open, egalitarian, non-interventionist arena is not what the news media provide. That is not to say that the news media do not play host to public debate of policy issues—they most certainly do. The discussion they oversee, however, is distinctively shaped by their values and professional practices and by the ways in which policy actors use news coverage to advance particular interests. We know that journalists help to define “what we think about” when we consider a policy issue by placing it in powerful conceptual frames (Entman, 1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006). We know that policy actors seek attention in the news media and that journalists act as gatekeepers to decide which of them will populate their stories (Bro & Wallberg, 2015; Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2009). We know that journalists selectively choose how to portray policy positions and policy actors, casting some as worthy of consideration while discounting or sidelining others (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002). We also know that the news media can draw audiences into a policy issue by revealing how it is relevant to their lives and identifying ways for them to get involved and to contribute (Nisbet, 2009; Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, & Vig, 2000).

This dissertation subscribes to the notion that the “arena” model of the news media no longer realistically captures the role that journalists play regarding public debates of policy matters. Rather, news media increasingly act as active moderators of policy debates, performing both traditional and emerging functions associated with this role. Thus, it is established that the news media are an important source of information

about policy matters for the majority of people (e.g., Snyder & Strömberg, 2010; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016). It is clear that journalists act as gatekeepers, consciously selecting among topics and deciding who is given a voice (e.g., Eberl, Boomgaarden, & Wagner, 2015; Shoemaker, Vos, & Reese, 2009). Critiques of the news media are equally abundant, particularly regarding their ability to distract audiences' attention away from substantive issues and to oversimplify complex policy problems (Bennett & Livingston, 2003; Goodman, 1999; Scheuer, 2007).

What is less clearly explicated in the literature—and the gap that this dissertation seeks to fill—is how policy proposals, positions, and actors are legitimized and delegitimized in news coverage of policy debates. Theorists in management, politics, and other fields have worked to define legitimacy as alignment with widely held social values and preferences and to determine how it is conferred or withheld in various contexts (e.g., Deephouse, 1996; Koopmans, 2004; Suchman, 1995), but a better understanding is needed of how legitimacy is determined in news media coverage of policy issues and what journalists' specific role is in that process. Legitimization is interesting because it represents a particularly active form of moderating public debates: not just allowing speakers and viewpoints past the “gates,” but determining how ideas, opinions, and people are regarded once they get there.

Investigating Legitimacy in Policy Debate

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the literature by using a case study to identify instances in which policy positions were portrayed in the news media in ways that supported or questioned their legitimacy and to connect those instances to journalistic practices and values. Certainly, the news media are not the only moderators

of policy debate, and the debate that takes place in the news media may not be the most consequential to actual policy. Depending on the situation, that distinction may accrue to deliberation that takes place in policy hearings, to the backroom negotiations between legislators and lobbyists, or to other settings. That said, this study specifically elects to focus on the news media due to their moderation of a policy debate that takes place in public view, a characteristic that is essential in well-functioning democracies. The following section provides an overview of the study's approach.

Study Overview

This dissertation's point of departure is a synthesis of the literature on deliberative democracy that leads to the explication of four essential functions needed for a robust discussion of policy issues. First, people must be informed so that they can make educated judgments, and they must be engaged so that they care about an issue and see how it affects their daily lives. Next, people need to have the opportunity to consider a variety of policy positions expressed by a range of voices. Finally, people need to form an opinion about which policies reflect their social values and therefore merit selection. Legitimization is connected to this last step: it reflects the process by which people come to see a policy proposal as aligned with commonly held social values and preferences.

This dissertation is interested in what the news media do to perform these core functions of policy debate. Therefore, it reviews literature that connects each function to journalistic practice, focusing on the moderator role of the news media in policy debate. In doing so, it explores a crucial point of tension between the conventions and ideologies that encourage journalists to foster a democratically ideal debate and the realities of day-to-day journalism, which can limit their ability to do so. The focus on this research is on

explicating the legitimizing function of the news media in policy debates, but it considers the other three functions as well, providing a more comprehensive picture of the news media's moderating role.

To evaluate the news media's contribution as moderators, this dissertation uses a case-study approach, evaluating the news media's role and function by analyzing news coverage of a recent real-world policy debate. In that sense, it follows the tradition of content-analysis studies that examine real-world phenomena to inform future inquiry into the mechanisms that lie beneath (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013; Krippendorff, 1980; Stemler, 2001).

Case Study Context

The case study selected for this research is the policy debate that arose when two U.S. cities moved to tax soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages, or SSBs, as a means of funding an expansion of pre-kindergarten programs. There is a long history in the United States of debating regulations that represent tradeoffs between social good—in this case, providing revenue for education or encouraging healthier behavior by pushing consumers away from SSBs—and social cost, including detriments to those who would pay the tax and an incursion on individual liberty (Beauchamp, 1980; Cohen et al., 2000; Feldman & Bayer, 2004; Gostin & Gostin, 2009). This case study places the function of journalists as moderators, including their legitimizing role, in this context.

The cities that provide the cases for this research—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Santa Fe, New Mexico—sought to pass SSB taxes in 2016 and 2017. In both places, the policy proposals stirred up fervent support and heated opposition. They drew funding and rhetoric from powerful national interests on both sides of the issue. Most importantly

for the purposes of this study, they attracted significant news coverage. The news media covered the debate over these proposed taxes from the time they were announced until a decision was rendered—in favor of the tax in Philadelphia, against in Santa Fe. News organizations also covered the post-decision outcomes. This pool of coverage affords the opportunity to examine how legitimacy was accorded or denied in the news media with regard to policy proposals, positions, and actors.

Through a review of the literature and findings from the case study, this dissertation will address the following research questions:

RQ1: What strategies are employed in news media coverage of policy debates to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors?

RQ2: When or under what conditions are certain legitimizing strategies likely to be used in the context of policy debates?

The next chapter outlines the four functions that scholars agree are essential to policy debate and reviews literature on journalistic values and practices that are pertinent to each, focusing on what is known and less known about the legitimacy function.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by synthesizing literature on deliberative democracy to distill four functions that scholars agree are essential ingredients in policy debate: information, representation, legitimacy, and engagement. Next, it reviews the literature on journalistic values and practices that align with the functions, considering how these come into play in the news media's moderation of policy debate. Although this chapter addresses the four functions in turn, it includes a more in-depth focus on the legitimacy function, which is least well understood with regard to news media construction of policy discussions.

Four Essential Functions of Policy Debate

Reasoned, critical deliberation of policy issues—hereafter referred to as “policy debate”—represents the core of deliberative democracy, which traces its roots to ancient Greece. There, citizens arrived at collective judgments on policy issues by voicing their opinions in an open assembly (Farrar, 2007; Ober, 2008). Even in the best circumstances, conducting a high-quality policy debate can be a fraught exercise. Some critics argue that debate is hindered because too few individuals are knowledgeable enough about policy topics to participate (Dimock & Popkin, 1997; Kinder, 1998; Luskin, 1987). Others warn of a lack of interest: if people do not care about a policy topic, it is hard to hold a worthy debate (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Galston, 2007). Additional concern stems from the risk of certain voices being excluded, creating an unrepresentative exchange (e.g., Fraser, 1994).

Some scholars have answered these challenges by acknowledging them but then defining a normative ideal for productive discussion. In this view, the way to address the obstacles to policy debate in modern society is to determine what we should aim for and

continually reinforce that benchmark. The next section identifies four functions of high-quality policy debate that resurface across various conceptions of this normative ideal: information, representation, legitimacy, and engagement.

Information

Scholars of policy debate recognize that people are best positioned to consider policy options and form positions when they are well-educated about the issues at hand. Fishkin (2009) argues that policy debate should be informed, and therefore informative, replete with appropriate and accurate information. Coleman & Gøtze (2002), in their treatise on re-engaging citizens in public life, hold that access to information is key to allowing citizens to develop an informed stance. Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw (2002) split the information that is crucial to policy debate into two types: empirical knowledge and narrative or anecdotal understanding, the latter of which helps people to grasp the personal interests and experiences of other participants in the debate.

Representation

Representation is a central feature of policymaking in democratic societies, where policy is meant to represent the will of the people (Buchanan & Keohane, 2006; Fishkin, 2009; United Nations, 1948). This also extends to the debate that informs the creation of policy. Ideally, policy debates in democracies are open, fair, and balanced, encompassing all viewpoints and all segments of society. Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw (2002) frame representation in policy debate simply: the deliberation must incorporate the full range of policy positions, all interested parties must have a chance to speak, and alternative policy solutions should be considered. Coleman and Gøtze (2002) agree with this vision of inclusivity and go a step further, arguing that if people who hold a specific policy

position do not naturally speak up, moderators of the debate should actively recruit them to the discussion. Fishkin (2009) endorses the criterion that no major policy position should be excluded and introduces the idea of balance: moderators should ensure that each policy position is “answered in a substantive way by those who advocate a different position” (p. 36). The representation function, therefore, is concerned not only with providing exposure for a wide range of policy positions and social actors, but also with ensuring some form of fairness and balance.

Legitimacy

The fact that diverse viewpoints enter into a policy debate does not guarantee that participants will view them as legitimate. Fishkin (2009) reinforces the need for sincere judgment of any policy proposals or position raised, allowing a weighing of the reasoning behind it. Echoing that sentiment, Coleman and Götze advise that policy proposals and positions deserve an evaluation on the merits to determine policy preference. Burkhalter and colleagues (2002) call for the use of strong evaluative criteria in policy debate to guard against the arbitrary assignment of legitimacy to some policy positions over others.

Engagement

A policy debate that interests no one is unlikely to be a high-quality discussion. For a robust policy debate to occur, according to Burkhalter et al. (2002), participants must be motivated to speak. Fishkin (2009) seeks participants who are willing to talk and listen, and Coleman and Götze (2002) speak of the need for citizens to understand why policies matter to them, “to generate civic discussion around those issues where citizens have real concerns ... and relevant life experiences” (p. 16). Moderators of policy debate

should engage participants by helping them to connect policy proposals to their lives, leading them toward a defined stance on which they might want to act.

Importance of the Four Functions

The scholars whose work supports the centrality of information, representation, legitimacy, and engagement in policy debate underscore the value that these elements provide when all are achieved. Fishkin writes that conditions such as these “[distinguish] deliberation from much ordinary conversation” and help society to identify “what should be done” (p. 34). Coleman and Gøtze note that these functions can create a legitimately productive discussion, helping people to consider policies in a way that yields “preference formation rather than simple preference assertion” (p. 6). Burkhalter and colleagues say that “the heart of deliberation is making hard choices among conflicting alternatives” (p. 404) and assert that the right framework for debate allows citizens to better make those decisions. These authors are open about the fact that their ideas represent normative models that set forth what *should* happen. Other research has gone to great lengths to capture what actually takes place in the real world, where the moderators of public debate are unlikely to rise to this standard. The next section describes the role of the news media as moderators of policy debate and summarizes what the literature has revealed to date about their performance of these four functions.

News Media as Moderators of Policy Debate

Centuries ago, it was relatively easy to bring citizens together in to discuss policy issues (Davenport & Leitch, 2005). Members of early societies could convene, exchange ideas, and emerge with a defined policy solution. Theorists sought to identify a figurative provider of this service for modern society’s large, geographically diffuse populations,

and the news media were nominated as a public arena where “something approaching public opinion can be formed” (Habermas, 1974, p. 49). In Habermas’ original vision, this arena could support debate among interested members of society, whose discussion would provide a form of public critique or check on government decision-making.

It is not difficult to see why the news media attracted this attention. Journalists have the ability to convene a discussion on scientific, legal, cultural, and economic issues in one adaptable location (Ferree et al., 2002). The news media represented an enduring institution in which policy actors could engage one another from a practical standpoint (Bleich, Bloemraad, & de Graauw, 2015; Sparrow, 2006). Furthermore, journalism has historically embraced a mission of public service, making the news media a willing and likely host for an informed, representative, and engaging policy debate (Beam, Brownlee, Weaver, & Di Cicco, 2009).

Research, however, has pointed to discrepancies between the notion of the news media as an open arena and the reality of an institution that is “shaped by organizational, economic, political, social, and cultural forces” (Andrews & Caren, 2010, p. 843). Scholars began to explicate the idea that journalists did not simply offer an arena for policy debate but rather functioned as active moderators of it, informed by their beliefs, values, routines, and practices. Interest moved toward achieving an understanding of how journalists construct policy debates for audiences, informed by decisions made in their day-to-day work (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Jamieson & Waldman, 2003; Malone, Boyd, & Bero, 2000; Terkildsen, Schnell, & Ling, 1998). This dissertation is built on the notion that journalistic practices have an impact on the way in which the news media present policy debates to news consumers. The following sections review what the

literature tells us about how journalistic values and practices intersect with each of the four essential functions of high-quality policy debate.

Representation Function

Definition of the representation function. Through the representation function, moderators of policy debates ensure that a wide range of perspectives are included and that various groups in society have the chance to speak (Burkhalter et al., 2002; Coleman & Gøtze, 2002). Because it is impossible to know the full universe of policy positions that may exist on a particular issue, the representation function is often reflected in the concept of balance (Fishkin, 2009), in that moderators should ensure that known factions have a roughly equal opportunity to express themselves in the debate.

Importance of the representation function. Fishkin writes that “deliberation is crippled if only the advocates of one side or point of view are in the room” (p. 37). In a similar way, Conover, Searing, and Crewe (2002) argue that it is important that people have “equal access to deliberative arenas” and “equal opportunities to influence the deliberation” (p. 24). Representation is important for the precise reason that the term signifies: the point is not that individual “citizens actually participate equally in deliberations” (Conover et al., 2002, p. 24) but that positions and social groups more generally are included in ways that allow all options and views to be considered.

The news media and the representation function. One element of journalistic practice is particularly relevant to the representation function: gatekeeping. This section provides an overview of gatekeeping’s roots and significance. Then it reviews the literature on factors that affect journalists’ conduct as gatekeepers, especially the norm of balance and various challenges to that norm.

Gatekeeping. Gatekeeping is a core element of journalistic practice. Originally developed to describe the process by which journalists decide “what’s news” (Gieber, 1956; Snider, 1967; White, 1950; Whitney & Becker, 1982), it broadened over time to describe a range of decisions that journalists make as they write, edit, and otherwise package information for audiences (Shoemaker, 1991). Journalists make choices about the information that is included, the policy positions that are raised, and the people who do the talking (Bro & Wallberg, 2015; Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2009). Shoemaker, Vos, and Reese (2009) write that gatekeepers “provide a picture of the world for the rest of us,” making it “vital for scholars to understand the gatekeeping process and its impact on the reality presented to the public” (p. 71).

Gatekeeping is useful in capturing the role of the news media as moderators of policy debate rather than an arena for it. In a public hearing, anyone can line up and wait for a turn to speak, but representation in policy debates moderated by the news media is determined by journalists, who hand-select the policy positions and speakers to include—what and who passes through the gates and into the discussion. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that inform journalists’ choices of what and whom to represent.

Gatekeeping and the norm of balance. Journalistic norms are a longstanding guiding force in journalistic practice. They serve as a code of conduct and reinforce the broader mission that underpins the profession; examples include a commitment to truth and accuracy, transparency, objectivity, and balance (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Singer, 2007). These conventions help to guide reporters’ and editors’ choices of what and whom becomes part of the news. Bennett (1996) notes that the consistency of journalistic norms

explains “how competing journalists making thoughtful and often very personal decisions can produce such similar news outcomes at the end of the day” (p. 373).

Balance is among the best-known and most heavily critiqued of the journalistic norms. It is a standard that the public widely expects journalists to meet, but research shows it is an easily missed target (Entman, 2007; Zeldes, Fico, Carpenter, & Diddi, 2008). Schudson (2001) describes the norm of objectivity and balance as rooted in the working conditions of early 20th century American journalists, who evolved the norm to differentiate themselves from the partisan businessmen who published their newspapers (often as a means of political influence), to establish solidarity around a code of ethics, and to set themselves apart from public relations workers. Over time, balance became sewn into the fabric of U.S. journalism, a practice seen to elevate the profession and symbolize its commitment to fairness. Today, journalists and their news organizations perceive it as part of their professional code or ideology to strive to be balanced in their representation of issues (Deuze, 2005; Reese, 1990).

Although balance evolved into a normative yardstick by which the public judged journalists and journalists judged themselves, balance as a measure of representativeness is thornier than it sounds. For example, U.S. journalists and court judges alike struggled in the 1960s with Fairness Doctrine regulations that tried to enforce balance in broadcast coverage of “controversial matters of public interest” (Aufderheide, 1990; Krattenmaker & Powe, 1985). More recently, journalists covering issues such as climate change and purported links between vaccines and autism have wrestled with whether the journalistic norm of balance calls on them to represent policy positions that appear to be questioned by good science (Antilla, 2005; Butler & Pidgeon, 2009). Journalists often are accused of

not being impartial, slanting their coverage toward certain viewpoints or actors—a belief that has only increased with recent declines of public trust in the media (Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2016; Lee, 2010). Further, journalists conduct their day-to-day work in a professional environment in which other factors compete with the norm of balance in gatekeeping. Two examples of these factors are news values and pressures that lead to indexing, both of which have particular relevance to policy debate.

Gatekeeping and news values. News values are criteria that journalists use to determine newsworthiness, a determining factor in gatekeeping (Gans, 1979). Palmer (2000) describes news values as “a system of criteria which are used to make decisions about the inclusion and exclusion of material” (p. 45). They may vary somewhat between news organizations, but common ground exists: a mix of “newness,” impact, controversy, timeliness, relevance, utility, meaningfulness, and educational value (Bradley, 1989; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Lanson & Stephens, 2007).

Scholars point out that news values may dictate different gatekeeping choices than journalistic norms do. This is especially important with regard to balance. In a contentious policy debate, the norm of balance tells journalists to evenly represent policy positions in their coverage, but the news value of controversy may lead them to focus on the more shocking or contrarian arguments (Hopmann, Van Aelst, & Legnante, 2011). In a similar way, the news value of timeliness may lead journalists to emphasize “breaking” or recently introduced policy positions over perspectives that have been circulating for a while, and the news value of utility may prompt journalists to stress perspectives that they think would be most useful or helpful to news consumers.

Gatekeeping and pressures toward indexing. In addition to the conflict that news values may create against the journalistic norm of balance, journalists who cover policy issues may experience pressure (whether subtle or overt) to skew the representation of policy positions in their stories toward the views held by powerful actors such as political and business elites. Hopmann and colleagues (2011) note that this propensity has ties to news values: journalists may view the policy positions of elites as more relevant than those of citizens and other lower-ranking individuals, prompting the news media to “focus on politicians and parties that ‘matter’” and further destabilizing balance (p. 245).

Bennett (1990) has written extensively on the reasons behind the news media’s emphasis on elites and the consequences of that imbalance. His research has shown that journalists who write about government and policy topics tend to “index” their coverage to the views of political elites at least partially because of news routines in which high-ranking government figures and journalists talk to one another often, and because each group is invested in the other to accomplish their professional goals. Political elites rely on the news media for coverage that keeps them in the public eye in a positive light, and the news media rely on access to powerful officials for the inside information that allows them to remain competitive and produce the product that news consumers want (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007). Indexing can be considered at several levels of analysis. The news media may demonstrate indexing effects at the level of policy positions, as in Alexseev and Bennett’s (1995) study that showed that national security coverage in the United States, Britain, and Russia at the end of the Cold War followed the viewpoints of officials. Indexing also can take place at the more macro level of interpretive frames, as in Entman’s (2003) study that illustrated how the mass media adopted President Bush’s

“war on terror” frame after the attacks of September 11, 2001, and that the administration mounted an active campaign against two writers who sought to challenge that frame.

Entman’s study is one of many that shows that indexing does not happen across the board. Other studies find a lack of evidence of it at all. Page (1996) found that the news media favor the policy positions of elites only in some cases: news gatekeepers indexed their coverage to the policy positions of political elites in covering the 1991 Gulf War but represented a far broader range of policy positions and speakers in covering the riots that followed the 1992 police beating of Rodney King Jr. in Los Angeles. Hayes and Guardino (2010) ran a content analysis of the evening news stories about Iraq on ABC, CBS, and NBC in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war, yielding mixed results: the networks quoted U.S.-based sources whose positions mostly indexed to the views of the Bush administration, but the international sources they quoted were much less aligned with the American government. Callaghan and Schnell (2001) looked for indexing effects at the frame level in eight years of network news coverage of the Brady Bill and assault weapons ban, finding that the frames represented in the news media followed a different distribution than the frames favored by politicians and high-profile advocacy groups.

These results point to the fact that journalists as gatekeepers—and as moderators of policy debate—make decisions about representation that may fall along a spectrum between balanced, in line with journalistic norms, and skewed, perhaps reflecting news values or indexing to the views of elites. There is an opportunity to study the coverage of specific policy debates to evaluate how journalists handle the representation function. Variables of interest include the relative balance in pro-policy and anti-policy arguments included in news coverage, the relative presence of politicians and other elite voices

compared with other groups, and the relative alignment of interpretive frames in the news with the frames adopted by various participants in the debate.

Information Function

Definition of the information function. In the information function, moderators of policy debate ensure that participants have the information they need to understand policy issues and develop informed positions (Coleman & Götze, 2002; Fishkin, 2009). Information can include empirical data—such as statistics, results of studies and surveys, and facts—as well as personal testimony in the form of narratives or anecdotes (Burkhalter et al., 2002; Mansbridge, 1990; Sanders, 1997).

Importance of the information function. An informed citizenry is considered crucial to the health of a democratic society. Van Aelst and Walgrave (2016) write that “for a democracy to be well functioning, citizens need information about politics. Only when people have knowledge about the actors, the state of various societal affairs, and the rules of the political game can they hold informed opinions and act meaningfully as citizens” (p. 5). Patterson (2013) wryly notes that “informed citizens do not spring forth from birth” (p. 130). He maintains that information and knowledge are a common good, even if government officials may disagree about how much information citizens need to form policy positions and render judgments on controversial issues. Tying in the idea of motivation, Patterson observes that an informed citizenry must *want to be* an informed citizenry: facts and evidence, whether empirical or anecdotal, must be presented in a way that sparks in people a desire to use them. Here, the news media play a key role.

The news media and the information function. The public historically has derived the vast majority of its policy-relevant information from the news media (Snyder

& Strömberg, 2010). Journalists, through their expertise in information-gathering and the clout of the news organizations to which they belong, are uniquely positioned to seek and secure the “kind of information that people need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 12). Journalists also are motivated to get information quickly and distribute it to the public efficiently: being the first to “break the news” means that a news organization offers the information commodity that their consumers want (Deuze, 2005; Lewis & Cushion, 2009). As economic entities, news organizations have a business interest in acquiring and providing useful, high-quality information.

From the early days of media scholarship, empirical research has supported the idea of the news media as the public’s go-to source of political information. Studies in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s showed that newspapers were a major source of information on policy issues and political parties (Chaffee & Tims, 1982; Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; Patterson, 1983). Television came into its own as a source of political information in the 1990s (Chaffee & Frank, 1996; Zhao & Chaffee, 2005). While this research indicates that audiences acquire political information from the news media, it does not make clear what the news media actually do to produce an informed public. That gap is being addressed by more recent scholarship. In particular, Yanovitzky and Weber (2018) identify two ways in which journalists convey information to audiences: raising *awareness* of policy information and making it *accessible*.

With regard to awareness, the news media play a role in alerting audiences that policy-relevant information is there to be had (Yanovitzky & Weber, 2018). Journalists have direct access to sources of information, including policymakers, researchers, and experts, that citizens do not (Albæk, 2011; Sigal, 1986; Turk, 1985). Journalists enact

routines designed to uncover new information, such as checking in regularly with sources and monitoring the information environment related to the beats they cover (Becker, Lowrey, Claussen, & Anderson, 2000; Berkowitz, 2009; Dunn, 1969). They hone approaches to information discovery in journalism schools and on the job (Joseph, 2009). Reporters and editors also regularly receive information from public-relations professionals whose purpose is to transmit information to the public through the media (Cottle, 2003; Macnamara, 2014; Sallot & Johnson, 2006). These affordances, skills, and processes offer journalists an uncommon level of insight into the universe of available policy information.

Journalists in turn raise awareness of that information among their audiences by citing or referencing it in stories. The information they include is determined through the practice of gatekeeping, explained in the section of this chapter about representation. As gatekeepers, journalists assess the facts, statistics, study findings, reports, personal narratives, anecdotes, and other elements they gather in their reporting and decide which pass through to news audiences (Gesualdo, Weber, & Yanovitzky, 2019; Wihbey, 2017). In this regard, there is a degree of overlap in the journalistic practice that drives both the representation and information functions.

Once journalists make news consumers aware that information exists, they can help to make that information accessible (Yanovitzky & Weber, 2018). Accessibility can take two forms. Journalists can give their audiences direct access to information: for example, presenting data as a chart, graph, or interactive map (e.g., Ranoa, 2017; Williams & Emamdjomeh, 2018); including a hyperlink to a research report in the text of a news story (e.g., O'Connor & Sanger-Katz, 2018); or telling a compelling narrative or

anecdote (Dahlstrom, 2014). In addition to connecting audiences directly with raw material, journalists can act as translators or explainers of information, transforming it so that participants in policy debate can process and use it. This action is particularly important when information is difficult to understand, such as in a large government dataset or a field-specific research study. Thus, journalists as moderators of policy debate increasingly interpret information for the audience as opposed to just reporting on events and developments.

When journalists as moderators of policy debate fulfill the information function, evidence in news coverage may show that they reference policy-relevant information (empirical data, personal narratives, or both), attribute information to the sources from which they obtained it, and perform one or more of the knowledge-brokering functions that relate to the awareness and accessibility of information, such as contextualizing or explaining it so that it has greater informative utility to news consumers.

Legitimacy Function

Definition of the legitimacy function. In the rubric of essential functions of policy debate, legitimacy is perhaps the hardest to grasp. Legitimacy has been defined in varied ways, and it is difficult to quantify or measure. Nonetheless, scholars across disciplines have worked to capture it in understandable terms, drawing from political science (e.g., Stillman, 1974), management (Phillips, 2003; Suchman, 1995), sociology (Johnson, Dowd, & Ridgeway, 2006), and public relations (Merkelsen, 2011).

This dissertation builds its definition of legitimacy primarily from two theorists: Suchman (1995), whose work on legitimacy is grounded in social norms, and Koopmans (2004), who couches legitimacy in news media depictions of people and policy positions.

Suchman, who studied management and organizations, defined legitimacy as “a generalized perception that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (1995, p. 574). He emphasized legitimacy as a property brought into being through the collective judgment of a certain group of people, generated by alignment with their shared beliefs and values. In a policy context, citizens may view a government as legitimate if its aims and its conduct align with their beliefs; at a more micro level, they may view a particular policy as legitimate if it resonates with their norms and values. Legitimacy in Suchman’s view is not an absolute property, but rather a collective determination that can change over time—as a policy is altered to align more or less with established social norms, or, alternatively, as social norms shift. His conception of legitimacy is echoed by Deephouse (1996), who writes that “from the perspective of a particular social actor, a legitimate organization is one whose values and actions are congruent with that social actor’s values and expectations for action” (p. 1025).

Koopmans (2004) defines legitimacy in the context of three nested constructs that combine to determine how policy positions or actors are depicted in the news media. Legitimacy builds from two lower-order constructs. The first building block is visibility: simply, whether people or policy positions are represented in the debate through the news media practice of gatekeeping. Only when actors or arguments are visible do they have the opportunity to attain the second-level attribute, resonance. A resonant policy position is one that provokes reactions from other participants in the debate, and resonance can be positive or negative, based on whether others passionately agree or vehemently disagree. If resonance is achieved, the door to legitimacy is opened. Legitimacy, positioned at the

peak of Koopmans' hierarchy, represents "the degree to which, on average, reactions by third actors in the public sphere support or reject an actor or her claims" (p. 375). This view ties legitimacy to a concept of critical mass: a widely supported policy position gains legitimacy, and a widely rejected one is rendered illegitimate.

There is overlap between Suchman's and Koopmans' conceptions of legitimacy, in that they rely on the notion of a large-scale evaluation of the acceptability or social desirability of policy positions. Koopmans describes the development of legitimacy as an aggregation effect, in which the accretion of supporting or opposing reactions builds or erodes legitimacy. Suchman speaks about legitimacy as a pronouncement from the whole. Both, however, see it as a social construct that captures the favor or esteem derived from the reflection of a population's values or preferences.

Importance of the legitimacy function. The legitimacy function underscores the fact that representation in policy debate is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Just because policy proposals, positions, and actors are out there—as Koopmans would say, visible—does not mean that they are seen as legitimate. Andrews and Caren (2010) note that some participants in policy debate are given "standing," indicating that the person is an "important actor with voice" (p. 843), and the same can be true of policy positions. Gitlin (2003) points out that journalists may marginalize certain groups as they cover them. These considerations are important from a conceptual standpoint if the goal of debate is to engage participants and positions on equal ground (Coleman & Götze, 2002).

The news media and the legitimacy function. Koopmans' idea that legitimacy is determined by the degree to which a policy position is supported or rejected hinges on the involvement of the news media: through news coverage, people have a chance to provide

support or rejection. In Suchman's conception of legitimacy, the news media can help to portray policy proposals as aligned with social norms. Chermak (1997) endorses the idea of the news media as a site where legitimacy is gained and lost. He argues that the holders of policy positions in a debate need widespread support for their views to thrive, and that the news media provide a place for them to seek it. Policy actors, he writes, "are motivated to participate as news sources to transmit their beliefs and values, and also to legitimize themselves with the public" (p. 688). Legitimacy also can be seen as connected to news framing, in particular via the media advocacy model of framing, in which news sources seek to influence journalists in two ways: framing for access and for content. In framing issues for access, issue advocates seek attention from news gatekeepers, but in framing issues for content, issue advocates seek to nominate or highlight the desirable, preferred, and socially resonant policy solution (Dorfman & Krasnow, 2014).

Conceptually, the ability to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors makes sense in the context of journalistic values. The public service mission of journalism implies that the news media would want to help news consumers come to an understanding of whether and how policies reflect social values and preferences (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Journalists, therefore, may see value in using their role as moderators of public debate to illustrate the connections and disconnects between proposed policies and social values and preferences.

Despite this logical connection between legitimacy and the journalistic mission, and despite scholars' assessments that the news media play a part in legitimization, there is less clarity in the literature on *what takes place in the news media* to legitimize or delegitimize and exactly *what journalists do* to grant or deny that legitimacy. The next

section examines strategies that scholars have touched on in an effort to address aspects of the legitimacy function in the news media.

Legitimizing through structuring policy positions in stories. The representation function of policy debate determines which policy positions and actors find a place in the news media, but simply “being there” does not guarantee that policy positions or actors have the opportunity to legitimize or delegitimize. Research shows that journalists can determine the impact of policy positions in the news media by artfully arranging them in their stories. Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Baden (2016) emphasize not the acquisition and selection of raw material for the news, but rather the transformation that journalists visit upon this material when they position content, supplement it with further information, and arrange it all “to craft characteristic news narratives” (p. 482). The authors write that by “reinforcing, criticizing, or marginalizing specific positions advanced by sources, these journalistic transformations orient news audiences to what they should think and do about the reported information” (p. 487). Therefore, with regard to legitimacy, even if a news source’s statement indicates that policy proposal reflects social values, journalists still may place that statement in a story in a way that reinforces or nullifies its effect—for example, immediately following it with a supporting or refuting statement. The strategy of structuring policy positions in stories recalls the idea from Chapter 1 that legitimacy is derived from more than simply making it past news media “gates,” and that journalists help to determine how ideas, opinions, and people are regarded once they are there.

Legitimizing through the endorsement of elites. Certain policy actors may have more weight than others in portraying a policy proposal, position, or actor as in or out of sync with social values and preferences. Not all statements made in the news carry equal

weight; research shows that the statements of high-ranking officials or other known quantities are more likely to lend or deny legitimacy than those from a “man on the street.” Reich (2008) notes that “senior sources” such as top-tier government officials tend to “add a sense of legitimacy, credibility, and prestige to news items, along with the general outlook of a major stakeholder” (pp. 749-750). Yoon (2005) contends that elites are likely to have an advantageous position in the news media that enables them to legitimize or delegitimize, in that “journalists tend to assume that certain sources are entitled to know certain things by virtue of their social structural position and routinely rely on these authoritative sources” (p. 763). Expert sources may function in a similar way. Conrad (1999) found that in health and science policy debates, it matters *who* supports or questions policy positions mentioned in the news. He writes: “Given a choice between quoting a director of a prestigious institute or a bench scientist, most science writers would lean toward the director, assuming that this source adds legitimacy to the story, shows that the writer is well connected, and provides readers with a more recognizable name” (p. 292). Journalists, through their selection of elite actors as news sources, may consciously or unconsciously provide news consumers with a barometer of how powerful or expert figures perceive the reflection of social values and preferences in a policy proposal, position, or actor.

Legitimizing by using evidence. Existing literature supports the idea that legitimacy can be enhanced with supporting evidence or diminished with contradictory evidence. Yanovitzky and Weber (2019) write that “active and consistent presentation of evidence in support of a particular conclusion or policy solution across news media effectively legitimizes that particular solution over others.” Evidence can show that there

is a grounding for a certain policy position or solution, and it can offer a “proof point” for policy proposal or position’s alignment with social values and preferences.

Poll data offer a classic example. In the context of a policy debate, polls seek to measure the extent to which a policy solution is viewed by the public as desirable and valued. Fishkin (1995) writes that “opinion polls are mechanisms by whereby statistical samples of people can speak for the whole” (p. 3). Poll data may provide evidence of the collective judgment and normative alignment that are central to Suchman’s idea of legitimacy. The news media clearly recognize the value of polls in building the narrative of policy debates, as this form of evidence has become common in political journalism since the 1960s and 1970s (Brettschneider, 2008; Ladd, 1980).

Legitimizing (and delegitimizing) by fact-checking. Some literature points to links between legitimacy and the journalistic practice of fact-checking: putting public statements through intensive, focused scrutiny to rate their truthfulness. Fact-checking has risen in prominence within the last decade (Amazeen, 2013; Graves, 2016) and offers the potential to influence perceived legitimacy via an important intermediary construct: credibility, the believability or veracity of information and/or its source (Heink et al., 2015). Through fact-checking, journalists can show whether a policy actor or policy statement is credible. Credible people and policy positions are, in turn, more likely to be viewed as legitimate, given that legitimacy is generated by alignment with shared beliefs and values (Suchman, 1995). Heink and colleagues write that citizens “have good reasons to disregard decisions which are based on false premises,” describing a “close connection between legitimacy and credibility” (p. 682). When journalists use fact-checking to show the public that policy positions lack credibility, it is likely to undermine that proposal’s

legitimacy. For example, if a mayor proposes a beverage tax based on the argument that the revenue is needed to sponsor 1,000 children to attend pre-K, and the news media fact-check that claim to show that there are only 200 children in need, the legitimacy of the mayor's policy proposal may be diminished.

Graves, Nyhan, and Reifler (2016) place fact-checking in the broader context of the public service mission of journalism. Present-day journalists consider it part of their responsibility and routine to uncover instances in which policy actors' claims fail to align with verifiable facts (Shapiro, Brin, Bédard-Brûlé, & Mychajlowycz, 2013). Policy actors who issue non-credible statements are engaged in a practice that is out of sync with social values and preferences, which prize truthfulness; if journalists uncover this practice by fact-checking, they may withhold legitimacy from that actor and his or her positions.

Legitimizing through editorializing. Through editorials and columns, journalists can place the power of their news organizations behind—or in opposition to—a policy proposal, position, or actor. Editorial content allows journalists to express their views on a policy proposal's alignment with social values and preferences, which can represent an effective avenue to legitimacy if news consumers trust those news outlets or journalists and hold them in high esteem (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Powlick (1995) writes that public officials often view journalists as “an informed and articulate segment of public opinion” (p. 434) and take their editorial assessment into account; news audiences may share this view. This is an area in which news organizations' reputation is crucial, but even more so, their unanimity: there is power when the press speak in a single voice (Hallock, 2007; Ryan, 2004).

Several studies have examined news coverage to show how the pronouncements of news organizations and journalists have affected perceptions of legitimacy in policy contexts. Lule (2002) examined *New York Times* editorials in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001, finding that these opinion pieces helped to build storytelling myths (in the actual mythological sense, not the sense of falsehood) around what had happened to New York City that helped readers to interpret U.S. government action. These editorial mythologies “can be seen as ideological, limiting and channeling interpretations of events, defending social order, and legitimating the response of authorities” (p. 287). Similarly, Ryan (2004) noted remarkable consistency in the editorial stances of the 10 largest U.S. newspapers in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, with no editorial suggesting the inappropriateness of military intervention to pursue the culprits and none casting doubt on the ultimate success of the U.S. military effort. The government’s efforts consistently were depicted as reflecting social values and preferences, and the editorials helped to establish the legitimacy of the government’s so-called “war on terror.” Ryan writes: “The potential for casualties makes the framing of the military strikes critical. If the US is not at ‘war,’ and if the world does not accept this narrative, then the killing of innocents might be seen as ‘murder,’ or as ‘terrorist acts.’ No writer questioned this narrative. Indeed, 17 writers—and [President] Bush—tried to add legitimacy to the ‘war’ frame by asserting this is a ‘new kind of war’” (p. 375). Phelan (2007) studied editorials written by six newspapers in Ireland about policy efforts at the end of the last millennium to privatize the Irish telecommunications industry, finding that although the policy discourse used in each paper exhibited some differences, these elite media institutions generally assisted in “legitimizing, mediating and projecting the authority of the

dominant political economy” (p. 24). The editorials’ endorsement of privatization sent a message to readers that this was the preferred course of action. For readers who place trust in news organizations and journalists, editorial content can add legitimacy when it endorses certain policy proposals or portrays them as socially valuable.

Gaps in our understanding of legitimacy. The literature outlined in this section points to five strategies that are used in the news media to lend or deny legitimacy to policy solutions, positions, or actors. However, there is a need for a more comprehensive examination of this function. One area of interest is the prevalence of these legitimizing strategies and whether there are others that have not been mentioned in the literature. Another area of interest is who utilizes legitimizing strategies like those described in this section: the degree to which journalists execute these strategies themselves versus the degree to which journalists are vulnerable to strategic manipulations by political actors who have access to the news media. Yet another area of interest is whether legitimizing strategies are used in different ways, or in varying proportion, depending on conditions of the policy debate such as place, time, or intensity. The intent of this dissertation is to take an exploratory step toward addressing these gaps, as explained in detail in Chapter 3.

Engagement Function

Definition of the engagement function. Political engagement, in its broadest possible definition, reflects activity intended to influence government action (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). Some researchers use the term “political engagement” interchangeably with “political participation,” in that both describe concrete actions that people can take toward political ends. (This dissertation relies on “engagement” terminology.) Scholars place engagement

activity on a spectrum from active—contacting government officials, writing letters to the editor, contributing money, attending protests, or working for an advocacy organization (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010)—to passive, such as paying attention to a political issue, following the news on a topic, or gathering information from websites or online search (Conway, 1991; Krueger, 2002). In policy debate, the engagement *function* refers to the creation of conditions such that people enact one or more of these behaviors.

This dissertation focuses on two components of the engagement function. First, policy debate can engage people with a policy issue by helping them to understand how it is relevant to them and why they should care, often referred to as “involvement” (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Frymier & Shulman, 1995). Second, policy debate can engage people by mobilizing them to get involved with an issue at any point on the spectrum that feels appropriate to them, from active to passive.

Importance of the engagement function. Political engagement is considered a key element of a well-functioning democracy (Barber, 1984; Carcasson & Sprain, 2010; Guttman, 2007). When people are engaged, they are better able to judge the performance of their representatives, participate in policy debate, and initiate political action (Galston, 2001). Wolfe (2004) sees political engagement as a prerequisite for cooperative, mutually beneficial policy action, and Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs (2004) say policy debate fosters political engagement because it gives people a chance “to develop and express their views, learn the positions of others, identify shared concerns and preferences, and come to understand and reach judgments about matters of public concern” (p. 319).

The news media and the engagement function. As moderators of policy debate, the news media have the potential to influence both sides of the engagement equation, illustrating a policy issue's relevance and mobilizing people to act.

Cultivating political involvement through relevance. In politics, as in other areas of life, people are often self-interested (Bauch, Galvani, & Earn, 2003; Kangas, 1997; Miller, 2001). If citizens understand the potential impact of a policy issue on themselves or their communities, they are likely to take notice; if they do not feel that an issue or policy proposal directly affects them, they may remain disengaged (Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995; Weeden & Kurzban, 2017). One way in which journalists as moderators of policy debate can communicate the relevance of issues to news consumers is through “problem frames” (Altheide, 1997). Problem frames portray policy matters as pressing, relevant issues that warrant an immediate solution. Altheide describes problem frames as “an organizational solution to a practical problem: How can we make real problems seem interesting?” (p. 653). Another way in which journalists can telegraph the relevance of policy issues is by illustrating to readers where a controversy touches their lives. For example, research by Weingart, Engels, and Pansegrau (2000) showed that German news media engaged audiences with the policy debate around climate change by publishing and airing stories that documented the amount of energy consumed in widely relatable activities such as transportation, home heating, and travel. Journalists made the audience “aware of the relevance to climate change of its own behavior, as well as of the immediacy of climate change as a global environmental problem” (p. 278). Journalists as moderators have the opportunity to communicate policy relevance at the individual, community, and global levels, depending on the issue at hand.

Providing mobilization through paths to action. Once people understand that a policy issue is relevant to them, they may be more likely to act. Journalists as moderators of policy debate can use direct and indirect techniques to mobilize news consumers to act on an issue. They may use the text of opinion pieces to directly encourage people to act (Golan, 2010; S. Y. Lee & Carroll, 2011) or quote sources who urge action. They also can take a more passive or objective approach by incorporating information on opportunities to act, publishing notices of policy hearings and public meetings (Besley & Roberts, 2010) or the dates and times of planned demonstrations (Ketelaars, 2017).

It is possible to empirically analyze the coverage of policy debate to determine whether and how journalists as moderators illustrate relevance or mobilize audiences, indicating evidence of the engagement function. For example, journalists may employ problem frames or incorporate policy positions that capture a policy's relevance to news audiences. They may provide information about opportunities for people interested in an issue to get involved, or they may quote sources who suggest involvement. Advocacy-oriented journalists might even express their own encouragement to act. Together, these options demonstrate that the ways in which journalists can foster engagement among audiences, the presence of which can be empirically evaluated in news content.

The Four Functions: A Summary

The functions of policy debate described in this section are essential to a robust policy debate, and journalists have a hand in the scope, nature, and dynamics of all four in their role as moderators of policy debate. As described in this chapter, discrepancies may exist between the normative ideal of how these functions should be executed and the way in which the functions play out in actual debates, given the realities of practicing

journalism. To provide a benchmark as this dissertation moves into the analysis of a real-world debate, this chart summarizes the normative conception of the four functions with regard to the news media and the outcome of these actions in the most ideal sense.

Function	What the news media do (normative)	Optimal outcome
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of information among news consumers • Increase accessibility of information by news consumers 	News consumers have the information needed to weigh policy solutions and establish/defend a point of view
Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include supporting, opposing, and alternative policy positions • Include policy positions from a wide variety of stakeholder groups • Provide a balanced representation of all available policy positions 	News consumers consider and “weigh” a wide range of policy positions from diverse stakeholders as they seek to form their own policy positions
Legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicate the alignment of policy proposals, positions, and actors with social values and preferences 	News consumers can evaluate policy proposals, positions, and actors against social norms and values, leading to the elevation of certain policy proposals over others
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrate relevance of a policy problem and its potential solutions to news consumers’ lives • Use direct or indirect means to mobilize news consumers around a policy issue 	News consumers understand how they are affected by a policy problem and its proposed solutions, and they can identify potential paths to action

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The intent of this dissertation is to increase our understanding of how policy proposals, positions, and actors are legitimized or delegitimized in news media coverage and what role journalists play in that process as moderators of policy debate. This chapter outlines the case study approach that is used to examine the legitimacy function in news coverage. To provide a more complete picture of the news media's moderator role, this study also examines their execution of the representation, information, and engagement functions in the case study context.

Research Design

There is a tradition of using case studies to shed light on journalistic practice (Atton & Wickenden, 2005; Dupagne & Garrison, 2006; Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014; Lewis & Usher, 2014; White, 1950). Case studies also have been used specifically to evaluate the news media's role as moderators of policy debate: Bennett et al. (2004) assessed *The New York Times'* coverage of World Economic Forum meetings between 2001 and 2003, finding that the newspaper moderated the debate sparked by those meetings in a way that restricted, rather than freely enabled, political dialogue.

This dissertation's research design builds on the general approach of Bennett and colleagues in that it, too, uses a slate of essential functions as a benchmark to evaluate an actual policy debate moderated by journalists. A key difference is that this dissertation integrates an additional methodology: a semi-structured search for strategies used in news content to legitimize and delegitimize. This is meant to provide insight into this less fully explicated function of the news media as moderators of policy debate.

The next section describes the case study in which evidence of the representation, information, legitimacy, and engagement functions will be examined in news coverage: the debate over proposals to tax sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The Policy Debate Over SSB Taxation

SSB regulations often are referred to by the umbrella term “soda taxes.” Not all proposed regulations represent a tax, and not all of the beverages affected are carbonated sodas, but this term has become emblematic of what Gostin (2017) calls the “soda wars—the politically divisive conflict between soda as a joy of life or as a uniquely harmful food” (p. 19). Berkeley, California, was the first municipality in the United States to enact a penny-per-ounce tax on SSBs in 2014. Six other jurisdictions followed in 2016, Philadelphia among them, leading some to call this the “year of the soda tax” (Gostin, 2017). The soda-tax victories of 2016 came on the heels of a decade in which similar policymaking efforts had been resoundingly unsuccessful. For example, former New York governor David Patterson attached a 12-cent-per-can soda tax to two annual budget proposals, but the idea was spurned twice by the soda industry, anti-tax advocates, and the state legislature (Wahba, 2010). The state of Maine briefly passed a small tax on alcohol and soda, but it was quashed in a referendum two years later thanks to negative sentiment fomented by industry opposition (Peters, 2010). President Obama opted not to pursue federal SSB regulations in his first term despite the prominence of health issues on his agenda (Paarlberg, Mozaffarian, & Micha, 2017). In 2012, a New York City attempt to regulate consumption via an upper limit on the size of containers in which SSBs could

be sold was scuttled due to a successful court challenge from the beverage industry (Fairchild, 2013).

SSB taxation is often put forward in the context of improving public health (Brownell et al., 2009). The obesity problem in the United States is well documented, affecting 93.3 million U.S. adults, nearly 40% of the population, in 2015-2016 (Hales, Carroll, Fryar, & Ogden, 2017). SSBs are considered a major contributor. Sugared sodas and iced teas, flavored coffees, sports and energy drinks, and other beverages can yield 200 or more calories per 20-ounce bottle, and Americans consume twice as many calories from these drinks as they did 30 years ago (Long et al., 2015). A systematic review of the medical literature revealed that SSB drinkers typically do not balance their drink choices by reducing caloric intake from other sources (Vartanian, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2007). In general, health advocates long have criticized SSBs for delivering a potent caloric punch with little or no nutritional value. Policymakers in the 2010s, faced with declining public health and increasing healthcare costs, began to take notice.

Whether policymakers have presented SSB taxes as a health-related initiative, however, has varied by municipality. Some early proposals to regulate SSBs, such as New York City's proposed container cap, were pitched entirely to change people's behavior and improve health, leading to criticism that decried intervention from the "nanny state" (Williams, 2018). The California cities of Berkeley and Richmond took a middle-ground approach, proposing SSB taxes as a revenue generator for city programs but tagging those revenues specifically for health enhancement, including programs to encourage physical activity, reduce obesity, and decrease children's consumption of SSBs (Nixon, Mejia, Cheyne, & Dorfman, 2015; Romney, 2014). Policymakers in other

municipalities acknowledged health benefits as corollaries of SSB taxes but pitched them primarily as sources of revenue for unrelated programs—in the cases of Philadelphia and Santa Fe, for pre-kindergarten education (Paarlberg et al., 2017; Romero, 2017). In all of these locations, regulations on SSBs were fiercely opposed by policy actors who said they arbitrarily focused on one class of product while ignoring other obesity-causing foods, represented an attack on personal liberty, and would cause economic harm (Niederdeppe, Gollust, Jarlenski, Nathanson, & Barry, 2013). Indeed, views of this nature were present in Philadelphia and Santa Fe, the history of whose attempts at SSB taxation is summarized below.

Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, it took three tries to pass a soda tax. Former mayor Jim Nutter sought twice to pass one, proposing the measure as both a health initiative and a way to fix a budget shortfall, but each attempt failed (Jablow, 2016). His successor, Jim Kenney, proposed a soda tax in February 2016 that was passed by the city council the following June, albeit with amendments: council members negotiated the tax down to 1.5 cents per ounce, rather than 3, and at the eleventh hour decided to expand the umbrella of taxation to include artificially sweetened beverages in addition to SSBs. Nonetheless, its passage made waves. Cohen (2016) writes that Kenney “rewrote the soda-tax advocate’s playbook” by playing down the public-health benefits of the tax and instead advocating its revenue-generation potential, tagging a projected \$91 million in first-year funds to shore up pre-kindergarten programming. Soda tax proponents and opponents around the United States—and even in other countries—looked to Philadelphia as a model for policy learning. Purtle, Langellier, and Lê-Scherban (2018) note that the city’s approach “shifted the policy debate away from contentious arguments about government involvement in

individual behavior,” resulting in the “SSB tax proposal being perceived as an evidence-based education policy that would increase levels of educational attainment and improve the social and economic trajectories of low-income Philadelphia youth” (p. 5).

Santa Fe. The mayor of Santa Fe, Javier Gonzales, proposed a 2-cents-per-ounce soda tax in 2017 as a means of financing 1,000 pre-kindergarten seats in city schools for free or at a significant discount. Gonzales called the measure a necessary step to aid Santa Fe children who “start their lives behind the curve” (Last, 2017b, p. 2), but not everyone was on board. Some citizens saw the measure as creating an unfair burden on households, risking jobs at a locally owned Coca-Cola bottling plant that had operated in Santa Fe for nearly 90 years, and threatening to drive shoppers to Albuquerque. The debate attracted national attention and funding from advocates on both sides of the soda-tax issue: former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg invested \$1.48 million in the pro-tax effort, and the American Beverage Association put forward \$1.9 million in cash and \$186,000 in in-kind services to oppose the measure (Last, 2017a). All told, the fight over the SSB tax in Santa Fe cost an estimated \$4 million and served as a proxy war between tax advocates and industry (Dewey, 2017). The fate of the proposal was decided in a referendum that attracted participation from 37.6% of voters, more than in the hotly contested mayoral election three years earlier. The measure was rejected, with 58% opposed. Lower- and middle-income voters came out strongly against the tax, while the vote was more evenly split in affluent neighborhoods (Last, 2017a).

Case Study Rationale

The SSB taxation issue in Philadelphia and Santa Fe provides an opportunity for an empirical study of how the news media function as moderators of policy debate, and in

particular how they may build or diminish legitimacy. The issue garnered wide coverage in the local and national news media, and it fits within the broader context of regulations that proponents view as enhancing the public good and opponents view as a detriment to the free-market economy or personal choice. What is learned about the news media's role in moderation of this debate could provide insight into the media's role in the debate over taxes on alcohol, cigarettes, and newly legalized forms of marijuana (Feldman & Bayer, 2004; Gostin & Wiley, 2016; Hansen, Miller, & Weber, 2017; Wilson & Thomson, 2005) or regulations on guns (Baker, Teret, & Dietz, 1980; Wolpert & Gimpel, 1998).

There are some interesting similarities and differences between Philadelphia and Santa Fe that should be noted in relation to their selection for this study. Philadelphia is important in the trajectory of SSB taxes in the United States because it was only the second U.S. city to approve and implement one (Purtle et al., 2018). Philadelphia offers a more representative test case than Berkeley, which preceded it in passing an SSB tax, as Berkeley's unusually progressive nature is unlikely to reflect how Americans respond to these measures (Gagliardi, 2014). Santa Fe was selected as a contrast to Philadelphia because it was one of the first cities to reject an SSB tax after the string of six successes nationwide in 2016. Philadelphia's and Santa Fe's proposed measures have some useful common ground: they held approximately the same force in terms of cents per ounce, and they both were designated to fund pre-kindergarten programs. Philadelphia and Santa Fe each support a vibrant news environment that includes two daily papers, a newsmagazine or alternative newsweekly, and several local television stations, allowing an examination of the news media's role and function in policy debate. Two differences between the cities are their size, with Philadelphia encompassing 1.56 million residents to Santa Fe's

84,000, and their methods of deciding on the SSB tax proposals: a city council vote in Philadelphia versus a public referendum in Santa Fe. Some implications of these differences will be addressed in the results and discussion.

Data Sources

This study is designed to analyze the role played by the news media in moderating the policy debate over proposed SSB taxes in Philadelphia and Santa Fe, with a particular focus on how policy proposals, positions, and actors were legitimized or delegitimized in news coverage. Therefore, a dataset was assembled of news coverage from each city, focusing on newspapers, magazines, and television broadcasts.

The dataset includes news coverage from local and national sources, because the debate over SSB taxation in Philadelphia and Santa Fe held interest at both levels. Local communities were invested in the debate because of the impact the taxes stood to have on municipal finances, community programming and health, the profitability of the beverage industry and small businesses, and household bottom lines. National interest developed as Philadelphia and Santa Fe became proxy battlegrounds for how SSB taxes might fare in other cities and states (Dewey, 2017; Sweet, 2017). Research shows that local and regional news organizations play a substantive role in shaping local political discourse and comprehensively cover local events, often more so than national news outlets (Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005; Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002; Moy, McCluskey, McCoy, & Spratt, 2006; Oliver & Meyer, 1999). In addition, Oliver and Meyer (1999) note that phenomena that come to be perceived as national news or as part of a national movement often begin as local stories. The use of local and national media

sources allows for a comparison of how the news media at each level moderated the policy debate in general and how they performed the legitimacy function in particular.

Local news media sources in each city included two daily newspapers, one city newsmagazine or alternative newsweekly, and two broadcast stations whose websites offered a search engine for past stories. The Philadelphia-based news organizations were *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Philadelphia Daily News* (both of whose stories are archived indistinguishably together on the website Philly.com), *Philadelphia Magazine*, CBS affiliate WKYW 3, and ABC affiliate WPVI 6. The news organizations for Santa Fe were the *Santa Fe New Mexican*; the nearby *Albuquerque Journal*, which serves as a newspaper for the region; an alternative newsweekly called the *Santa Fe Reporter*; ABC affiliate KOAT 7; and CBS affiliate KRQE 13. National news sources included *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and the evening broadcasts of ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC.

Two time periods were defined for data collection. The first (hereafter “Time 1”) represents the period in which each taxation proposal was debated, beginning on the date the measure was announced and ending on the date its fate was decided. The second (hereafter “Time 2”) represents the period in which the outcome of the policy process was discussed, beginning the day after each measure was decided and extending for six months afterward. This second phase is intended to capture debate about implementation in Philadelphia and debate about why the proposal failed to garner support in Santa Fe.

For Philadelphia, Time 1 runs from February 29, 2016, to July 16, 2016, and Time 2 spans July 17, 2016, to January 16, 2017. (Here, Time 2 includes the date of the tax’s implementation: January 1, 2017.) For Santa Fe, Time 1 runs from November 10,

2016, to June 2, 2017, and Time 2 spans June 3, 2017, to December 3, 2017. Because national news coverage may have addressed either or both cities, national news items were collected from both time periods, from February 29, 2016, to December 3, 2017.

Sampling Strategy

To capture a complete census of items in the selected news organizations about SSB taxation in Philadelphia and Santa Fe, a search was conducted for each news outlet consisting of the phrase “soda tax” (without quotes) and the name of the city. The choice of this query was motivated by the fact that some news stories used the word “soda” but not the term “sugar-sweetened beverages,” whereas no news stories in a sample search included the term “sugar-sweetened beverages” without the example term “soda.” The broad query presented 2,352 documents, each of which was manually reviewed by the author to determine whether it contained at least one opinion or fact related to SSB taxation. All news items that met this criterion were retained. Examples of non-relevant news items included stories that discussed the concepts of soda and taxes independently of each other—for instance, a set of business news briefs that included a paragraph on Pepsi’s second-quarter forecast and a separate paragraph on changes to corporate tax rates. Though time-consuming, this approach ensured that important documents were not missed by using overly narrow search criteria. The resulting pool of stories ($N = 528$) represented content from 15 news organizations, as no returned items from ABC’s *World News Tonight* met the standard for relevance.

Table 1 summarizes the number of documents returned for each data source and the number determined to be relevant after manual screening.

Content Analysis Procedure

Coding Instrument

Content analysis methodology begins with the selection, retrieval, and appraisal of relevant documents (Krippendorff, 1980), as described earlier in this section. The first version of the coding instrument was developed based on input from three sources: the four functions of policy debate outlined in Chapter 2, an initial read of the news stories in the dataset, and a literature search for existing content-analysis instruments relevant to the topic or goals of this research. Two existing coding instruments were of particular utility: one written by Niederdeppe et al. (2013) to track arguments presented in the news media for and against soda taxes, and another created by Yanovitzky and Weber (2019) to analyze news content about childhood obesity. Some classifications in the coding instrument also were informed by Barry, Brescoll, Brownell, and Schlesinger's (2009) analysis of individuals' use of metaphors and analogies to understand policy issues.

Once drafted, the coding instrument was applied to a randomly selected sample of 25 news items in the dataset to identify additional useful variables and to improve items' format and wording. The coding instrument can be found in the appendix, and the iterative process used in its creation is explained later in this section.

Although the focus of this study is the legitimacy function, the coding instrument was designed to gather data related to the news media's performance of all four essential functions of policy debate. The intent behind this decision was to generate a thorough picture of news media activity in moderating policy debate, enable an open-ended search for evidence of the legitimacy function, and provide a mechanism for benchmarking the findings of the study with available literature on the news media's moderator role.

Descriptive information. The coding instrument provided for the collection of descriptive information for each news item: the news organization; type of document (newspaper article, column, op-ed, or editorial; magazine story or opinion piece; and broadcast story or opinion piece); and publication or air date.

Content coding. The fundamental units of analysis for this study varied based on each function of policy debate.

For the representation function, which centers on which viewpoints are introduced into the policy debate and by whom, the unit of analysis was a policy position. A policy position, a key building block of debate, is defined an opinion or stance expressed in the news media about the SSB taxation issue: either a full argument (an opinion combined with a rationale, such as “The city council should reject the soda tax because it will jeopardize the profits of local corner stores”) or an opinion without justification (e.g., “I am firmly against a soda tax in Philadelphia.”) Policy positions were coded for additional properties such as their valence (pro-tax or anti-tax), function (e.g., suggesting the cause of a policy problem, suggesting who is responsible for handling the policy problem, or suggesting that SSB taxes are or are not the preferred policy solution), frame (e.g., a position related to educational benefits, public health, or individual freedom of choice), and the category of actor who expressed them (politician, government official, researcher, advocate, small business person, industry representative, journalist, citizen, or other).

For the information function, the units of analysis included two types of policy positions as well as all mentions of evidence. Policy positions relevant to the information function included those that captured the objective status of a policy problem (i.e., aspects of the current state of affairs) and the cause of the problem (i.e., exactly what

needs to be addressed through some form of policy solution). Evidence was coded with regard to the information function because one of the functions that evidence can serve is to inform. As described in Chapter 2, journalists can provide policy-relevant facts, statistics, studies, reports, narratives, anecdotes, and testimony to educate news audiences about a policy issue. Recall that evidence also can be used to legitimize, but only when it is used to demonstrate a connection with the core construct of legitimacy: alignment with social values and preferences. With regard to the information function, content coding for evidence took a wider view, capturing all empirical and narrative evidence that potentially could serve as a source of information for news consumers.

For the legitimacy function, the unit of analysis was intentionally open-ended. The coding instrument asked coders to identify passages in the news media in which policy positions were supported or questioned. These purposefully broad codes were informed by the understanding of legitimacy as a construct that captures the degree to which a policy proposal, position, or actor reflects social values or preferences, and is therefore supported, or the degree to which it conflicts with social values or preferences, and is therefore questioned (Koopmans, 2004; Suchman, 1995). Content tagged with the “supporting” and “questioning” codes provided the basis for a thematic analysis of the legitimacy function, as explained in greater detail later in this chapter.

The engagement function relied on two units of analysis. One unit of analysis was a passage in the news media that showed how proposed SSB taxes would affect people’s lives, classified as “relevance.” The other unit of analysis was a passage in the news media related to taking action on the SSB taxation issue, classified as “mobilization.”

Both relevance and mobilization are elements of the engagement function that are explicated in the literature on how the news media engage audiences on policy topics.

Multiple units of analysis restrict the opportunity to compare the news media's relative performance of the four functions: it is not possible to draw conclusions about whether they were more likely to inform or to engage, for example. That said, function-to-function comparisons are not central to the research questions, and multiple units of analysis were needed to capture all news content related to the functions of policy debate. It was impossible to choose a policy position as the single unit of analysis, for example, because certain pieces of information are valuable to our understanding of the policy debate but do not contain an expressed opinion, e.g., "Data compiled for *The Wall Street Journal* show Philadelphia's beverage tax had a significant impact on shopping patterns after it was introduced in January." Similarly, some content related to engagement function would be missed if only policy positions were tracked. For example, the statement "This vote will be close and every vote will matter ... Everyone who cares about the future of Santa Fe and pre-K should come out and vote" is not a policy position (it does not contain an opinion about SSB taxes) and it is not an evidence mention (there is neither empirical nor anecdotal information) but it does engage news audiences by encouraging them to act. Thus, while multiple units of analysis are unwieldy, they were used to ensure a full picture of the functions of policy debate in news coverage. For clarity, the alignment of codes with the four functions is captured in Table 2.

Coding Procedure

The coding of each document was performed manually by a team of three trained coders using Dedoose (2017). All coders, including the author, were doctoral students in

communication with an interest in the area of journalism studies. Their familiarity with relevant literature may have influenced their interpretation of the content in the dataset and their use of the coding instrument, as noted in work across various fields that has relied on coders with expertise (e.g., Nadeau, Gidengil, Nevitte, & Blais, 1998; Reichert & Lambiase, 2003).

All coders were trained on the use of Dedoose and on the coding instrument, including group coding exercises and detailed examples of the correct applications of codes. To ensure the accurate and reliable application of the coding instrument, coders first were asked to code three stories. Manual comparison of the results identified areas of discrepancy, which were discussed by the team. Some elements of the coding instrument appeared clear to the coders, such as what constituted a policy position, the frames invoked by policy positions, and the category of policy actor to which speakers belonged. Other elements of the coding instrument were less clear, such as how to apply the “supporting” and “questioning” codes and whether codes for relevance and mobilization could be applied independently of codes for policy positions and evidence mentions. With regard to the latter issue, coders had the chance to discuss the nature of overlapping codes. For example, an American Beverage Association spokeswoman’s statement to NBC Nightly News stating that the SSB tax is “a regressive tax because the people that can least afford to pay it will be the ones that are paying a higher proportion of it ... It’s a tax on grocery products that are in everyone’s grocery cart” includes a policy position (an anti-tax opinion) and illustrates relevance (the impact of the tax on individuals’ grocery bills). Similarly, “The pro-tax side says that in addition to the health benefits of reducing sugar intake, the tax would create 200 jobs in early childhood education and expand pre-

K programs to allow about 1,000 3- and 4-year-olds the opportunity to get a jump on their early development” includes a pro-tax policy position and an evidence mention. Given the nature of political argument, it is logical that policy positions may also include information or illustrate relevance (especially in policy positions that offer a rationale).

From the earliest stages of training, coders had the chance to ask questions and to suggest improvements to the coding instrument. In particular, the author added specific examples to certain sections of the coding instrument so that coders could refer back to these archetypes if they needed a real-world reference. For the second round of training, all three coders coded 10 more stories in common, repeating the process of manual comparison and discussion. Areas of potential confusion in the second round included whether coders were required to find and apply codes to every element in a news item (they were not) and how to recognize examples of personal narratives or testimony, a key element of the “anecdotal evidence” category (to resolve this issue, specific clarifying examples were provided from the 10 most recently coded stories).

Agreement among the three coders was manually calculated to be 70%, based on a sample of 200 codes applied to policy positions. This is below the minimum of 80% that Kassirjian (1977) and others have identified as acceptable for content analysis. A detailed examination of the coding indicates two causes of the low level of agreement. The first is that one member of the coding team tended not to code evidence mentions that were present in news content. The second is that the coders still appeared to struggle with decision-making on how to use the “support” and “questioning” codes. The coding instrument should be refined in the future to resolve these issues and to help coders to make these decisions in a reliable way. Part of the trouble is likely due to the fact that this

study sought to take an open-ended approach to identifying legitimizing content in the news media; as a result, the codes used were relatively amorphous. Future versions of the coding instrument can incorporate the legitimizing strategies identified in the results of the study, providing specific criteria for coding passages in which policy proposals, positions, or actors appear to be legitimized or delegitimized. It should be noted that the absence of these strategies in the coding instrument owes to the fact that they emerged from the subsequent qualitative analysis of the data, rather than being prescribed at the outset of the coding process.

Data Analysis Strategy

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. The first stage of analysis addressed the representation, information, and engagement functions: those about which existing scholarship tells us a great deal about the role and function of the news media. The second stage of analysis addressed the legitimacy function, about which far less is known and which therefore benefits from a more semi-structured approach. These two stages and the differences between them are outlined below.

Analyses related to representation, information, and engagement. Coded policy positions were analyzed to determine the relative frequency of properties in the news media related to representation, information, and engagement. For these functions, chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the content of news reports versus opinion pieces, given that news reports mostly reflect input from news sources while editorials and columns capture the opinions of journalists. Chi-square analyses also were conducted to compare news content from the Philadelphia local media, the Santa Fe local

media, and the national news media to identify similarities and differences in the ways in which these geographic clusters of news organizations moderated the policy debate.

Analyses related to legitimacy. Analyses related to the legitimacy function utilized the pool of news passages to which “supporting” or “questioning” codes were applied. These 875 items provided the basis for additional thematic analyses to tease out techniques that were used in the news media to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors. The procedure for this analysis is described below.

First, these 875 news passages were combed for evidence of the five legitimizing strategies referenced in the literature review: using evidence, structuring policy positions within stories, endorsement from elites, fact-checking, and editorializing. They also were read and analyzed for evidence of potential legitimizing and delegitimizing strategies that were not captured in the literature review. News content that appeared to illustrate an unidentified legitimizing strategy was marked and later re-examined to identify common properties. This thematic evaluation yielded two additional strategies of interest: fostering or resolving a sense of ambiguity around a policy proposal, position, or actor, and allowing certain policy actors to speak on behalf of others, merging their policy positions “by association.” Thus, a total of seven potential legitimizing strategies was identified as present in the news content.

In the final step, the 875 news passages in the qualitative analysis pool were re-evaluated to identify the frequency of the appearance of these seven strategies, and chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the prevalence of these strategies across several dimensions: in news reports versus opinion pieces, in Philadelphia versus Santa

Fe, and in the time period leading up to the determination of a policy measure's fate versus the time period after a decision is made.

The results of all analyses are provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The primary goal of this research is to understand how legitimacy is won and lost in policy debates moderated by the news media, and specifically what role journalists play in legitimizing or delegitimizing policy proposals, positions, or actors. This chapter reports the results of analyses related to these research questions, but first, it provides the results of analyses related to the other three functions of high-quality policy debate: representation, information, and engagement. These three functions are analyzed to offer a more comprehensive picture of the policy debate moderated by the news media in this case study, providing context for the results of the legitimacy-related analyses that come later in this chapter. Representation, information, and engagement are addressed through frequency analyses and illustrative examples, as well as by chi-square analyses conducted to identify differences in how the news media executed these functions by geography (Philadelphia local news, Santa Fe local news, and national news) and by document type (news reports versus opinion pieces).

With this context in place, this chapter moves on to the results of analyses related to the legitimacy function. The focus is on a thematic analysis conducted on a pool of 875 statements that were coded as “supporting” or “questioning” policy positions, informed by the theoretical approach of Koopmans (2004). Seven legitimizing and delegitimizing strategies are identified—five mentioned in the literature review and two identified in the thematic analysis—and examples are provided for each. Finally, this chapter provides the results of chi-square analyses conducted to identify statistically significant differences in the prevalence of the seven strategies by geography (Philadelphia local news, Santa Fe

local news, and national news), document type (news reports versus opinion pieces), and time (the period before and after each city determined the fate of its proposed SSB tax).

Dataset Overview

The coding process yielded 2,912 coded passages from a total of 15 news organizations. Local news stories made up the vast majority of the dataset, contributing 2,589 coded passages (88.9%), with the remainder coming from the national media. The local news in Philadelphia and Santa Fe contributed a relatively equal number of coded passages, despite the cities' significant difference in population. Coded passages from Philadelphia local media made up 47.9% of the total, and Santa Fe comprised 41.0%. Roughly three quarters of coded passages came from news reports (72.4%), and the other quarter (27.6%) was derived from opinion pieces.

Representation Function

The primary unit of analysis used with regard to the representation function was a policy position. A total of 1,200 coded passages contained policy positions. Frequency analyses were conducted to determine the relative prevalence of policy position valences, frames, and actors represented in the news. The results of these analyses are reported in Table 3 and described in this section.

Representation of Pro-Tax and Anti-Tax Positions

In the news media as a whole, the representation of pro-tax and anti-tax policy positions was fairly balanced, at 47.6% in favor and 55.9% against (indicating a small proportion of positions that referenced both). There were no statistically significant differences in the relative balance of pro-tax and anti-tax policy positions in news reports versus opinion pieces or across the three geographic groupings of news media.

Representation of Actors

Although the representation of pro-tax and anti-tax arguments in the news media was relatively balanced, the voices of some social groups were represented more heavily than others. The policy positions selected for inclusion by the news media were analyzed based on the category of actor who provided them; the results are reported in Table 3. Politicians were the most heavily represented, providing 25.4% of all policy positions, followed by advocacy groups with 18%. The mayors of Philadelphia and Santa Fe were the primary champions of these SSB taxation proposals, supported by allies on the city council and by a pro-tax advocacy group in each city. Policy positions represented by politicians and advocacy groups also reflect the opposition, as Philadelphia and Santa Fe had at least one vocal opponent on the city council and one anti-tax advocacy group. Together, political and advocacy voices dominated the news media conversation, while the views of citizens and specific interest groups, such as the beverage industry and small business, were less prominent. Citizens were the providers of only about 10% of the policy positions represented in the news media, and small business accounted for less than 5%. Speakers who were heard from less often also included non-elected government officials, such as budget directors (4.3% of all policy positions) and researchers (2.9%).

There is one important caveat to the analyses related to representation, and that is in the code for “journalist” as the person who introduced a policy position into the debate. This code was applied in two ways: for policy positions held by journalists themselves, expressed in opinion pieces (e.g., the viewpoint of a columnist) and for policy positions introduced by journalists in news reports *on behalf of others* (using constructions such as “supporters believe ...” or “opponents hold ...”). After-the-fact analyses were conducted

to pull apart these two uses of the code, showing that about 10% of all policy positions in news content were of the latter type. Journalists frequently grouped policy positions and provided a synopsis (e.g., “Critics say the taxes will stress residents’ already thin grocery budgets”). This is a common form of journalistic shorthand—summarizing viewpoints into a neat package for the benefit of audiences—but it means that some groups had their policy positions summarized by reporters rather than speaking for themselves.

Representation of actors in news reports versus opinion pieces. Chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the representation of policy positions by category of actor in news reports versus opinion pieces. The purpose of this analysis was to show how journalists’ activity as gatekeepers played out in the context of the representation function, based on the understanding that journalists decide which policy positions and actors appear in their news reports.

The results, provided in Table 4, show that most groups were represented to the same degree in each type of news item, with two key exceptions. Policy positions from politicians were represented in greater proportion in news reports, as were those of the beverage industry. Politicians made up almost 30% of all policy positions in news reports, compared with 15% in opinion pieces. The beverage industry and its allies comprised nearly 14% of all policy positions in reported stories, compared with 4% of the positions in opinion pieces.

Representation of actors in Philadelphia versus Santa Fe. Chi-square analyses were conducted to identify any statistically significant differences in the proportion of actors who were represented in each city. These analyses revealed several statistically significant differences, as noted in Table 5. In general, the local news media represented

policy positions expressed by politicians, government officials, and advocacy groups in greater proportion than the national media. These three groups generally represent official or elite sources, especially because the advocacy groups in Philadelphia and Santa Fe were professionally organized and well-funded, drawing contributions from the American Beverage Association on one side and Michael Bloomberg and his allies on the other.

Politicians particularly dominated in Philadelphia (33.8% of all policy positions). There, local news outlets heavily covered the SSB taxation debate as a power struggle among Mayor Kenney and allies on the city council, two outspoken anti-tax city council members, and the city council president (who remained cautiously in the middle until the last two weeks of the policymaking process). The news media portrayed the debate over the SSB tax as a test of Kenney's political power. An editorial in *Philadelphia Magazine* published the week of the tax's passage said that "The fact that Kenney took on one of the strongest lobbies in the United States and won—and that the once all-powerful [city council president] Clarke was, at times, working against him—shows that the mayor is a skilled politician who has enough votes on Council to pass ambitious, controversial proposals." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* stated that Kenney "can count this as the first major political victory of his term." This analysis cannot discern why news media coverage in Philadelphia revolved around this political drama, but it does show that politicians and their supporting cast of characters were dominant in the debate.

Politicians were less prominent as the sources of policy positions in Santa Fe, where the news media instead gave advocacy groups the spotlight. Advocacy groups introduced 23.9% of the policy positions in the Santa Fe local news. Two vocal, media-savvy organizations with outside sponsorship—Pre-K for Santa Fe on the pro-tax side

and Better Way for Santa Fe and Pre-K on the other—used their backing from Michael Bloomberg and the American Beverage Association, respectively, to relentlessly pursue attention from the public and the news media. The staff of the *Santa Fe New Mexican* overtly complained about the deluge of requests for attention from these groups, noting that “Santa Fe’s soda war has unleashed a war of dueling statements.” Of course, however, the *New Mexican* and other news organizations in the city proceeded to diligently cover every one of those statements.

Citizens were far better represented in Santa Fe than in Philadelphia or nationally, as noted in Table 5. This may reflect the fact that Santa Fe is a small city, one in which local news organizations committed themselves to covering the low-level city council committee sessions and town hall meetings at which local residents tended to speak.

All three of these groups—politicians, advocacy groups, and citizens—were represented in lower proportion in the national news than in the local news. This content analysis cannot shed light on national journalists’ reasons for downplaying the presence of these actors, but one hypothesis is that their ties with local issues and local politicians were weaker than those of local journalists. Another hypothesis is that the SSB taxation debate was framed in the national news in a very different way than it was in the local news. This phenomenon is addressed in the next section.

Representation of Frames

Frequency analyses were conducted to evaluate the proportion of interpretive frames reflected in policy positions, as reported in Table 3. The results show that the debate over SSB taxes in Philadelphia and Santa Fe was generally framed in the news media as an issue of social good versus social cost: whether advances in early childhood

education or public health were worth the sacrifices that the beverage industry, small businesses, SSB drinkers, and low-income residents would need to make. The frame that focused on educational benefits was the most represented, followed in prominence by its natural counterpoint: the social cost that would result from creating these programs for children. About 35% of policy positions in the news media framed SSB taxes in terms of social cost, usually emphasizing the ramifications for one or more stakeholder groups that would be affected: individual households (14.4%), low-income residents (13.3%), small businesses, (13.1%), and the beverage industry and its employees (10.1%). Thus, nearly 70% of all policy positions in the news media combined to frame the SSB taxation issue with respect to the social good of education or the social cost required to achieve it.

Less prominent in the policy debate moderated by the news media was the public health frame, which was reflected in 19.0% of policy positions. This finding is interesting because the public health frame had been the primary focus of SSB taxation debates in other cities in prior years. News coverage from Philadelphia and Santa Fe represented a departure (Sanger-Katz, 2016). The mayors, especially Kenney, endeavored to distance themselves from the public health frame, fearing it would raise “nanny state” accusations and thereby doom their proposals in the way that other cities’ attempts had been quashed (Philadelphia Daily News, 2016). The reduced prominence of the public health frame in news coverage of Philadelphia and Santa Fe likely corresponds with a lower frequency of policy positions adopting the public health frame’s natural opposite: the individual choice frame, whose central principle is “government hands off my soda.” Individual choice was a common frame in prior SSB tax debates that were framed in health terms, as opponents pushed back against the idea that governments wanted to legislate individual purchasing

decisions. That frame took a back seat in Philadelphia and Santa Fe, representing only about 7% of all policy positions.

Representation of frames in news reports versus opinion pieces. To determine whether there were any differences in the interpretive frames used in the news media in news reports and opinion pieces, chi-square analyses were run, as reported in Table 4. The only noteworthy difference was in the presence of the individual choice frame. It was present to a greater extent in opinion pieces than in news reports, but as noted above, it operated very much on the sidelines of the policy debate overall.

Representation of frames in Philadelphia versus Santa Fe. Chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the interpretive frames used in the national news media and the local media in each city, as reported in Table 5. The results show several statistically significant differences.

The most striking finding is that the educational benefits frame and social cost frame were dominant in the local news media in both Philadelphia and Santa Fe, while the public health frame was central in the national news media, where it was reflected in 43% of all policy positions. This content analysis cannot uncover the mechanism behind this finding, but it raises three hypotheses worthy of future attention. One possible reason is the large share of voice garnered in the local news by local politicians, who strongly pushed for subsidized pre-K education while downplaying SSB taxes' connection to public health. Another hypothesis is that the educational benefits frame held importance for local news audiences who might be more inclined to care about hyperlocal outcomes: improved learning for neighborhood children, new jobs for pre-K teachers, improvements in the city economy, and lower future juvenile incarceration rates. A third hypothesis is

that national news organizations were habituated to the public health frame that had characterized their past coverage of attempts to pass SSB regulations in New York City, Mexico, Berkeley, and elsewhere, and they simply pushed forward with this same frame in their coverage of Philadelphia and Santa Fe. Interviews with the journalists who wrote the stories would be needed to determine whether any of these hypotheses has value.

Results of analyses based on media geography reveal several other significant differences. For example, within the frame of social cost, the frame of detriment to low-income residents (17.2% of all policy positions) was more prevalent in Philadelphia than in Santa Fe (8.9%). Instead, the impact of SSB taxation on consumers was framed more generally in Santa Fe, emphasizing the potential harm to households of all income levels (18.9% of all policy positions).

Two frames were seen in greater proportion in coverage of one city or the other, as noted in Table 5: the outside intervention frame, which was more prevalent in Santa Fe, and frames coded as “other,” which were seen in greater proportion in Philadelphia. The outside intervention frame portrayed the SSB taxation debate as a proxy fight among moneyed pro-tax and anti-tax interests who had no intrinsic connection to Santa Fe. People in Santa Fe, no matter which side of the debate they represented, expressed shock in the news media at the massive sum of money that flowed into their small city from the American Beverage Association, Bloomberg, and other sources. (In line with this frame, the Santa Fe local news provided ongoing coverage of the total sum injected into the policy debate by wealthy outsiders, reporting on each monthly disclosure to the campaign finance board.) Outside intervention was not as great of a concern in Philadelphia, where a different city-specific frame came into play instead. Tagged with the “other” category,

because it was not outlined in the original coding instrument, this frame in Philadelphia reflected the legality of the SSB tax proposal. Close to the end of the initial debate of the measure, opponents realized that the city was headed toward approval. They prepared and filed a lawsuit and, immediately upon the tax's passage, shifted the policy positions they expressed in the news to center on the idea that Kenney's government had stepped into an area of regulation that its constitutional powers did not allow it to tread. (A judge later disagreed.) This legality frame was rarely seen in Santa Fe, where the SSB taxation proposal failed by referendum and there was no need for a court challenge.

Summary

From the "30,000-foot view," news coverage of the policy debate over SSB taxation in Philadelphia and Santa Fe presented a relatively balanced picture of the deliberation, representing pro-tax and anti-tax arguments in roughly equal proportion. The news media as a whole characterized the SSB taxation debate as an issue of whether educational benefits for children were worth the social harm triggered by generating the funding for those programs, not as a government strategy to improve public health by restricting access to a particular product. This represents a significant departure from the way in which SSB taxes were represented in the news media in the past.

At more granular levels, local-versus-national and city-by-city patterns emerge in how journalists executed the representation function. Noteworthy differences include an emphasis in local news coverage on the policy positions of politicians and other elites, the prevalence of a public health frame in the national news that was not seen in any of the local rhetoric around these SSB taxes, and a general under-representation in policy debate of the viewpoints of "the little guys": small businesses and unaffiliated citizens.

These results reveal the outcome of journalists' decisions as gatekeepers in terms of what and whom to represent in the context of this debate.

Information Function

This study measured the flow of information in the policy debate in two ways. Policy positions served as one unit of analysis: those that provided information about the objective status of the problem, i.e., the policy issue at hand and its magnitude, or the cause, i.e., the origin of the problem and, by extension, how it might best be solved. The other unit of analysis for the information function was an evidence mention, due to the informative power of empirical evidence, such as objective facts, statistics, surveys, and research studies, and anecdotal evidence, such as personal testimony.

The existence of information coded in news content for this study can shed light on the *awareness* side of this function: the information that journalists as gatekeepers selected for inclusion in their coverage to make people aware of the dimensions of the SSB taxation issue. The other side of the information function, *accessibility*, is related to the work that journalists can do to make information accessible, understandable, and useful. Three codes were designed to identify evidence of accessibility: explaining or contextualizing information to increase understanding among news consumers; providing links to original sources; and capturing information in the form of a chart, graph, or map. The results of analyses related to awareness and accessibility are provided in this section.

Information: Awareness

Objective status and cause of the problem. Frequency analyses were conducted on coded passages containing policy positions that assessed the objective status and the cause of the policy problem.

A combined 10% of the policy positions introduced into the policy debate by the news media either described the objective status of the policy problem or addressed its cause. These two variables are linked: how someone conceptualizes the cause of the problem directly relates to its current status. For example, if a lack of the availability of medicine in a certain city is framed as an inability of stores to keep their shelves stocked, the relevant status of the problem may include the number of shipments of medications arriving to the area and the inventory-control systems that stores are using to better manage them. If the unavailability of medicine is framed as caused by pharmaceutical companies making the drugs too expensive for stores to carry, the relevant status of the problem may focus on the rates charged by drug companies and the number of local pharmacies that are able to pay them. Policy problem causes and statuses, therefore, are tied to how a policy problem is framed. The relevance of frames to the information introduced in Philadelphia and Santa Fe with regard to SSB taxation is explained below.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Philadelphia and Santa Fe politicians framed their SSB taxation measures as a means of generating revenue for pre-kindergarten education. Within this frame, the policy problem was defined as a lack of early childhood education opportunities. Information about the status of the problem would align with this frame, e.g., the number of children lacking access to pre-K, the cost of preschool education for families that need to pay out of pocket, city or state rankings for education outcomes, and downstream effects connected to failings of the education system, such as incarceration rates. A coded passage from the *Santa Fe New Mexican* offers an example of information within this frame: “Gonzales said there are about 1,000 children ages 3 and 4 in the city who are eligible for early childhood education programs, but their families either can’t

afford to pay \$900 to \$1,400 per month to put them in a [pre-K] program, or they can't get them enrolled because existing programs are at capacity.” Text from the *Albuquerque Journal* provides another example: “New Mexico ranks No. 1 in the nation for children living in poverty and second-highest for children living in hunger.” Based on the frame of educational benefits, information was provided in the news media about the pre-K gap that politicians said they were trying to address.

When a frame other than educational benefits was dominant, this reshaped the nature of the information provided in the news media about the cause and status of the problem. As noted in the previous section, the public health frame was most prevalent in the national news. Within this frame, the policy problem was not a lack of pre-K, but rather overconsumption of SSBs. Information about the status of this problem included obesity statistics, measures of the calories consumed per day from SSBs, and healthcare costs resulting from an obese and overweight population. Information of this type was included in the local news, but the national news made it a specific focus. For example, *USA Today* informed readers that “about two-thirds of kids, if you stop them on a given day, have had at least one soda, fruit juice or sports drink ... an average of about 164 calories for boys and 121 calories a day for girls.” *The New York Times* quizzed readers on the number of teaspoons of sugar in a 16-ounce bottle of Coke, noting that “The answer is 12. A 16-ounce Snapple Kiwi Strawberry—‘Made from the Best Stuff on Earth,’ it boasts—has 12. A same-size Nantucket Nectars Cranberry has 15 teaspoons. Imagine putting that in your coffee.” This news content provides policy-relevant information in the context of the health frame, informing news consumers about SSBs as a partial cause of the U.S. obesity problem.

The statistics that *USA Today* and the *Times* provide for their readers in these examples share a categorization with another form of information provided by the news media in their coverage of Philadelphia and Santa Fe: evidence. The section below summarizes the information provided in these policy debates in the form of evidence.

Evidence. The news media incorporated 1,191 evidence mentions in their coverage of the SSB taxation issue in Philadelphia and Santa Fe, thereby providing information to news consumers. (Evidence has another role in policy debates, namely to legitimize or delegitimize policy positions; this aspect is addressed later in this chapter, in the section about the legitimacy function.) Of these evidence mentions, 1,004 (84.3%) contained empirical evidence and 215 (18.1%) contained narrative or anecdotal evidence, indicating that some news content represented an overlap of the two.

Much in the way that information about the objective status and cause of the policy problem varied based on how the problem was defined, evidence varied widely in subject and type, often based on how the problem was framed. This section gives a brief overview of the evidence that journalists selected for inclusion in the policy debate and provides examples that illustrate its capacity to inform audiences.

Empirical evidence. Empirical evidence introduced into the debate included facts, statistics, results of research, survey data, economic and health forecasting, and other information derived from systematic study. A great deal of the empirical evidence that the news media introduced into this policy debate was used to address the question of whether SSB taxes would be effective in achieving policy goals—in short, whether the taxes would work and what fallout they might produce in the process. Empirical evidence of this nature tended to take two forms: (1) studies, reports, and other data on whether

SSB taxes succeeded in locations where they were already in place, such as Berkeley and Mexico, and (2) predictive modeling of how SSB taxes might play out in Philadelphia and Santa Fe.

As with other forms of information, evidence varied based on the frame that journalists and their sources used to characterize the policy problem. In the educational benefits frame, which placed pre-K front and center, journalists selected and presented empirical evidence about the value of early childhood education, as in this passage from the *Santa Fe New Mexican*: “A study this year by the state legislature found that children from low-income families who were enrolled in a state-funded pre-K program as 4-year-olds did better academically than their peers when they reached third grade.” Journalists also presented evidence to forecast whether SSB taxes (or alternative proposals) would generate sufficient funds for the pre-K programs they were designed to underwrite. These projections in *Philadelphia Magazine* offer an example: “The Kenney administration believes that [council member] Reynolds-Brown’s estimate of \$60 million is reasonable, but it has attacked [her alternative] proposal for bringing in \$35 million less than what it says it needs to fund pre-K, community schools, and a parks overhaul.”

Empirical evidence provided within the public health frame accordingly focused on different topics, especially the obesity problem in the United States. Journalists used empirical evidence in the public health frame to demonstrate the effect (or lack of effect) of SSB taxes on consumer behavior and to forecast the number of people who might shift their purchases away from SSBs depending on the cents-per-ounce value of the tax. Some of the most frequently cited empirical evidence in the public health frame came from Berkeley, where an SSB tax had gone into effect about a year before Kenney floated his

measure in Philadelphia, and Mexico, which had implemented its tax in late 2013. A passage from the *Albuquerque Journal* provides a representative sample of this genre of empirical evidence, citing University of California research that “found a 20 percent drop in consumption of [SSBs] in Berkeley’s low-income neighborhoods, while consumption of the same types of drinks rose by 4 percent in nearby Oakland and San Francisco ... Berkeley residents reported a whopping 63 percent increase in the consumption of bottled or tap water.” The news media also presented empirical evidence within the public health frame to inform news consumers about the possible pitfalls of SSB taxation, as when a *Journal* source cited a study showing “a reduction of just six calories per day from sugared drinks for Berkeley residents, which was more than offset by a 32-calorie-per-day increase from non-taxed beverages like milkshakes and yogurt smoothies.”

Another area in which the news media informed news consumers using evidence was with regard to the social cost of SSB taxation. Policy positions related to social cost focused on the detriment that SSB taxes could visit upon individual households, citizens with low incomes, small businesses, and the beverage industry. Journalists employed empirical evidence within this frame to provide information about the impact on the economy in general and on businesses large and small. The news media also used evidence within the social cost frame to downplay the potential impact of the anticipated harm, as in this transcript from the *NBC Nightly News*: “[An] April PLoS report found that store revenue in Berkeley didn’t fall after the tax was implemented, and a Public Health Institute analysis of the Berkeley labor market found that employment in food-industry jobs has actually grown by 7.2 percent since the soda tax was implemented.”

Anecdotal evidence. Just as journalists can select statistics, studies, reports and other forms of empirical evidence to inform news audiences in a factual way, they can choose personal narratives and testimony to provide information about the human aspect of a policy proposal. The news media employed anecdotal evidence in the context of all the major frames used in the coverage of Philadelphia and Santa Fe: educational benefits, public health, and social cost. This evidence mention from Philadelphia’s ABC Channel 6 captures anecdotal evidence within the social cost frame, specifically with regard to the impact on household finances: “Chuck Andrews picked up a \$1.77 gallon jug of tea, got home and looked at his receipt. ‘When I read the receipt I’m like, wait a minute, I paid more in tax than I did for the product,’ Andrews said. The tax on the \$1.77 gallon of tea was \$1.92.” This specific story from a local consumer provides viewers with information on how the SSB tax plays out in the world, as does this anecdote selected by a

Philadelphia Inquirer journalist, within the context of the educational benefits frame:

“Are you so excited?” Lisa Martin asked her 3-year-old daughter, Rowan, as she led her down the hallway toward her classroom at SPIN Parkwood early learning center. “Yeah!” the little girl said, throwing her arms—slightly inhibited by her puffy coat—up and down and doing a little jump. SPIN was able to add 40 seats to the newly renovated brick building on Dunks Ferry Road, thanks to city money, or more specifically the city’s new sweetened-beverage tax.

The *Inquirer*’s choice of this brief narrative serves to inform audiences about who will benefit from the revenue generated by the SSB tax and how it might play out in the lives of preschool children and their families. The newspaper similarly selected anecdotal evidence to place the public health frame in real terms:

Marisa Rogers, a physician of internal medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, recounted her experiences with two diabetic patients. One, in her early 60s, worked for years on diet and exercise, and finally succeeded in getting off all her medications. The other, in her 40s, had more difficulty and recently had her second leg amputated. “Let’s face it, changing your behavior is really hard to

do,” Rogers said, noting that a tax on sugary drinks would give her patients added incentive to switch from sugary sodas to healthier beverages.

Anecdotal evidence may lack the statistical significance of a research study or the population-level magnitude of government data, but examples in this study indicate that journalists used the power of personal narratives and testimony to inform news audiences about the effects of SSB taxation, whether real or projected.

Information: Accessibility

Anecdotal evidence, due to its specific and often human nature, is unlikely to require the news media to perform additional work to make it accessible and useful to audiences. Certain forms of empirical evidence, however, may need intervention from journalists to render them accessible or understandable to news consumers. This study included codes to assess the extent to which journalists made information more accessible to audiences in one of three ways: explaining or contextualizing evidence, providing a link to original source material, or capturing evidence in a chart, graph, or map.

None of these accessibility functions was particularly prominent in the data, as noted in Table 6. Of the 1,191 coded passages containing evidence, 93 (7.8%) indicated that journalists had explained or contextualized evidence for the benefit of news audiences, such as this passage from *The New York Times*:

In Mexico, where a big, national soda tax went into effect in 2014, soda drinking declined the fastest among the poor, who felt the tax’s effects in their budgets most acutely. Consumption among the poorest Mexicans fell by 17 percent by the end of the year, compared with 12 percent in the population nationwide. As Barry Popkin, a professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina puts it: The rich paid the tax, and the poor reduced their soda drinking. If something like that happens in Philadelphia, the poor may suffer in the form of less choice or enjoyment, but they may not bear the brunt of funding city preschool.

Here, the *Times* reporter informs readers about the results of a study but also explains the human behavior underlying the results and connects the findings to policy positions that reflect concern about SSB taxes' impact on the poor. Other examples of journalists explaining or contextualizing evidence involved helping news consumers to interpret information, as in this *Times* passage: "Studies using mathematical models show that soda taxes are likely to have small but measurable effects on public health. But the precise effects will most likely depend on which people cut back in response to a tax, and whether people make up for lost calories in some other part of their diet." Here, the journalist uses language to help news audiences hedge against any tendency to leap to conclusions about SSB taxes' effectiveness that are not actually supported by the data.

There were very few instances in the data of journalists performing the other two coded functions that could improve the accessibility of evidence. Journalists provided direct access to the evidence they used in only 16 cases (0.5% of all coded passages). Examples of this practice included a *New York Times* story that provided hyperlinks to four empirical studies and two *Philadelphia Magazine* stories that linked to actual video clips of the pro- and anti-tax commercials that they referenced. In only two cases (0.2%) did journalists provide evidence in visual form: one graphic of data from a study of SSB consumption in Berkeley, and another that captured the number of registered voters in each Santa Fe district who were eligible to vote in that city's SSB tax referendum.

In general, the majority of the "above and beyond" work that journalists did to make information accessible to audiences in this particular policy debate was related to the explanation and contextualization of evidence, making it more comprehensible and useful to news audiences as they evaluated the proposals at hand.

Information in news reports versus opinion pieces. Chi-square analyses were conducted to test for statistically significant differences in journalists' incorporation of information in news reports versus opinion pieces. The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 7. The greatest difference was in the use of empirical evidence, which was found far more often in news reports. Anecdotal evidence also was slightly more frequently represented in news reports, as were the use of techniques to explain, translate, or contextualize evidence for news audiences.

Information in Philadelphia versus Santa Fe. Chi-square analyses also were conducted to identify statistically significant differences in journalists' incorporation of information in the Philadelphia local news, Santa Fe local news, and national news. The results are reported in Table 8. There were significant differences in all aspects of the awareness function, though these differences should be interpreted in light of the fact that information about the cause and status of the problem made up a relatively small fraction of the dataset. Among the most interesting findings is that national news outlets included a greater proportion of empirical evidence in their coverage; this may reflect the level of research access and resources that are available to the national media or the relative prominence in the national news of the public health frame, which calls forth evidence about obesity and its ties to SSB consumption. Anecdotal evidence was prevalent in greater proportion in the Philadelphia local news, perhaps reflecting that city's focus on the potential salutary effects of SSB taxes on the children who would enroll in pre-K.

Summary

Overall, the news media played an active role in introducing information into the policy debate over SSB taxes. Journalists informed news consumers about the cause and

status of the policy problem at hand. Journalists also drew on empirical and anecdotal evidence to provide a mix of facts, statistics, studies, narratives, and testimony that could contribute to news consumers' ability to make an educated evaluation of an SSB taxation proposal. A primary takeaway from this assessment of the information function is that the information journalists as gatekeepers include in their news coverage is shaped, at least in part, by the interpretive frames used to characterize a policy issue.

Engagement Function

Two units of analysis were used to assess the engagement function, as described in Chapter 2: news content that captured relevance, i.e., the importance of SSB taxes to people's lives, and news content that mobilized, either by telling news consumers how to get involved in the issue or by encouraging them to do so. A total of 846 coded passages (29.3%) were tagged for relevance, mobilization, or both. Table 9 summarizes the relative presence of relevance and mobilization, indicating that the news media were far more likely to engage news consumers by illustrating the relevance of SSB taxes than they were to mobilize them to act. The following sections provide a look at how the news media performed the engagement function with respect to relevance and mobilization.

Engagement: Relevance

Expressions of the relevance of SSB taxes to news consumers made up the vast majority of content coded for engagement: 728 coded passages, or 85.2% of those related to the engagement function. The coding instrument further divided expressions of relevance into four sub-categories, each of which is explained below.

Relevance to the community. Journalists as the moderators of policy debate most commonly expressed the relevance of the SSB taxation proposals to news audiences

by highlighting the impact at the community level. Community-oriented depictions of relevance were seen in just over half of the passages coded for the engagement function (50.4%). Examples include this one from the *Albuquerque Journal*: “Gonzales said the program would help ‘fill the gaps’ in early childhood education and give all children in Santa Fe an opportunity to be kindergarten-ready when they come of age. And the initiative could create close to 200 jobs.” This statement illustrates the relevance of the SSB taxation proposal to news consumers who are parents of preschool-age children and, by weaving in the prospect of local job creation, news consumers who are not. A passage from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* puts the relevance of SSB taxes in community terms by painting a vivid picture of Mayor Kenney’s “broader vision for Philadelphia, one with universal pre-K, vibrant recreation centers, fully equipped police and fire departments, and less blight.” Expressions of relevance to the community also were prevalent within the social cost frame, as journalists worked to capture the hardship that fellow citizens might feel as a result of SSB taxes. This example from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* quotes a local gas station owner about the likelihood that the SSB tax would make it hard for him to retain his 20 employees: “If profit is not there, maybe I have 10 or 12, and that’s just me ... there’s gas stations and small convenience stores at every corner. Imagine one or two employees laid off from each business.” In selecting expressions of relevance such as these, journalists engaged news audiences with the SSB taxation issue by depicting the effect of these taxes on neighborhoods and cities.

Relevance to the individual. Far less news content expressed the SSB taxation proposals’ relevance in individual terms. Less than a fifth of news content coded for the engagement function (18.3%) referenced individual-level impact. That is not to say that

individual-level impact was any less powerful in the press. Take, for example, this passage from the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, which falls within the frame of social cost:

“Robert Farrell, who works at the Coca-Cola bottling plant, which has been in business for nearly a century, calls the proposed tax worrisome. ‘It could possibly jeopardize my job here if there are cuts,’ said Farrell, one of about 75 employees at the plant. ‘I’m one of the new guys, so I’ll probably be the first to go.’”

Here, journalists capture, in real terms, the potential effect of SSB taxes on an individual human being. This passage from the *Albuquerque Journal* does the same, but from the standpoint of a consumer: “‘This makes me sad,’ said Cheryl Caldwell, 50, who is unemployed and says she gets her daily caffeine fix from Mountain Dew. ‘The city’s taking everything away ... What is the alternative, make your own soda?’” This passage shows how a consumer of limited means might feel trapped by the extra cost levied by a new tax. Indications of SSB taxes’ individual-level impact ranged from the reduction in single-family preschool tuition to the price hike anticipated on a specific energy drink.

Relevance through problem frames. Journalists did engage audiences with the issue of SSB taxation in Philadelphia and Santa Fe by using “problem frames,” which Altheide (1997) argues can increase engagement by positioning policy issues as pressing problems that demand a response. Problem frames were present in 21.5% of news content coded for the engagement function. This example from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* allows Mayor Kenney the opportunity to employ a problem frame: “It’s been generations we’ve been going downhill with our kids in our neighborhoods ... And it’s going to take some time to get us back. But this is the first step back.” Here, Kenney points up the need for policy action by describing the city and its children as on the decline. Another example is provided in this passage from the *Santa Fe Reporter*: “It is uncontroversial to say Santa Fe suffers from woefully underfunded pre-K programs, which experts say are integral to

improving children’s economic outcomes ... Families are stuck on waiting lists, banking on lotteries for a slot in the city’s best preschools.” Problem frames were seen in the data from this case study much more often in combination with community-level indications of relevance. There were 79 coded passages (18.5% of indications of relevance) in which these two forms of engagement intersected, but only three (1.9%) in which problem frames were combined with statements that captured the individual-level relevance of SSB taxes. This indicates that journalists were more inclined to cast SSB taxes as an urgent social problem—amplifying the importance of the issue facing a city as a whole.

Other forms of relevance. The coding instrument for this case study included a flexible code for forms of relevance that did not align with the community, individual, or problem-frame categories. This “other” code was applied to 8.5% of news content coded for the engagement function. These instances were focused primarily on the relevance of the SSB taxation debates in Philadelphia and Santa Fe to the fate of proposals elsewhere. In other words, what did the outcomes for these cities mean for other municipalities and states that might want to try an SSB tax? The *Albuquerque Journal* offers an example:

Philadelphia scored a major victory for public health last week by becoming the first large U.S. city to pass a tax on sugary drinks ... What’s more, the fact that this measure passed in a city where it failed twice before, and in the face of strong opposition from the beverage industry, will inspire and embolden cities like San Francisco, Boulder, Colo., and Oakland, Calif., where voters will decide on sugary-drink taxes this fall.

The journalists who moderated the policy debate in these two cities were aware that other places were watching—and in fact, Santa Fe was even watching Philadelphia. Philadelphia, as the first major U.S. city to pass an SSB tax, led journalists and their news sources to wonder whether the tide could turn in favor of these policy measures after years of failure. The coded passages in this category of relevance placed Philadelphia’s

efforts in context and hinted at approaches used by the Kenney administration that might have contributed to this groundbreaking success, such as reframing the debate away from public health and toward educational benefits.

Relevance in news reports versus opinion pieces. Chi-square analyses were conducted to identify any statistically significant differences in expressions of relevance in news reports versus opinion pieces. The results are summarized in Table 10. Only one statistically significant difference was observed: a greater proportion of problem frames in opinion pieces compared with news reports. One hypothesis for this effect is that people who are motivated to write opinion pieces, whether they are editorial boards, staff columnists, or external op-ed contributors, may be more likely to perceive an issue as a pressing problem—and therefore worth writing about. Without more information from sources, however, it is not possible to ascertain the reason behind this difference.

Relevance in Philadelphia versus Santa Fe. Chi-square analyses also were conducted to look for statistically significant differences in expressions of the relevance of the SSB taxation issue to news audiences in Philadelphia, Santa Fe, and nationally. Several statistically significant differences were observed and are reported in Table 11.

In general, expressions of relevance were more prevalent in the Philadelphia local news than in the Santa Fe local news. Expressions of relevance were least prevalent in the national news. News content from Philadelphia also featured a greater proportion of news content coded for “other” relevance, which is logical based on the city’s unique role as a potential bellwether for other municipalities that might be considering an SSB tax.

Meanwhile, problem frames were employed to a greater extent in the Santa Fe local news than in Philadelphia, and to a far greater extent than in the national news. This

may be due to frequent statements from Mayor Gonzales and Pre-K for Santa Fe that pre-K was an urgent social issue due to the New Mexico state legislature's repeated failure to take up early childhood education. Santa Fe journalists regularly quoted Gonzales and his allies talking about their belief that the burden lay on Santa Fe to come up with its own solution, contributing to the "problem frame" of subsidized pre-K as an immediate need.

Engagement: Mobilization

News content that could serve to mobilize audiences in the policy debate over SSB taxation was classified in four categories: encouraging people to act, quoting a source who encouraged action, providing information about an opportunity to act (such as the date of a hearing), and portraying the issue as an open question even after its fate already has been decided. The latter was applicable only to Philadelphia, due to the challenge mounted against the SSB taxation measure after city council approval.

In general, mobilizing content was not prevalent in news coverage of the policy debates in Philadelphia and Santa Fe. Only 126 coded passages included examples of mobilization (14.9% of news content coded for the engagement function, and 4.3% of all news content). This is far smaller than the proportion of news content that contained policy positions or information. The results reported in Table 9 indicate that mobilization was not nearly as central to the role played by the news media in this policy debate.

Although none of the four mobilization techniques was particularly common, the one that appeared the most often was providing information about an opportunity to act. Its 55 instances represented only 6.5% of all news content coded for the engagement function and a tiny fraction of all news content, at 1.9%. It is a more passive method of creating the conditions under which news consumers might act on a policy issue, and it

leans on the objectivity norm of journalism: rather than tell people what to do or encourage them to act, it plainly puts the information out there and leaves it to news consumers to take the next step. More “activist” mobilization techniques, including directly encouraging people to act and quoting sources who did so, were nearly absent in news media coverage of this policy debate.

Mobilization in news reports versus opinion pieces. Chi-square analyses were conducted to test for statistically significant differences in mobilizing content in news reports versus opinion pieces. The results, summarized in Table 10, support the logical conclusion that direct exhortations to act have a more natural home in opinion pieces than news reports. Also unsurprising: quoting sources who encouraged action is a mobilizing technique that appeared to a much greater extent in news reports. These findings align with conceptions of journalism that confine prescribed action to editorials, columns, and op-eds, and in which mobilizing activity that appears in a news report must be safely contained within a quote. This reflects the objectivity norm.

Mobilization in Philadelphia versus Santa Fe. Chi-square analyses also were conducted to identify statistically significant differences in the proportion of mobilizing news content presented by news organizations in Philadelphia, Santa Fe, and nationally. The results, reported in Table 11, reveal several differences.

Far more direct encouragements to act were present in the national news, owing to the contributions of editorials in *The Wall Street Journal* and staff columns in *USA Today* and *The New York Times*. There were a few vocal regular columnists at the local level, such as Stu Bykofsky of the *Philadelphia Daily News*, but the majority of the opinion journalism that aimed to mobilize audiences was published in the national press.

Mobilizing audiences by providing information about an opportunity to act is a technique that was much more prevalent in the local Santa Fe news for one obvious reason: there, news consumers could have a direct effect on the outcome of the SSB taxation proposal because Santa Fe opted for a citywide referendum. News content in Santa Fe made frequent passing mentions of the date of the referendum, and as the vote grew closer, news organizations provided information about polling place locations and hours. There was far less news content of this type in Philadelphia, where the city council members, rather than residents, voted on the fate of the SSB tax. Some Philadelphia news items included contact information for city council members, but in general, news content there did not emphasize opportunities to take action on the SSB issue.

A mobilizing element that was more prevalent in Philadelphia in a statistically significant way was engaging audiences by portraying the tax issue as an open question even after the city council rendered its decision. This form of mobilization was seen only in Philadelphia because it was there that the beverage industry filed a post-passage legal challenge to the tax. Journalists covered the progress of the lawsuit through the courts and, while the judge's decision was pending, either reminded audiences that the tax still could be struck down or selected statements from sources that reinforced this point. This portrayal of the tax issue as an open question may have had limited mobilizing power, in that the decision lay with a judge, but it could have mobilized news consumers in more passive ways, such as enticing them to continue to follow the progress of the issue.

Summary

Journalists as moderators of the policy debate over SSB taxation in Philadelphia and Santa Fe seem to have embraced one aspect of the engagement function—involving

audiences in the policy issue by illustrating its relevance to them—but shied from the other, engaging in far less activity to mobilize audiences. These findings reflect the objective, public service-oriented journalism that is common in the West (Hanitzsch, 2007), in which journalists provide audiences with the information they need to come to conclusions about whether to become active in policy matters but let them make that decision on their own. There were few examples in this case study of active or direct mobilization, even in the context of opinion pieces.

The analyses reported in this chapter have sought to provide a detailed picture of the SSB taxation debate as moderated by journalists in Philadelphia and Santa Fe with regard to three functions of policy debate that are thoroughly addressed in the literature: representation, information, and engagement. This background provides context for the analyses reported in the next section, which examine the function that has been least well explicated and that is central to the purpose of this dissertation: legitimacy.

Legitimacy Function

This dissertation seeks to examine the full scope of the legitimizing function that the news media perform as moderators of policy debate. In doing so, it seeks to answer two research questions: what strategies are employed in the news media to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors, and whether there are any conditions under which certain legitimizing strategies are more or less likely to be used.

Because the legitimacy function is less fully explicated in the literature, this study used a semi-structured analysis approach. First, it examined policy positions marked with three codes that pertain to legitimacy as a measure of alignment with social values and preferences: suggesting that SSB taxes are the preferred policy solution, suggesting that

SSB taxes are *not* the preferred solution, and suggesting a concrete alternative policy solution. Then, thematic analyses were run on news content coded as “supporting” or “questioning” policy proposals, positions, or actors, based on the logic of Koopmans (2004) that an entity garners social preference when it is widely supported in the news media and loses social preference when it is widely rejected. These 875 coded passages were combed for evidence of the five legitimizing strategies identified in the literature review, and additional strategies were allowed to emerge from the data.

Direct Expressions of Preference for or Against SSB Taxes

The news content in this case study included 440 policy positions that expressed a preference for SSB taxes as the preferred policy solution (36.7% of all policy positions) and 392 policy positions that deemed the taxes a non-preferred solution (32.7%). These positions can indicate to news consumers where and how social preferences are aligning (or failing to align) behind a policy proposal. Proposals that amass support in the news media may gain legitimacy, while those that are repeatedly rejected may lose legitimacy.

An example of a policy position that directly expressed a preference for SSB taxes is seen in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*:

“George Matysik, executive director of the Philadelphia Parks Alliance, said the programs the tax would pay for could level the playing field for communities living in poverty. ‘We’re not going to fix that problem by giving them more soda,’ he said. ‘We’re going to fix that problem by giving them equal opportunities.’”

Similarly, an op-ed writer in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* explicitly stated a policy preference for the SSB tax: “Until we better prioritize education in our local, state and federal budgets, a local sugary drink tax is the best-planned and most-likely-to-make-a-

difference opportunity to improve our community, get parents back to work, and attract and retain young families.”

Some policy positions in news coverage expressed a policy preference for SSB taxation in a more oblique way, by downplaying the legitimacy or viability of alternative policy options. This is an example from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*: “Asked whether he would consider a broader tax, Kenney said taxing sugar was a lot more complicated than taxing soda. ‘You can’t go to every bakery,’ he said. ‘The scope of enforcement is so large that it’s almost impossible to do.’” Here, the mayor legitimizes the tax as the preferred policy option by casting it as a practical solution. The editorial board of the *Santa Fe New Mexican* similarly selected the SSB tax as the preferred policy solution in Santa Fe by rejecting competing possibilities: “Our position ... is that pre-K is needed so that all children can be prepared properly for school. We believe that setting aside a dedicated source of revenue for the city to pay for the program is a better solution than trying to divert dollars from the general operating budget.” Policy positions such as these elevate the legitimacy of SSB taxes by putting them forward to news consumers as an esteemed solution that has captured the preferences of others in society.

Nearly as many policy positions appeared in news coverage, however, that cast SSB taxes as the non-preferred policy solution: the route that should not be taken, or an approach out of line with society’s preferences. For example, the head of the main anti-tax advocacy group in Santa Fe told the *Albuquerque Journal*: “We think [the tax] targets hard-working families and small businesses ... There are definitely better ways to fund this without imposing the largest tax of its kind.” A restaurant owner in the Chestnut Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia who talked to broadcast channel CBS 3 had a similar view:

“We have a [tax of] eight percent on food and a 10 percent drink tax, where if you go to Wynmoor or Lafayette Hill, you’re only going to pay six percent. What we’re talking about is supporting the important things in the city of Philadelphia, but there’s other ways that are better and fairer to raise money for our public schools.” This is typical of policy positions in the news that diminished the legitimacy of SSB taxes: opponents indicated regularly that the SSB levy was not the preferred policy solution by insisting that pre-K should be funded by some other mechanism. Even the name of the anti-tax advocacy group in Santa Fe, “Better Way for Santa Fe and Pre-K,” points to this perspective.

Notably, policy positions that delegitimized SSB taxes rarely nominated a specific alternative to SSB taxes. Plenty of policy positions expressed that SSB taxes were not the way to go, but few included suggestions on what should be done instead. Only 42 policy positions in the dataset (3.5%) expressed a policy preference against SSB taxes while putting forward an alternative policy option. Only in one case, a proposal by Philadelphia city council member Blondell Reynolds-Brown to generate the necessary revenue for pre-K through an across-the-board tax on drink containers, was a policy alternative fully conceptualized. Most policy positions that sought to delegitimize SSB taxes by suggesting that there was another preferred policy option were vague, as in this passage

from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*:

[Council member] Maria Quiñones-Sánchez ... said the administration should look for a source of pre-K funding that’s ‘more predictable.’ Maybe the city could hold off on a planned reduction in wage taxes, she said. Or it could capture the additional \$30 million in property-tax revenue that City Controller Alan Butkovitz said would be coming its way from new property assessments.

Opponents of SSB taxes quoted in the news media, therefore, were typically free to identify SSB taxes as a non-preferred, illegitimate policy solution without answering

the question, “If not this, then what?” It is unclear whether journalists who covered this policy debate in Philadelphia and Santa Fe pressed policy actors to supply an alternative and those sources refused to do so, or whether journalists allowed sources to delegitimize SSB taxes without asking them to nominate other policy approaches that they felt might better align with society’s values and preferences.

Additional analyses were conducted to identify who was responsible for the policy positions introduced in the news media to cast SSB taxes as either the preferred or non-preferred policy solution. The results, reported in Table 12, indicate that the tax was almost universally rejected as an acceptable policy solution by the beverage industry and the small business community, while politicians and government officials mostly helped to make the case for SSB taxes as the best policy. (The volume of politicians expressing a preference against SSB taxes is also significant, as the proposals met with some fierce opposition on both cities’ councils.)

Journalists themselves were responsible for about 16% of the policy positions in the news media that nominated SSB taxes as the preferred policy option and nearly 20% of the policy positions that indicated that they weren’t. The analyses reported in Table 12 indicate how journalistic activity in this regard broke down between journalists offering their own opinions in editorials and columns versus introducing others’ policy positions in news reports without attribution, as in this example from the *Santa Fe New Mexican*: “Opponents argue that the city should find a better funding source, complaining that the tax will hurt targeted businesses, possibly cost jobs and cause price increases that would prompt some consumers to shop outside the city.” Both types of activity leaned in favor of the idea of SSB taxes as the non-preferred policy position, though there was a greater

difference in journalists' own opinions expressed in editorials and columns. If legitimacy is conceived as a reflection of a population's values and preferences, expressions of SSB taxes as the non-preferred policy option may have had a hand in delegitimizing them.

Thematic Analysis of Legitimizing Strategies

The coding instrument for this study included codes for news content in which a policy position was supported or questioned, informed by the work of Koopmans (2004), who conceptualized legitimacy as a form of critical mass developed in the news media. The goal of this coding was not to yield detailed information about this news content in the initial coding process, but rather to cast the widest possible net for material that could then be thematically analyzed for evidence of legitimizing and delegitimizing strategies.

There were 875 uses of these codes: 332 in which SSB taxes were supported and 543 in which they were questioned. These coded passages were thematically analyzed using a semi-structured approach. First, they were evaluated for evidence of the five legitimizing and delegitimizing strategies outlined in the literature review. Then, those that appeared to indicate a strategy outside of these five were grouped together by their common properties, yielding two additional strategies for consideration.

All five legitimizing and delegitimizing strategies identified in the literature—using evidence, structuring policy positions in stories, endorsement from elites, fact-checking, and editorializing—were evident. In addition, the data suggest the existence of two other functions: fostering or resolving ambiguity (delegitimizing by creating a sense of uncertainty around a policy proposal, position, or actor, or alternatively, legitimizing by restoring certainty) and allowing policy actors to “associate” themselves with other affected parties whose position in the debate is more in sync with social values and

preferences. A frequency analysis of the relative prevalence of the seven strategies is reported in Table 13.

The sections below explicate these seven strategies and provide examples of how they were used in news media coverage of the SSB taxation debate in Philadelphia and Santa Fe. This section also reports the results of chi-square analyses conducted to identify statistically significant differences in the prevalence of certain strategies across the trajectory of the policy debate.

Using evidence. Evidence was used to legitimize or delegitimize in 228 coded passages. The use of evidence to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors is related to but distinct from its use to inform. Evidence *as information*, as described earlier in this dissertation, includes empirical information (e.g., facts, statistics, and studies) or anecdotal information (e.g., personal narratives and testimony) that helps news consumers to understand the contours of a policy issue so that they can make an educated decision. Evidence is used *to legitimize or delegitimize* specifically when it demonstrates a policy proposal's alignment with social values or preferences. Evidence holds a legitimizing property only when it fulfills this particular function. For example, the statistical fact from Philadelphia that "Several ShopRite stores slashed employee hours this spring, and in March Pepsi announced it was laying off about 20% of its local workforce" is a piece of evidence that delegitimizes the SSB tax by indicating that this policy proposal is likely to bring economic harm—a result that is out of line with social values and preferences. Conversely, the fact that "Two-thirds of the [union] local's 3,000 members work in bottling plants or drive trucks delivering soda, water, and other beverages to area retailers" may be important information for news consumers who seek

to make an informed decision about SSB taxes, but it does not, in and of itself, demonstrate the alignment or lack of alignment between the SSB tax and social values or preferences. This latter example captures evidence used to inform, but not to legitimize. Given that citizens generally favor and legitimize policies that reflect common values and that will succeed in achieving stated goals (Brewer, 2001; Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999), evidence can be used in the news media to meet the burden of proof that a policy proposal fulfills these criteria and help to elevate it for selection.

Evidence in this case study was used more often to legitimize (142 coded passages) than to delegitimize (86 coded passages). This *New York Times* example illustrates the use of evidence—in this case health research—to build the legitimacy of Philadelphia’s proposed SSB tax:

Unlike Berkeley, Philadelphia is a city with a large poor population and high soda consumption. That means that, if the soda-tax advocates are right, it could have a measurable public health benefit. Soda consumption in Berkeley was very low even before the tax there passed. In Mexico, which passed a national soda tax, consumption of sugary drinks fell substantially in the measure’s first year, particularly among the country’s poorest shoppers.

Here, the effectiveness of SSB taxes is central to their legitimacy: a preferred policy is one that accomplishes the socially valued goals that it sets out to achieve. The evidence from Mexico substantiates the idea that an SSB tax will produce positive effects for society. The choice of evidence from a location with economic characteristics in common with Philadelphia helps to strengthen the case that the SSB tax is a potentially desirable policy solution for this city. Another example of evidence to legitimize comes from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, in which consumer research was used to disprove the claim that SSB taxation would bring large-scale negative economic effects:

Will the proliferation of soft-drink taxes drive industry profits down? Not if soda follows the road paved by the tobacco industry, where public stigma and higher taxes have led to increased industry profits and share values, notes Jonathan Feeney, a Berwyn-based food-stocks analyst for Athlos Research. “When tobacco taxes went up in the 1990s, cigarette sales dropped, but the remaining hard-core heavy smokers willingly paid higher prices,” Feeney said. Tobacco companies found that they could boost prices further, cut back on advertising, reduce distribution, and make higher profit margins even on reduced sales.

In this case, evidence points up aspects of tobacco taxes (and, by extension, SSB taxes) that reflect social values: lower consumption of what some perceive as a harmful substance and generation of government revenue, all with no harm to companies’ profits. Evidence of this type painted the SSB tax as a “win-win,” legitimizing it as a preferred policy option.

Empirical evidence was not alone in its power to legitimize. Anecdotal evidence also helped to shore up SSB taxes as aligned with social values and preferences. For instance, the *Albuquerque Journal* interviewed Mayor Gonzales of Santa Fe in March 2017 after he returned from a fact-finding trip to talk with Philadelphia’s Mayor Kenney about his experience in passing and implementing the SSB tax. The *Journal* published this short narrative account of Gonzales’ discussion with Kenney about accusations from the Philadelphia beverage industry that jobs were already being lost as a result of the tax:

Gonzales said Mayor Kenney isn’t buying it. “He was emphatic in his belief that nothing about the tax was having the kind of impact the soda industry was putting out. He didn’t believe at all what they were saying,” he said, adding that Kenney reminded him that Pepsi-Co made a \$6 billion profit last year and its CEO makes \$25 million a year. “I left feeling good that, despite what we’ve heard about the sky falling in Philadelphia, in fact it’s not.”

This anecdote from Gonzales helps to distance the SSB tax from criticism that it would jeopardize jobs—a factor likely to delegitimize the tax as undesirable and out of sync with social values. Gonzales weaves factual evidence about industry profits into his

narrative account of his conversation with Kenney, supporting the legitimizing notion that SSB taxes can be implemented without economic detriment to the community.

As noted in Table 13, delegitimizing with evidence was less common than legitimizing with evidence, but this technique did appear in about 10% of instances. The passage below from the *Albuquerque Journal* provides an example. Mayor Gonzales often said in the news media that Santa Fe's 2-cents-per-ounce SSB tax would yield \$10 million per year to support the enrollment of about 1,000 children in pre-K education, but a journalist from the *Journal* noted that:

Boulder, Colo., a city slightly larger than Santa Fe, where voters last week approved a 2-cent-per-ounce tax on sugary drinks, estimated its revenues [from the tax] would be only about \$3.8 million per year.

This evidence from Boulder implies that the Santa Fe SSB tax proposal has no logical chance of generating as much revenue as the mayor frequently claimed (though Gonzales rebutted this notion by arguing that the revenue in Santa Fe would outpace the revenue in Boulder due to Santa Fe's annual influx of tourists, who were expected to get the city the rest of the way to \$10 million). Evidence is used here to portray the SSB tax in Santa Fe as unlikely to achieve its goals, delegitimizing it as a non-preferred solution.

Another passage from the *Inquirer*, published when the Philadelphia city council conducted its last-minute vote to make diet beverages also subject to the SSB tax, shows how evidence can be used in the news media to diminish legitimacy. In this case, it is suggested that no evidence exists to support a particular policy stance: "Diet beverages 'are filled with artificial sweeteners and chemicals. Do we really want people to drink these?' said nutritionist Mary Story, a professor at Duke University's Global Health Institute." Her perspective is followed with: "[Story] did say that researchers had not

found any proof of harm caused by the products.” Without evidence to back up Story’s policy position, its legitimacy is reduced, and the question is raised of why she would be against diet beverages with no evidentiary support. Overall, the results of this case study support the literature on how evidence can be used in the news media to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors.

Structuring policy positions in stories. There were 180 instances in the thematically analyzed data (24.8%) of structuring policy positions in stories to leave an impression of legitimacy or illegitimacy. Examples of this strategy demonstrate that legitimacy can be strengthened or undermined based on how material is arranged in a story and/or placed in context. Consider this exchange from CBS 7 in Santa Fe:

Reporter: Santa Fe voters will soon decide if a 2-cents-per-ounce tax on sugary drinks to support early childhood education programs is worth it ... Mayor Javier Gonzales says the city could make roughly \$10 million a year on this.

Male resident (not identified): Well, I am all for it, anything to help our kids.

Maggie Aylward, resident: And they say it’s for the children. They always say it’s for the children. But it never quite works out that way.

Both the reporter and the first resident depict the tax as aligned with the social value of helping children, contributing to its legitimacy. The follow-on from Maggie Aylward, however, severely undercuts that legitimacy. There is no further discussion of the pros or cons of the tax after Aylward speaks; the notion lingers that the SSB tax will not achieve its goal of helping local children, posing a threat to its legitimacy.

Another example comes from the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. (This passage also contains another instance of the strategy of delegitimizing by highlighting a lack of evidence.) Three paragraphs from this *New Mexican* story were structured as follows:

“Pre-K needs a stable revenue source,” says the group Better Way for Santa Fe and Pre-K on its website. “Beverage tax revenues will keep dropping as people reduce their purchases or go outside the city to avoid the tax.”

The tax’s supporters, led by Mayor Javier Gonzales, insist Santa Fe’s tourist-driven economy will ensure a steady stream of consumers for Coke, Pepsi and other sugary drinks subject to the tax, even if local shoppers change their habits.

But their evidence is scant, and their tax proposal comes at a time when soda sales nationally are declining.

Here, the policy positions are arranged in a way that detracts from the legitimacy of the pro-tax argument, calling into question the idea that the SSB taxation measure will generate enough revenue to meet pre-K’s financial needs. The tax proposal is cast as a non-preferred policy option, one that will not work. A different arrangement of the same policy positions could have left a more positive (and legitimizing) impression.

Many instances of structuring policy positions were of the “Supporters say ... but opponents counter” variety, in which both views are heard but one has the final word—potentially giving it more heft and legitimacy. For example, pro-tax and anti-tax positions were arranged in this way in a *Philadelphia Inquirer* story:

Mayor Kenney says revenue from the tax will help expand access to pre-K programs. Most support that, but many strongly oppose funding it with a soda tax.

“It’s a discriminatory tax, it’s a regressive tax,” Larry Miller of Philadelphians against the Grocery Tax said. Miller says it’ll hit low-income families unfairly and could also put some people out of work. “At least 2,000 jobs that are on the line, small business will feel this also,” Miller said.

Dr. Farley’s response to that is diabetes is also regressive. It’s more common among people living in poverty. “The people who are going to preferentially benefit from this are people with low income,” Farley said.

In this arrangement of policy positions, the health commissioner rebuts the policy position of the issue advocate. Farley has the last word, turning Miller’s terminology back against him. This structuring of policy positions mutes the potential delegitimizing

effect of Miller's policy position, which portrays the tax as out of sync with social values and preferences, and amplifies the legitimizing effect of Farley's policy position, which depicts the tax as a way to achieve the socially valued goal of improving the health of the city's less fortunate. Overall, these results support the notion that fine-grained, sentence-by-sentence decisions that journalists make in constructing news stories can serve to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals or positions.

Endorsement from elites. There were 34 examples in the data of endorsement from external elites, representing 3.9% of the passages that were thematically analyzed. Some high-ranking actors who were not involved with the proposal or passage of SSB taxes in Santa Fe and Philadelphia acted as an "outside barometer" on the issue, but generally this was not a common strategy in news coverage.

The boldface names that appeared in this relatively small sample included Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, who both took up Philadelphia's tax proposal as an issue in the 2016 presidential campaign. Former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell weighed in a few times, as did business elites such as billionaire health advocate Michael Bloomberg and David Cohen, the CEO of Comcast.

Some endorsements from elite actors were bland, as in a *Philadelphia Inquirer* story indicating that Cohen of Comcast supported Kenney and "called on the business community to support funding measures for pre-K." In other examples, elite actors dug deeper into the SSB taxation issue, using news coverage as an opportunity to assert policy positions and make specific arguments. Clinton and Sanders in particular sought to play a role in legitimizing or delegitimizing the SSB taxation proposal by providing commentary. The *Inquirer* noted:

Following comments former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made in Philadelphia Wednesday in support of Mayor Kenney's proposed tax on sugary drinks to universal fund pre-K education, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders said Thursday he's against the tax. "At a time of massive income and wealth inequality, it should be the people on top who see an increase in their taxes, not low-income and working people," Sanders said in a statement. Sanders, who said he's for pre-K, went on to criticize Clinton for supporting the soda tax.

In this statement, Sanders works to portray the SSB taxation measure as one that flies in the face of normative social values by burdening segments of society that are ill-equipped to cope. He implies that a preferred alternative policy approach is to place the onus of pre-K funding on the wealthiest individuals. (Of course, this was aligned with the general message of Sanders' 2016 campaign.) Sanders' stance on the tax elicited a response from Mayor Kenney, also captured in the *Inquirer*:

"I'm disappointed Sen. Sanders would ignore the interests of thousands of low-income, predominately minority children and side with greedy beverage corporations who have spent millions in advertising for decades to target low income minority communities," Kenney said. While Sanders framed his opposition in terms of the levy being a tax on the poor, Kenney, a Clinton supporter, called it a "corporate tax—plain and simple."

In these examples, Sanders and Kenney compete to determine the legitimacy of the SSB taxation proposal in the news media. Kenney seeks to legitimize the proposal by placing it in a context that is likely to reflect social values and preferences—taxing large corporations—and Sanders seeks to delegitimize it by emphasizing its potential effect on working families, an angle that is unlikely to garner wide support for the tax.

What these examples reveal about the strategy of endorsement from elites is that it is unlikely to legitimize or delegitimize in the absolute. Instead, its legitimizing power likely varies based on how a specific news consumer sees a specific elite actor's policy positions as aligned with his or her own—and, by extension, with broader social values and preferences. A Sanders supporter and a Clinton supporter would perform the

legitimacy calculus differently. Legitimizing and delegitimizing via endorsement from elites also may illustrate a transitive property of legitimacy: if news consumers tend to agree with the policy views of Sanders, and if he delegitimizes the SSB tax by depicting it as misaligned with social values, those news consumers may see the tax as illegitimate, too. In this way, the strategy of endorsement from elites may offer a legitimacy shorthand for news consumers.

Fact-checking. Fact-checking played a minor role in this case study. Eleven of the coded passages that were thematically analyzed (1.3%) contained fact-checking of the type popularized by PolitiFact and other news agencies: taking a claim made by a policy actor and testing it against known facts within a news article. It should be noted that this does not mean journalists were not checking facts as part of their reporting, out of the public eye. This analysis is exclusively limited to instances in which the news media published the results of their fact-finding in ways that could undermine the credibility, and therefore the legitimacy, of policy positions or actors.

In one example of this nature, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* fact-checked the claims contained in a promotional mailer sent out by the anti-tax advocacy group Better Way for Santa Fe and Pre-K. The article states:

Inside the glossy mailer is this swipe at city government: “Santa Fe is an expensive place to live for working families. City government has already increased property taxes, doubled parking fees and increased water and electric rates, and the city has a \$5 million surplus.” Not so fast. “City government” cannot raise electric rates. That’s a function of the Public Service Company of New Mexico, with rate increases approved (or not) by the Public Regulation Commission. The surplus, too, is now at \$15 million, but perhaps these mailers were printed before the new numbers were announced.

The *New Mexican* steps in to police the accuracy of the information provided by the advocacy group, judging two of its statements against a set of facts provided by the

newspaper. This strategy of comparing a stated policy position against facts—and finding a discrepancy—undermines its credibility. This lack of credibility in turn indicates to news consumers that the advocacy group may not be acting in good faith or in line with social values and preferences, potentially eroding the legitimacy of the organization, its statement, and its promotional literature.

In another example, the *New Mexican* takes on a television commercial created by the pro-tax advocacy group Pre-K for Santa Fe, in which a local mother tells the camera that the SSB tax in Santa Fe should be thought of as no big deal, because it is “only two cents.” The paper conducted the following fact-check:

Her claim is false, but proponents continue to air the ad. The proposal actually calls for a 2-cents-per-ounce tax, not just 2 cents. The ad could leave the impression that a 12-ounce bottle of soda, for instance, would cost only 2 cents more when, in fact, the tax could add nearly a quarter to the cost. Nevertheless, Pre-K for Santa Fe, a political action committee that paid for the ad and is campaigning in favor of the proposed tax, authorized the radio spot, saying the group and others, including the news media, have been using “2-cent tax” and “2-cents-per-ounce tax” interchangeably.

Here, the newspaper checks the facts and reveals that the advocacy group is trying to use obfuscation to its advantage. As in the prior example, fact-checking can influence legitimacy through the intermediary construct of credibility. The newspaper’s review of the ad portrays the advocacy group as conducting an insincere, manipulative campaign—two properties that are out of line with social values and preferences for political speech, and therefore a threat to the organization’s legitimacy.

The methodology of this study can offer examples of how this strategy played out in the news media in Philadelphia and Santa Fe, but it cannot determine how and why the news media determined that a public fact-check was called for. Further research is needed

with journalists who covered this policy debate to identify the factors or criteria that prompted them to overtly evaluate the credibility of certain statements.

Editorializing. About 12% of the thematically analyzed news content contained evidence of the strategy of editorializing to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors. There were 45 coded passages from editorial content that legitimized and 58 that delegitimized.

Some examples of this strategy included concrete expressions of preference for or against the proposed SSB taxes. In Philadelphia, the *Inquirer* editorial board wrote:

We support the sugary drink tax, not because we are anti-soda or even anti-sugar—though the health costs of an over-sugared population are staggering—but because pre-K has proved to be an effective program that could give children an educational boost that could last for years. It is a program that has value and substance, and, unlike soda, no empty calories.

In Santa Fe, the *New Mexican* editorial board also came out solidly in favor:

Our position ... is that pre-K is needed so that all children can be prepared properly for school. We believe that setting aside a dedicated source of revenue for the city to pay for the program is a better solution than trying to divert dollars from the general operating budget. What's more, we support the goal of reducing consumption of sugary drinks that likely would result from this tax—even if that means dollars for pre-K decline somewhat. We like how the mayor's plan will improve access to preschool, provide training for current teachers and expand job opportunities, all without creating a city bureaucracy to run schools.

These editorials confer legitimacy in the most direct sense: indicating that a policy proposal should be selected because it reflects widely held values and preferences. The *New Mexican*'s editorial even elevates it above alternative policy solutions. Legitimizing through editorializing also was carried out by individual columnists, as in this example from a *Philadelphia Inquirer* journalist: “The soda tax is not perfect. But it's where we are now. It's where we have allowed ourselves to get after decades of failed efforts to

rescue collapsing neighborhoods and the hundreds of thousands of Philadelphians slipping into despairing poverty. It's not a radical plan. It's common sense."

Other news organizations and columnists were vocal in the opposite direction. The *Albuquerque Journal* decided that "in the final analysis, the proposed tax is just too high—\$1.44 on a six pack—and extends to ridiculous proportions in some cases. By taxing powdered drink mixes by the liquid volume they can produce, distributors of a \$7 canister of lemonade mix would be taxed nearly \$22. That's sugar being treated like it was meth." The *Journal* characterizes the tax as out of line with accepted social norms—as they see it, treating an everyday product in the way that one might treat illegal drugs. The editorial board of *USA Today* also openly questioned the idea of SSB taxes:

Americans, more than one-third of whom are obese, would be better off if they did cut back on sugary drinks. But efforts to tax people out of the habit are likely to fall flatter than day-old cola. Sugary drinks are 'uniquely harmful.' Opposing view: People are quick to see through ideas described as good for them but which make little sense. Why slap a surtax on sodas but not on Twinkies (135 calories per cake) or McDonalds' Double Quarter Pounder with Cheese (780)?

This editorial view depicts the SSB tax as out of sync with social preferences using the "slippery slope" argument, indicating to readers that they aren't likely to want the government to tax other "bad for you" products that they love, either.

The data from this case study offer dozens of examples of how the news media used the power of opinion in editorials and columns to shape the perceived legitimacy of SSB taxation proposals in Philadelphia and Santa Fe. Just as editorial endorsements can legitimize candidates for office by helping news consumers to identify which candidate is preferred, editorial strategies in the news media helped to portray SSB taxes as socially desirable, legitimate solutions or as illegitimate proposals that conflicted with social values and should be rejected.

Fostering or resolving ambiguity. Fostering or resolving ambiguity is the first of two apparently new strategies that emerged from the thematic analysis. The methodology of this strategy is to cast doubt on a policy proposal, position, or actor—or to counter that doubt by restoring confidence. Fostering ambiguity delegitimizes SSB taxes by implying that they are non-viable policy proposals that are unworthy of preference. Resolving ambiguity legitimizes SSB taxes by dispelling doubts and restoring the impression that they are a legitimate way to achieve policy aims.

Taken together, fostering or resolving ambiguity was the most frequently used legitimizing and delegitimizing strategy in coverage of Philadelphia and Santa Fe, seen in more than 38% of the coded passages that were thematically analyzed. Statements that fostered ambiguity (27.4%) were more common than statements that resolved ambiguity (11.0%), indicating that doubt often went unanswered in news coverage. This example from an *Albuquerque Journal* editorial helps to illustrate a sense of ambiguity:

It's unclear how much the tax, which amounts to around \$1.50 a six-pack, would raise. What happens if the tax doesn't raise enough to ensure the mayor's vow that all families who want their kids in pre-K have a pre-K classroom to go to? Does the tax go even higher than 24 cents a can? Does the list of taxed beverages expand? Do fewer kids get to go? If so, which kids are in and which are out?

These questions go unanswered, leaving a sense of the unknown about whether the SSB taxation measure will work and whether it is worthy of policy preference. The strategy of fostering ambiguity also appears in this *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial, which was published after the Philadelphia city council decided to change the way in which the revenue generated by its SSB tax would be spent:

A funny thing happened on the way to City Council's expected approval of Mayor Kenney's sugary-drinks tax for pre-K: It ceased to be a sugary-drinks tax for pre-K. Granted, the city still means to tax sweetened beverages to pay for more prekindergarten. But officials also plan to use the revenue to cover city

employee benefits, shore up reserves, and pay for a host of other pet projects and causes, the *Inquirer* reported this week.

Here, ambiguity is generated by the notion that the tax approved by the city council is different from the one that had been considered for the last four months. Doubt is cast on the premise that Kenney had been using to sell his tax all along: that it would create a better future for children. The editorial engenders a sense of unease about the motives behind the tax and about the likelihood that it will fulfill its stated purpose.

Fostering ambiguity was not limited to editorial content. News sources used their position in the news media to undermine SSB taxes by sowing doubt. A representative of the staunchly anti-tax Teamsters union gave this statement to Philadelphia's ABC 6: "I don't believe that they believe that there's 2,000 jobs at stake here ... Do we raise taxes to throw people out of the city and companies out of the city?" Similarly, a politician in Santa Fe was cited in the *Albuquerque Journal*: "Councilor Michael Harris called the mayor's proposal 'another aspirational goal' he wasn't sure the city should be taking on. He said the city still has 'trust issues' with the public after an audit found it was unclear precisely how \$2 million of a \$30.3 million parks bond approved by voters in 2008 was spent." Policy positions like these undermine the legitimacy of the SSB taxation proposal by creating ambiguity in the minds of news consumers who might have thought the tax was aligned with social values and preferences, indicating that they may not be correct in their evaluation. Statements from news sources that roil ambiguity can delegitimize by telegraphing that a policy proposal is unlikely to succeed, out of line with social norms, or faulty in other ways that would render it a non-preferred policy solution.

Examples of the strategy of fostering or resolving ambiguity spanned a wide range, but all shared the characteristic of stirring doubt or restoring certainty about how

SSB taxes aligned with broad-based values and preferences—especially the preference for a policy solution that works. This appears to be a distinct approach that is worth consideration alongside the five options outlined in the existing literature.

Association. Legitimizing by association is the second of two strategies identified in the thematic analysis. In this strategy, news sources who might represent an unpopular view seek to associate themselves with other policy actors who occupy a position that is more in line with social values and preferences. For example, the owner of a beverage trucking company never mentions his own profit motive, but rather associates himself with the plight of low-income residents and only makes statements regarding their well-being. Association has the potential to work in three ways: it may deflect accusations of self-interest, it may position policy actors to make arguments that reflect social values, and it may demonstrate that more than one social group supports a policy position, highlighting the link between aggregation and legitimacy proposed by Koopmans (2004).

Association was not an especially prevalent strategy in this case study. There were 48 instances, representing 5.5% of the coded passages that were thematically analyzed. This passage from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* offers an example:

The American Beverage Association, a trade association representing America's nonalcoholic beverage industry, has disputed the notion that raising taxes on soda could reduce consumption, saying the higher prices would harm local businesses and burden low-income consumers. "The soda tax is an old idea that has been rejected in the past for good reason," ABA spokeswoman Lauren Kane said in a statement Sunday afternoon. "Philadelphians have been burdened year after year with tax increases, and a new tax on soda would just be another tax on hardworking Philadelphia residents and neighborhood businesses."

The industry group does not mention its own interests; it only focuses on small businesses and low-income residents. Readers might see through this transparent approach, but this news source at least tries to associate herself with the more socially

acceptable plight of others. This tactic was common among anti-tax news sources, who recognized that small businesses and individual households occupied an arguing position that better reflected social values than the bottom lines of large corporations. Politicians, industry representatives, and advocacy groups sought to legitimize their policy positions in the news media by associating themselves with households and retailers, so much so that a Santa Fe resident called out the practice in the *New Mexican*:

Let me wax a bit sarcastic—how heartwarming it is to see so many business interests (such as the Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce) suddenly concerned about the poor in our city, calling the soda tax regressive and condemning how hard it is for lower-income people to make ends meet. Those business interests could show their concern by pushing for a higher minimum wage, or by persuading the soda distributors not to raise prices.

In another example from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Harold Honickman, the region's largest beverage distributor, makes no mention of his own interests in the SSB taxation debate and instead speaks for Philadelphia's low-income community:

Honickman sees Kenney's soda tax hurting residents like those the learning center serves, people who own corner stores or who don't have the means to travel for groceries. "It's a tax against the poor," Honickman said. "It's a regressive tax. The only people you're hurting on this tax are the poor people of Philadelphia, the people who make a living off running a little bodega."

It is undeniable that the SSB tax could have a dramatic negative potential impact on Honickman's own business, but Honickman takes a position that is more aligned with social values, and therefore potentially more legitimate.

Overall, association represented a strategy that more powerful policy actors used in the news media to cloak their policy interests in social values that were far more likely to resonate with news consumers as they worked to establish their own policy preference. What cannot be discerned from the data is whether journalists consciously allowed news

sources to pursue this strategy in news coverage, and if so, how often they pressed news sources to tease out their self-interest in the policy issue.

Comparisons Related to the Seven Strategies

To answer the second research question of this dissertation—whether there are any conditions in which certain legitimizing strategies are more likely to be used in policy debate—chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the proportion of the seven strategies in news reports versus opinion pieces and across time, before and after the fate of a policy proposal is decided. Results of these analyses are reported below.

Legitimizing strategies in news reports versus opinion pieces. Chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the presence of legitimizing strategies across three types of news content: reported stories, editorials and columns, and op-eds. This analysis helps to separate what journalists do from what outside actors do in the news media. The results, reported in Table 14, show that the strategy of structuring policy positions within stories was more prevalent in news reports than in opinion pieces, indicating journalists' responsibility for the story-construction function. The other statistically significant effects are unsurprising: that editorializing occurs almost entirely in the context of editorials and barely at all in news reports. This reflects the journalistic norm that members of the press should confine expressions of their own views to the opinion pages.

Legitimizing strategies before and after a policy proposal is decided. Chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the use of legitimizing strategies in Time 1, the period from the initial announcement of the SSB taxation proposal to the date when it was approved or rejected, and Time 2, the period of six months after the decision was made. The results, reported in Table 15, show few differences across the news media as a

whole from Time 1 to Time 2. A statistically significant difference was seen in the use of the strategy of structuring policy positions within stories, which was higher in Time 1 (26.4%) than Time 2 (15.0%). In addition, the strategy of using evidence to delegitimize was slightly more prevalent in Time 2 (14.4%) than Time 1 (8.2%).

To probe these findings, an additional chi-square analysis was conducted in which Time 1 and Time 2 data were broken out by media geography: Philadelphia local news, Santa Fe local news, and national news. The results are summarized in Table 16. This analysis reveals that the more intensive use of evidence to delegitimize in Time 2 owes largely to Philadelphia, where a court challenge to the SSB taxation measure took place during that time. The tax continued to be debated during this time period, but on different grounds: the conversation shifted from a question of social good versus social cost to a question of constitutionality or legality. Therefore, it stands to reason that policy actors in Philadelphia continued to seek to legitimize or delegitimize the tax in Time 2, whereas in Santa Fe, the real debate was over at the conclusion of Time 1.

The reason behind the general lack of significant differences between Time 1 and Time 2 cannot be discerned with certainty, but one hypothesis is that the time periods chosen may not have been long enough to capture shifts in legitimizing strategies. The debate over SSB taxation certainly lasted beyond the time frame defined for this study, particularly in Philadelphia, where a public conversation has raged on since the measure went into effect in January 2017. Opponents are still making claims in the news media about the harm that has befallen Philadelphia businesses and household budgets. The beverage industry continues to lobby aggressively against the tax, and a city council member introduced a bill on March 14, 2019, to gradually phase it out by 2021 (Briggs &

Blumgart, 2019). Given that Philadelphians are still debating—in the city council and in the news media—whether this policy is the preferred option, it would be possible to extend this study past the six-month period post-approval to determine whether legitimizing strategies are seen in different proportion over a longer time horizon. Of course, this comparison would not be possible for Santa Fe, where the topic largely disappeared from the news media after the tax was defeated by a vote.

Summary

The analyses reported throughout this chapter demonstrate that the news media served as active moderators of the policy debate over SSB taxation in Philadelphia and Santa Fe. They performed the representation, information, and engagement functions in ways that reflect the literature on these key functions, and they played a complex role in legitimizing and delegitimizing policy proposals, positions, and actors. This study found evidence of five legitimizing functions in the news media that have been discussed in prior literature—using evidence, structuring policy positions in stories, endorsement from elites, fact-checking, and editorializing—and points to the possible existence of two other strategies: fostering and resolving ambiguity, and associating with others whose policy stances better reflect social values and preferences. The next chapter examines the role that journalists play in the execution of these seven strategies, especially what they do versus what news sources do to legitimize and delegitimize.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter reviews what we can learn from the case study of Philadelphia and Santa Fe about the strategies used to confer or diminish legitimacy in the context of news coverage. It places those strategies in one or both of two broad groups: (1) strategies that news sources are given the opportunity to utilize by journalists in their capacity as gatekeepers, and (2) strategies that journalists execute outside of their gatekeeping role.

Legitimacy, the News Media, and Policy Debate

Our present-day understanding of how the news media function as moderators of policy debate—deciding not only what information is introduced to educate the public on policy matters, but also who is represented, how people are engaged, and which proposals are legitimized as widely preferred—compels us to learn more about how the news media help to orchestrate the public deliberation of policy. The policy conversation facilitated by the news media is certainly not the only one, as debates take place in policy settings and other venues, but it is an important one. It also provides a compelling and illustrative example of the tension between objectivity and activism in journalism. As moderators of policy debate, journalists make decisions that require them to balance their occupational ideology, which prizes fairness and objectivity in the service of the public (Deuze, 2005), with factors such as their own ideas of which policies are best (Donsbach, 2004; Peiser, 2000) and their power to shape policymaking processes (Strömbäck, 2005).

We need to better understand the legitimacy function of the news media with regard to the techniques used and their potential impact. Of the four functions of policy debate examined in this study, legitimacy offers the strongest conceptual link between policy deliberation and policy selection. This social construct captures the favor or

esteem accorded to policy proposals that resonate with social values and preferences (Suchman, 1995), a property that increases the likelihood that they will be selected and move toward implementation. Knowing what journalists do to move the levers of the legitimacy function, whether consciously or unconsciously, is crucial to understanding how the news media can help to determine policy preference.

As noted in Chapter 2, scholars have begun to connect the construct of legitimacy to activity in the news media, providing insight into specific techniques used to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors. To date, however, we have not had a full picture of those strategies or a comprehensive understanding of the role that journalists play in their execution.

This dissertation takes an initial step toward filling that gap by synthesizing the findings from the case study of news coverage of the deliberation of SSB tax proposals in Philadelphia and Santa Fe. In this chapter, two broad categories of legitimizing strategies are explored: those that news sources pursue with permission from journalists acting as gatekeepers, and those that journalists enact outside of the gatekeeping function. These two categories, and the degree of overlap between them, are discussed in the next section.

Legitimacy in the News Media: Source-Driven and Journalist-Driven

The analysis of news coverage of the policy debate in Philadelphia and Santa Fe yielded evidence of seven strategies that were used in the news media to legitimize and delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors. Existing literature looked into five of these strategies: using evidence, structuring policy positions within stories, endorsement from elites, fact-checking, and editorializing. Two additional apparent strategies emerged from an open-ended thematic analysis conducted as part of this research: fostering or

resolving ambiguity (creating a sense of doubt or restoring a sense of confidence) and association (in which policy actors attempt to portray their views as legitimate by allying themselves with the cause of others).

Table 17 divides these legitimizing strategies into groups based on the type of activity undertaken by journalists. In the first category, news sources seek to confer or diminish legitimacy, and journalists act as gatekeepers who admit these legitimizing statements into news coverage. In the second category, the journalistic practices involved lie outside the boundaries of gatekeeping. One strategy, using evidence, spans both categories, as it can be driven by sources in some cases and by journalists in others.

The sections below review the case study findings from Philadelphia and Santa Fe in light of these categories, which provide insight into how policy proposals, positions, or actors are legitimized or delegitimized and into journalists' involvement in each case.

Source-Driven Legitimizing Strategies

The strategies of using evidence, fostering or restoring ambiguity, endorsement from elites, and legitimacy by association share the characteristic of being utilized by sources in the news media. News sources can employ these techniques to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, and actors; journalists, acting as gatekeepers, decide whether to include or exclude sources' legitimizing or delegitimizing statements. Data analyzed in the case study of Philadelphia and Santa Fe capture only the strategies pursued by sources that journalists *did* include. This section considers how news sources utilized legitimizing strategies in news coverage in this case study, beginning with a strategy that is shared across both categories: using evidence.

Using evidence. In this case study, news sources actively introduced evidence to legitimize and delegitimize. As described in Chapter 4, evidence to legitimize is distinct from evidence to inform: specifically, evidence has legitimizing power when it is used to prove the assertion that SSB taxes are a viable, preferred policy approach that aligns with social values. Journalists cited or quoted SSB tax proponents who proffered reports from Mexico and Berkeley showing the salutary effects of these policies on government revenue, population-level obesity, and the economy. Journalists also allowed opponents to offer contradictory evidence—especially predictive studies—that forecast job loss, underwhelming impacts on public health, and shortfalls in anticipated tax revenues. Here, journalists as gatekeepers gave news sources the opportunity to introduce evidence that portrayed SSB taxes as either successful and beneficial in ways that aligned with social preferences, or as unsuccessful and harmful in ways that conflicted with them.

Opinion polls or surveys are common forms of evidence used to legitimize or delegitimize, as noted in Chapter 2. Even if their methodology is flawed, they serve as explicit measurements of the will of the people (Fishkin, 1995) and thereby demonstrate the extent to which a policy resonates with social preferences. In this case study, the news media's use of poll data as evidence was driven primarily by the action of news sources. The news organizations in this study did not conduct surveys or polls themselves, but rather published the results of polls supplied by the government, independent research firms, and the soda industry. Journalists also selected material offered by news sources that were not surveys per se, but that nonetheless provided legitimizing or delegitimizing evidence. For example, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* cited an advocacy group's estimate that "75 businesses—including nearly two dozen Santa Fe restaurants—have signed on to

publicly support [the tax]” and “more than 3,000 Santa Fe residents and 45 community organizations have joined them.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* quoted an American Beverage Association statement that “more than 30,000 Philadelphians and more than 1,600 businesses and local organizations have joined together” against the tax. These quantifications provided by news sources and selected for inclusion by journalists play a legitimizing or delegitimizing role by illustrating, respectively, how collective social preference is aligning for or against SSB taxes.

Fostering or resolving ambiguity. The principle of ambiguity can play a central role in how legitimacy is conferred or diminished. Given how legitimacy is defined in this study—as a collective judgment of the degree to which a policy proposal, position, or actor reflects social values and preferences (Koopmans, 2004; Suchman, 1995)—people need some degree of certainty in order to render that judgment. Citizens who feel assured that a policy proposal reflects their values and will succeed in achieving goals they desire are likely to ascribe legitimacy to it (Wallner, 2008); conversely, citizens who lack that assurance may feel uncomfortable rendering a judgment or may default to a skeptical view. Based on this logic, a strategy to delegitimize a policy proposal is to foster a sense of ambiguity. Restoring a sense of certainty is its legitimizing inverse.

The case study of Philadelphia and Santa Fe offers many examples in which journalists made it possible for news sources to undermine or bolster the legitimacy of SSB taxes by fostering or resolving ambiguity. Journalists selected statements from sources that cast doubt on whether SSB taxes would generate revenue for the programs they were designed to fund, whether they would truly bring about social benefits, and whether they mirrored social values such as protecting low-income residents and small

businesses. Journalists also selected statements from pro-tax advocates who sought to quell these doubts and restore confidence in SSB taxes as viable policy proposals that merited widespread policy preference.

Some statements from news sources that generated ambiguity did so in a direct way, such as this restaurant industry association leader's perspective in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*: "Not only is this the highest tax ever introduced, but it wasn't very well thought out, either ... the administration needs to think about this and slow down and consider other alternatives rather than pushing through a tax they don't even understand." This source's comment seeds the idea among news consumers that they should feel uncertain about the SSB tax, and it gives the impression that another policy solution might be out there that merits policy preference. Journalists selected statements from news sources that were more oblique in approach than the example above but that still questioned whether SSB taxes were the preferred policy option, as when a Philadelphia city council member told the *Inquirer*: "Nobody knows until it happens ... But I think the logic behind it is, the more you tax something, the less people use it." Journalists permitted news sources to stake out policy positions such as these, which suggested to readers that the SSB tax would fail to deliver on socially valuable goals, creating an uncomfortable sense of the unknown that could erode legitimacy.

Endorsement from elites. A third strategy that journalists allowed news sources to use to legitimize and delegitimize policy positions is endorsement from external elites. Because legitimacy is brought into being by the collective judgment of a group of people (Suchman, 1995), it can be won and lost as news consumers learn who endorses a policy

proposal and why. Research indicates that elite actors hold greater weight in their endorsements than garden-variety policy actors (Reich, 2008; Yoon, 2005).

As gatekeepers, journalists have the opportunity allow elite actors to use the news media as a platform for their endorsement or rejection of policies. Editors can give elites this platform by publishing their op-ed pieces; reporters can give elites room to speak by choosing their statements for inclusion in reported stories. The journalists who moderated the policy debate over SSB taxes in Philadelphia and Santa Fe did both. For example, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* published an op-ed from then-presidential candidate Bernie Sanders about the SSB tax proposal, and it reported several stories that revolved around opinions from Sanders and his 2016 primary opponent, Hillary Clinton. These high-profile politicians, though not part of the Philadelphia community, were chosen by journalists to provide their take on how well Philadelphia's proposed SSB tax reflected commonly held values and preferences. Sanders repeatedly delegitimized the tax by saying that it would place an undue burden on lower-income residents, an outcome that is mismatched with the social value of protecting those who are less fortunate. Clinton legitimized the tax through her belief that the educational benefits it would fund were in sync with the American principle of improving opportunities for children, regardless of their socioeconomic background. In choosing to put Sanders' and Clinton's perspectives front and center, journalists as gatekeepers gave these political players a chance to erode or bolster the legitimacy of SSB taxes.

Journalists in this case study did not extensively incorporate endorsements from elites, as illustrated in Table 13. Only a handful of high-profile actors made it through the "gates" to endorse or reject the tax measures, among them former Pennsylvania governor

Ed Rendell and former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg. As a result, the endorsement of external elites played a minor role in legitimizing or delegitimizing SSB taxation. It should be recalled that this assessment is predicated on the notion of elites as outside actors who are not part of the proposal, passage, or implementation of the policy proposal in question. Clinton, Sanders, Bloomberg, Rendell, and others were “known quantities” from outside the community whom the news media selected to either lend or withhold their endorsement of the tax, perhaps acting as a barometer for citizens who were working to determine whether the proposed SSB taxes reflected their social values and policy preferences. Policy positions from these external actors may be useful guides for certain news consumers. For example, someone who supports Sanders and learns that he rejects SSB taxes may then see the taxes as in conflict with his or her own values.

Association. The strategy of association is the fourth approach that news sources use with permission from journalist gatekeepers in an effort to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors. In this strategy, news sources use the platform of the news media to ally themselves with the cause or plight of other groups. Journalists allow news sources to pursue this strategy by selecting quotes that reflect this approach and presenting them to news audiences.

In this case study, legitimacy by association was a strategy that flowed almost exclusively in one direction. Certain policy actors—among them politicians, the beverage industry, and well-funded advocacy groups—held policy positions that may have been out of alignment with widely held social preferences. It would have flown in the face of accepted social values, for example, for Santa Fe’s leading Coca-Cola bottler to come out and say that she opposed SSB taxes because the measure would diminish her personal

profits. News sources who represented privileged segments of society appeared to recognize that they could better delegitimize SSB taxes by associating themselves with cash-strapped consumers and family-run corner stores than they could by championing their own cause. Thus, some of them offered policy positions in the news media that adopted the position of others, especially small businesses and low-income residents.

Journalists selected at least some of those statements for inclusion, based on the findings of this study. News sources were therefore able to stake out a less self-serving position in the news media, instead adding to the chorus of voices saying that SSB taxes would place a burden on those who were least equipped to bear it. These news sources associated themselves with actors who had a more normatively acceptable argument to make than they did. This finding warrants additional research into how conscious or unconscious journalists were of news sources' use of this legitimizing technique: whether they were unaware, or whether they understood what these sources were trying to do and elected to include their statements anyway.

Journalist-Driven Legitimizing Strategies

The previous section captures legitimizing strategies that news sources pursue in the context of news coverage of a contentious issue. In these cases, news sources do the primary work of legitimizing or delegitimizing, and journalists' role is to admit them to the policy conversation or screen them out (though of course, in this content analysis, we can only discern who and what was admitted). This section looks at four strategies that journalists can pursue independently of news sources: using evidence, structuring policy positions within stories, fact-checking, and editorializing. If source-driven legitimizing strategies represent approaches in which journalists' central role is gatekeeping, the

journalist-driven legitimizing strategies addressed in this section represent activities that go beyond gatekeeping at least in some way.

Using evidence. Using evidence is a legitimizing strategy that spans both categories: source-driven and journalist-driven. This is because not all evidence comes to journalists in the hands of sources. Rather, journalists make independent efforts to find and present policy-relevant evidence to news consumers. In a study of health and science journalists, Gesualdo, Weber, and Yanovitzky (2019) found that reporters encountered policy-relevant evidence not only through passive reception from sources but also via active search. Journalists who were interviewed talked about making regular visits to the websites of universities, academic journals, or government agencies to see what evidence was available; subscribing to research newsletters that connected them with new findings related to their beats; and searching scholarly and government databases to unearth useful evidence. These practices indicate that journalists engage in concerted efforts to acquire evidence, which may be able to legitimize or delegitimize if it points to connections or discrepancies between a policy proposal and social values and preferences.

Whether evidence is derived from news sources or from independent action on the part of journalists, the use of evidence to legitimize or delegitimize entails an active conception of the news media's role in policy debate (Boswell, 2014; Yanovitzky & Weber, 2019). Journalists may seek out pieces of evidence that play a part in helping news consumers to understand how well a policy proposal matches with their values and preferences. Evidence used to legitimize or delegitimize can depict a policy proposal as worthy or unworthy of selection, indicating the power of journalists' evidence use. In this case study, journalists had to consider industry-sponsored evidence that forecasted effects

on employment, academic studies that looked at public health outcomes, and government evidence that foretold the potential impact on preschool education. Although some of this evidence was clearly provided through the efforts of news sources, as indicated by quotes or specific attribution, other legitimizing evidence was offered without attribution, which may indicate that it was derived from journalists' own searches for corroborating material (though this cannot be conclusively proven using the available data).

Structuring policy positions within stories. As noted in Chapter 4, the strategy of structuring policy positions within stories involves an element of journalistic practice that goes beyond gatekeeping. Here, it is not the policy positions included in stories that help to confer or deny legitimacy, but how they are arranged. Structuring pieces of news content within an article to tell a story is a standard element of journalistic practice (White, 2000; Zelizer, 1993). In coverage of contentious issues, journalists choose the order in which policy positions appear, providing rebuttals for some and deciding which others will “have the last word,” sometimes leaving a lingering impression that a policy either resonates or does not resonate with social values and preferences. This passage from the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, which covered Philadelphia's experience with the SSB taxation issue as an instructive case for its own readership, offers an example. The journalist first summarizes some key anti-tax arguments from industry:

Some supermarkets and distributors in Philadelphia say soda consumption has dropped between 30 percent and 50 percent since the tax went into place there in January, forcing them to consider layoffs, according to news reports. PepsiCo announced last week it would lay off 80 to 100 workers, about a quarter of its staff at its Philadelphia-area distribution plants, because of the slumping sales.

He immediately follows this industry statement, however, with the perspective of a Philadelphia city government official:

“The soda industry sunk to a new low today,” Lauren Hitt, a city spokeswoman, told *The Philadelphia Inquirer* ... Pepsi reported nearly \$35 billion in gross income and \$6 billion in profit last year. The idea that they can afford to do that but ‘must lay off workers’ should make every Philadelphian very skeptical of whether these layoffs are actually due to the tax.”

The structuring of these two statements undermines the industry’s initial attempt to delegitimize the SSB tax by portraying it as out of sync with the social preferences of job creation and a healthy economy. The journalist’s choice to arrange the policy positions in this way at least maintains, and possibly bolsters, the legitimacy of the SSB tax measure. Story-construction decisions like this one go beyond conceptions of gatekeeping, which focus on choices journalists make about “what is in and what is out” and point to the fact that journalists can pull the levers of legitimacy via finer-grained decisions about story construction. Examples of this strategy indicate that news sources need to do more than simply making it “past the gates” and into a story, as journalists have additional control over how their statements will be presented to news audiences.

Fact-checking. Journalists in this case study occasionally pursued the “strategic ritual” of fact-checking (Shapiro et al., 2013) to warn news consumers away from policy positions or actors that lacked credibility and, by extension, suffered from threats to their legitimacy (Heink et al., 2015). By fact-checking statements that policy actors make and holding them accountable (Graves et al., 2016), journalists can uncover policy actors who are acting in bad faith to give the public an inaccurate impression of a policy proposal’s desirability or potential effectiveness. This represents a decisive, concerted action on the part of journalists, even though it reflects only a small fraction of the legitimizing and delegitimizing strategies observed in this case study.

Whether and when journalists decide to conduct an overt fact-check cannot be discerned by the coverage from Philadelphia and Santa Fe alone, but there are examples in the data of instances in which journalists both did and did not elect to call out factual inaccuracies. For instance, in some cases the *Santa Fe New Mexican* aggressively took on claims made in the TV commercials and promotional mailers created by Santa Fe’s publicity-savvy advocacy groups, identifying and disproving false or unsubstantiated statements. The *New Mexican* called out a pro-tax group’s tactic to make the SSB tax look more socially desirable by saying that the tax would cost people “2 cents” rather than “2 cents per ounce,” and it uncovered an anti-tax group’s effort to depict the SSB tax as a socially undesirable policy option by couching it as the latest in a string of other recent rate hikes that Santa Fe city government was said to have implemented—though the city was responsible for none of those increases. In these cases, the *New Mexican* called out policy actors who appeared to be intentionally manipulating facts to show that the SSB taxation measure aligned or fail to align with social values and preferences; the newspaper’s efforts indicated to readers to disregard these efforts to increase or diminish the policy’s legitimacy. By contrast, journalists at the *New Mexican* opted not to execute the fact-checking function at other moments. For instance, the newspaper allowed the publication of an op-ed in which a Santa Fe citizen wrote:

In Philadelphia, sales of such soda drinks in the city dropped 50 percent. Thus, funding for the projects to be supported by the tax was cut in half, which made many of the projects insolvent. This is likely to happen here. Secondly, as a result of the loss of sales in Philadelphia, several hundred workers lost their jobs in bottling companies, delivery trucks and retailers. That would likely happen here and Santa Fe cannot avoid the loss of any jobs.

Although no data had emerged from Philadelphia to corroborate the statements this writer made, and although there were conflicting reports about how many jobs lost in

Philadelphia were attributable to that city's SSB tax, the *New Mexican* ran this op-ed without a fact-check on its claims, either in that day's opinion section or in news reports published at the time. Examples such as this one show that fact-checking is a legitimizing or delegitimizing strategy that is available to journalists, but more information is needed about how and when reporters and editors decide that this kind of treatment is warranted.

Editorializing. Editorializing is perhaps the most classically direct strategy that journalists can use to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, or actors. Recalling the definition of legitimacy as a collective judgment of alignment with social values and preferences (Koopmans, 2004; Suchman, 1995), the news media can serve as a gauge of this alignment, should journalists make the decision to take a stand in this regard. The viewpoints provided by editorial boards and columnists can contribute to the collective judgment for or against a policy proposal, a key determinant of legitimacy. For news consumers who place their trust in specific news organizations—and that can be a big “if” (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003)—the judgment of news media institutions can carry particular weight. Previous research has shown that endorsements can contribute to the legitimacy of candidates for political office (Cook, 2006; Lieske, 1989); news media endorsements of specific policy proposals can function in much the same way.

Journalists who moderated the policy debate over SSB taxes in Philadelphia and Santa Fe weighed in at the institutional level and the individual journalist level. The editorial boards of all the daily newspapers in this case study took a stand on the issue. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* gave its endorsement, albeit with a “this is the best we can do” caveat. The two major Santa Fe daily newspapers were split: the *Albuquerque Journal* came out against, siding with those who called the SSB taxation measure a regressive

policy that would harm consumer spending power and the economy, while the *New Mexican* landed strongly in favor. Even some national newspapers and their columnists expressed a stance on SSB taxation in either Philadelphia or Santa Fe. Several *New York Times* writers touted Philadelphia's SSB tax proposal as an avenue toward the socially valued goal of improving public health, despite the fact that the Philadelphia city government doggedly maintained its focus on the measure as an approach to better early childhood education. *The Wall Street Journal* railed against the Santa Fe SSB tax the day after residents there shot it down in a landslide vote, disparaging the measure as the city government "telling people how to run their lives" and noting acidly that "most commoners would rather decide for themselves"—clearly indicating the editorial board's belief that the tax was out of line with the social value of individual choice. The effect of the *Journal's* editorial was so significant that the *Santa Fe New Mexican* wrote a story about its publication the next day, summarizing its main points for a local audience.

Overall, the strategy of editorializing is the most explicit, unambiguous way in which journalists in this case study became involved in legitimizing or delegitimizing policy proposals, positions, or actors. In the confines of a type of news content where they were permitted to express an opinion (Hynds, 1984), journalists made clear the ways in which they viewed Philadelphia and Santa Fe's proposed SSB taxes as aligned or misaligned with social values and preferences. Especially for people who trust the news media and look to journalists to take the temperature of policy issues, these expressions of legitimacy or illegitimacy could have a special form of relevance.

Summary

In proposing two broad classes of legitimizing strategies—those driven by news sources and those driven by journalists—this dissertation seeks to provide insight into what journalists actually do to legitimize and delegitimize policy proposals, positions, and actors. The results of this case study illustrate how certain legitimizing strategies are tied to the journalistic practice of gatekeeping: news sources strive to legitimize or delegitimize in an effort to achieve policy aims, and journalists give them access to the platform of the news media to do so. Other legitimizing strategies are executed more directly by journalists in roles that they play beyond gatekeeping: actively seeking and presenting evidence that legitimizes by demonstrating alignment with social values and practices (or that delegitimizes by doing the opposite); making choices about how policy positions are arranged within stories; fact-checking statements to clarify for news audiences whether policy positions accurately portray the resonance or lack of resonance with social values and preferences; and openly taking an editorial stance on these matters. Additional examples of all of these strategies are provided in Appendix A.

As the conception of the news media's involvement in policy debate continues to evolve away from the idea that they primarily serve as a conduit of policy-relevant information and toward the idea that they actively moderate multiple dynamics of the conversation, it is important to understand the full scope of the strategies available to the news media to legitimize and delegitimize—and where news sources and their appeals to journalists come into play in the process. Given the theoretical connection between legitimacy and the collective determination of policy preference, legitimacy may be a

powerful lever in determining policy outcomes, suggesting that further research is needed to identify new approaches to quantifying the news media's impact.

Contributions

The primary contribution of this study is a more fully explicated account of how the legitimacy function plays out in policy debates moderated by the news media. This section addresses the implications of this study's findings for theory and practice.

This research contributes to theory about policy deliberation by providing one of the first comprehensive pictures of the strategies used to legitimize or delegitimize policy proposals, positions, and actors in the news media. Existing literature has traced valuable threads to uncover certain legitimizing strategies: using evidence (Yanovitzky & Weber, 2019), structuring policy positions in stories (Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Baden, 2016), endorsement from elites (Reich, 2008; Yoon, 2005), fact-checking (Graves et al., 2016; Heink et al., 2015), and editorializing (Lule, 2002; Ryan, 2004). This research brings together these previously disconnected strategies, introduces two new ones that emerged from a qualitative analysis of news media content, and proposes a two-part classification to distinguish legitimizing strategies that news sources pursue in media coverage (aided by journalists as gatekeepers) from strategies that journalists execute more directly. It is hoped that this study will spark further inquiry into the legitimacy function so that the news media's role in moving this lever of policy debate will one day be as thoroughly researched and understood as their role in representation, information, and engagement.

Practical implications of this research exist for issue advocates, who may derive useful lessons from the source-driven legitimizing strategies identified earlier in this chapter. Advocacy organizations may be interested in developing a greater understanding

of the notion of legitimacy as the alignment of policy proposals, positions, and actors with widely held social values and preferences; evaluating their public and media relations approaches against this yardstick may increase the likelihood that their views will resonate with news audiences. The findings of this case study also can be interpreted within the media advocacy model of framing, which distinguishes framing for attention, i.e., garnering attention from the press, from framing for content, in which advocates seek to use the media to underscore a preferred policy solution. The notion of legitimacy in the news emphasizes the idea that getting the chance to speak in the press is a necessary but not sufficient condition for issue advocates, who also must get journalists to incorporate their views in ways that allow them to make the case for the policy solution they favor.

Practical implications for journalists may vary based on their orientation toward interventionism (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, & Lauerer, 2016). Journalists and news organizations that strive to fulfill the objectivity norm may derive value from understanding the source-driven legitimizing strategies that issue advocates and others may attempt to use to advance policy proposals or positions, so that such strategies can be counterbalanced with positions that represent alternative viewpoints (or screened from news content entirely). Journalists and news organizations that perceive their role less as disseminator of information and more as mobilizer of the people toward specific political goals (Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2013), seeking to shape the outcome of the policy process through their coverage, may be interested in how to leverage some of the source-driven strategies and how to best exercise the legitimizing power of journalist-driven strategies. Questions of intentionality represent a frontier of new research related to the legitimacy function, especially as studies continue to assess the level of purpose with

which journalists go about their work and the degree to which journalists' conceptions of their professional roles are reflected in the coverage they produce (Hinnant, Jenkins, & Subramanian, 2016; Mellado, 2015; Tandoc et al., 2013).

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations to this research. First, this dissertation examines the dynamics of policy debate only in the news media, which is not the sole venue in which policies are deliberated, and potentially not the most important one in the decision-making process on any given issue. Policy debate takes place in public hearings, in the closed offices of elected leaders, among lobbyists hired by influential institutions, and elsewhere. The legitimacy gained and lost in the news media may be more or less consequential to policymaking outcomes depending on the circumstances. That said, this study does provide insight into the legitimizing strategies that are used in the news media, whose form of policy debate remains one of the most public and most accessible.

Legitimacy is a construct that remains relatively challenging to define and apply. In some respects, this lack of clarity contributed to limitations of this research. The effort to capture all passages in news content where legitimacy was bolstered or diminished—taking as broad a view as possible to produce the most robust pool of news content for thematic analysis—led to what coders perceived as a lack of precision in the coding instrument, in turn leading to intercoder reliability that failed to meet accepted standards. In addition, reliability was calculated in aggregate for a sample of policy positions rather than separately for every variable in the study. Once the coding instrument is improved to improve its precision, coding should be repeated, and a distinct reliability value should be calculated for each variable. One change to the coding instrument to improve precision is

that the seven legitimizing and delegitimizing strategies identified in this study can be incorporated, along with examples of how to recognize them in the news. Provisions also can be made in the coding instrument to distinguish the actions of news sources from the actions of journalists themselves. This differentiation was achieved in this study via after-the-fact analyses, but future research can accomplish it in the data-collection stage. This improvement would be applicable not only to the coding of legitimacy, but to the coding of the representation, information, and engagement functions as well.

From a research perspective, an important next step is to begin speaking with journalists about *how* and *why* the legitimizing strategies in this study make their way into news coverage. This study raises intriguing questions, for example, about whether journalists consciously or unconsciously permit news sources to pursue the “source-driven” legitimizing strategies identified here. It also brings up the issue of how aware journalists are of the construct of legitimacy itself—the degree of alignment with social values and preferences, and the power that may hold in determining policy preference—and of their potential role in conferring or diminishing it. Further, this study prompts an examination of the degree to which journalists envision their involvement in the four functions of policy debate as part of (or in conflict with) their professional role, and whether legitimizing and delegitimizing are more or less central to their conception of their role than representing, informing, or engaging. Findings from interview studies of this type would help to expand our understanding of not only what the news media do as moderators of policy debate, but to what extent and why.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This dissertation sought to enhance our understanding of how policy proposals, positions, and actors are legitimized and delegitimized in the news media. It looked for evidence of legitimization and delegitimization in a case study of news coverage of a contentious policy debate, explicated seven specific strategies that can bolster or erode legitimacy, and examined how some of these strategies are driven by news sources while others are driven by journalists.

As in the legal arena, where judges act as moderators who determine who can say what and who speaks in what order, journalists act as moderators of the policy debate that plays out in their news coverage. They decide which policy views are represented in the conversation and who has the chance to express them. They determine what people need to know about policy topics, introducing information about the policy problem and the proposed solution. To the extent that they are interested and comfortable, they work to engage audiences with policy issues, showing people how a policy problem and its proposed solution affect their lives and lighting a path to greater involvement. Through the execution of the legitimacy function, the news media also help to determine which policy solutions are shown to reflect social values and preferences and which are not.

This research represents an initial effort, if small, to start a deeper conversation about how the legitimacy function plays out in news media coverage of a policy debate. Individual pieces of literature have pointed to certain elements of news content where legitimacy is conferred or taken away; this study adds to this previous work by offering a holistic examination of legitimizing techniques. Ideally, it will provide a point of departure for further exploration of what journalists permit news sources to do that can

legitimize or delegitimize, how journalists contribute through other aspects of their news routines and practices, and whether legitimizing strategies are utilized by each group consciously or subconsciously.

It is clear that the “arena” model of the news media that was popular in the early 1970s has been eclipsed by the idea that the news media actively moderate policy debate. These moderating activities are informed by journalistic norms, news values, and the day-to-day practices and constraints of the profession. This study demonstrates the need for further investigation into how journalists’ actions may shape the legitimacy of policy proposals and positions and how this contributes to the generation of productive, effective policy deliberation in present-day society.

Table 1

Returned vs. Relevant News Items

	Returned	Relevant	Relevant %
Local news media			
Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News	299	141	47.1%
Philadelphia Magazine	60	48	80.0%
Philadelphia ABC 6	275	20	7.2%
Philadelphia CBS 3	158	52	32.9%
Albuquerque Journal	368	46	12.5%
Santa Fe New Mexican	209	122	58.4%
Santa Fe Reporter	35	15	42.9%
Santa Fe ABC 7	356	14	3.93%
Santa Fe CBS 13	108	12	11.1%
National news media			
New York Times	98	22	22.4%
Wall Street Journal	17	10	58.8%
USA Today	146	14	9.59%
ABC World News Tonight	138	0	0.0%
CBS Evening News	24	5	20.8%
Fox News	15	2	13.3%
NBC Nightly News	46	5	10.9%
Total	2,352	528	22.4%

Note. Searches were run on the websites of each individual news outlet, backed up by database searches in Access World News, Factiva, or ProQuest.

Table 2

Codes Relevant to Each Function of Policy Debate

Function	Relevant Codes
Information	Awareness Evidence: Empirical Evidence: Narrative/Anecdotal Policy Position Function: Objective Status of Problem Policy Position Function: Cause of Problem Accessibility Evidence: Direct Link to Data Evidence: Presentation in Chart, Graph, Map Evidence: Explanation or Contextualization
Representation	Policy Position Valence Policy Position Supplier Policy Position Frame
Legitimacy	Policy Position Function: Suggests Tax is the Solution Policy Position Function: Suggests Tax is Not the Solution Policy Position Function: Suggests Alternative Response Support for Policy Position (General) Questioning of Policy Position (General)
Engagement	Policy Position Frame Policy Position Function: Predicts Consequences of Tax Policy Position Function: Predicts Consequences Without Tax Policy Position Function: Assigns Responsibility for Problem Relevance: Problem Frame Relevance: Impact on Individual Relevance: Impact on Community Relevance: Other Mobilization: Direct Encouragement to Act Mobilization: Quoted Encouragement to Act Mobilization: Information About Opportunity to Act Mobilization: Open-Ended

Table 3

Representation of Policy Positions in the News Media

	% of Policy Positions (<i>n</i> = 1,200)	% of all Coded Content (<i>n</i> = 2,921)
Policy Positions	100.0%	41.2%
Policy Position Valence		
Pro-Tax	47.6%	19.6%
Anti-Tax	55.9%	21.7%
Policy Position Frame		
Educational Benefit	33.2%	13.8%
Public Health	19.0%	7.9%
Social Cost	35.2%	14.5%
Large Industry	10.2%	4.2%
Small Business	13.1%	5.4%
Household Finances	14.5%	6.0%
Low-Inc. Residents	13.25%	5.5%
Individual Choice	7.2%	3.0%
Outside Intervention	5.9%	2.5%
Partisanship	1.5%	0.7%
Other	14.6%	6.0%
Policy Position Supplier		
Politician	25.4%	4.6%
Government Official	4.3%	5.8%
Researcher	2.9%	5.4%
Advocacy Group	18.1%	3.3%
Large Industry	11.0%	1.9%
Small Business	4.7%	1.2%
Journalist	20.8%	16.3%
<i>Journalist Positions</i>	10.3%	4.2%
<i>Others, Unattributed</i>	10.7%	4.4%
Citizen	10.8%	1.3%
Other	3.6%	1.4%

Table 4

Representation of Policy Positions by Content Type

	Reports (<i>n</i> = 849)	Opinion (<i>n</i> = 351)	Significance
Policy Positions			
Policy Position Valence			
Pro-Tax	47.7%	45.6%	.50
Anti-Tax	51.7%	53.6%	.56
Policy Position Frame			
Educational Benefits	34.9%	29.1%	.05
Public Health	17.8%	21.9%	.10
Social Cost	35.3%	34.8%	.85
Large Industry	11.4%	7.1%	.03*
Small Business	13.7%	11.7%	.35
Household Finances	15.4%	12.0%	.12
Low-Income Residents	11.7%	17.1%	.01*
Individual Choice	5.7%	10.8%	.00**
Outside Intervention	5.9%	6.0%	.95
Partisanship	1.4%	1.7%	.70
Other	13.7%	16.8%	.16
Policy Position Supplier			
Politician	29.7%	15.1%	.00**
Government	4.5%	4.0%	.71
Researcher	2.7%	3.4%	.51
Advocacy Group	18.7%	16.5%	.37
Large Industry	13.9%	4.0%	.00**
Small Business	5.7%	2.3%	.01*
Journalist	14.3%	36.5%	.00**
Citizen	10.1%	12.3%	.28
Other	2.8%	5.4%	.03*

Note. The statistical significance of differences in percentages between samples was estimated using a chi-square test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Representation of Policy Positions by Media Geography

	Philadelphia (<i>n</i> = 523)	Santa Fe (<i>n</i> = 519)	National (<i>n</i> = 158)	Significance
Policy Positions				
Policy Position Valence				
Pro-Tax	45.1%	47.2%	53.2%	.21
Anti-Tax	54.9%	51.8%	44.9%	.09
Policy Position Frame				
Educational Benefits	31.2%	39.5%	19.0%	.00*
Public Health	16.3%	14.5%	43.0%	.00**
Social Cost	38.2%	34.1%	28.5%	.06
Large Industry	11.9%	8.7%	9.5%	.23
Small Business	13.6%	14.3%	7.6%	.09
Household Finances	11.3%	18.9%	10.1%	.00**
Low-Income Residents	17.2%	8.9%	14.6%	.00**
Individual Choice	5.5%	7.7%	10.8%	.07
Outside Intervention	2.9%	7.9%	9.5%	.00**
Partisanship	0.4%	0.6%	2.9%	.00**
Other	18.4%	12.3%	9.5%	.00**
Policy Position Supplier				
Politician	33.8%	21.0%	12.0%	.00**
Government	6.7%	2.1%	3.8%	.00**
Researcher	3.3%	1.5%	3.1%	.01*
Advocacy Group	14.7%	23.9%	10.1%	.00**
Large Industry	15.5%	5.2%	15.2%	.00**
Small Business	6.5%	4.0%	0.6%	.01*
Journalist	15.5%	18.3%	46.2%	.00**
<i>Journalist Positions</i>				
<i>Others, Unattributed</i>				
Citizen	4.2%	19.8%	2.5%	.00**
Other	3.3%	4.4%	1.9%	.28

Note. The statistical significance of differences in percentages between samples was estimated using a chi-square test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 6

Information in the News Media

	% of Evidence Mentions (<i>N</i> = 1,191)	% of all Coded Content (<i>N</i> = 2,921)
Awareness Function		
Evidence: Empirical	84.3%	34.5%
Evidence: Anecdotal	18.1%	7.4%
Accessibility Function		
Explanation/Translation	7.8%	3.2%
Direct Link	1.3%	0.5%
Chart/Graph/Map	0.2%	0.1%

Table 7

Information in the News Media by Content Type

	Reported (<i>N</i> = 2,108)	Opinion (<i>N</i> = 804)	Significance
Awareness Function			
Policy Problem Status	2.0%	3.0%	.11
Policy Problem Cause	1.9%	2.0%	.80
Evidence: Empirical	37.8%	25.9%	.00**
Evidence: Anecdotal	8.2%	5.2%	.01*
Accessibility Function			
Explanation/Translation	3.6%	2.1%	.04*
Direct Link	0.6%	0.4%	.43
Chart/Graph/Map	0.1%	0.0%	.38

Note. The statistical significance of differences in percentages between samples was estimated using a chi-square test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 8

Information in the News Media by Media Geography

	Philadelphia (<i>N</i> = 1,395)	Santa Fe (<i>N</i> = 1,194)	National (<i>N</i> = 323)	Significance
<i>Awareness Function</i>				
Policy Problem Status	1.4%	3.9%	0.3%	.00**
Policy Problem Cause	1.1%	1.4%	7.1%	.00**
Evidence: Empirical	34.3%	32.5%	42.4%	.00**
Evidence: Anecdotal	9.9%	5.3%	4.3%	.00**
<i>Accessibility Function</i>				
Explanation/Translation	3.9%	2.1%	4.3%	.02*
Direct Link	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%	.73
Chart/Graph/Map	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	.88

Note. The statistical significance of differences in percentages between samples was estimated using a chi-square test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 9

Engagement in the News Media

	% Within Category (<i>N</i> = 846)	% of all Coded Content (<i>N</i> = 2,921)
Engagement	100.0%	29.3%
Relevance	85.2%	25.0%
Relevance: Individual	18.3%	5.3%
Relevance: Community	50.4%	14.6%
Relevance: Prob. Frame	21.5%	6.3%
Relevance: Other	8.5%	2.5%
Mobilization	14.9%	4.3%
Mobilization: Direct	3.8%	1.1%
Mobilization: Quoted	2.4%	0.7%
Mobilization: Opportunity	6.5%	1.9%
Mobilization: Open Question	3.3%	1.0%

Table 10

Engagement in the News Media by Content Type

	Reported (<i>N</i> = 581)	Opinion (<i>N</i> = 265)	Significance
Relevance	85.9%	86.4%	.84
Relevance: Individual	20.0%	14.7%	.07
Relevance: Community	48.4%	54.7%	.09
Relevance: Prob. Frame	19.6%	25.7%	.05*
Relevance: Other	8.3%	9.1%	.70
Mobilization	15.1%	143.%	.76
Mobilization: Direct	0.5%	10.9%	.00**
Mobilization: Quoted	20.0%	0.0%	.00**
Mobilization: Opportunity	7.7%	3.8%	.03*
Mobilization: Open Question	4.1%	1.5%	.05*

Note. The statistical significance of differences in percentages between samples was estimated using a chi-square test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 11

Engagement in the News Media by Media Geography

	Philadelphia (<i>N</i> = 414)	Santa Fe (<i>N</i> = 386)	National (<i>N</i> = 46)	Significance
Relevance	91.1%	82.4%	71.7%	.00**
Relevance: Individual	20.8%	15.3%	21.7%	.11
Relevance: Community	53.4%	47.2%	50.0%	.21
Relevance: Prob. Frame	16.9%	28.0%	8.7%	.00**
Relevance: Other	11.6%	6.2%	0.0%	.00**
Mobilization	9.7%	18.9%	28.3%	.00**
Mobilization: Direct	0.7%	4.7%	23.9%	.00**
Mobilization: Quoted	1.2%	3.4%	4.3%	.09
Mobilization: Opportunity	1.4%	12.7%	0.0%	.00**
Mobilization: Open Question	6.8%	0.0%	0.0%	.00**

Note. The statistical significance of differences in percentages between samples was estimated using a chi-square test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 12

Policy Preference of Various Policy Actors

	Taxes Are Preferred (<i>N</i> = 441)	Taxes Not Preferred (<i>N</i> = 392)	Significance
Politician	33.9%	20.6%	.00**
Government Official	7.3%	1.8%	.00**
Researcher	5.0%	1.0%	.00**
Advocacy Group	20.9%	21.9%	.58
Large Industry	0.2%	19.1%	.00**
Small Business	0.9%	3.1%	.00**
Journalist	16.1%	19.6%	.49
<i>Own Opinion</i>	8.2%	11.0%	
<i>Unattributed Others</i>	7.7%	8.4%	
Citizen	9.6%	12.1%	.34
Other	6.0%	1.5%	.00**

Table 13

Frequency of Seven Legitimizing Strategies

	Percent (<i>N</i> = 875)
Use of Evidence	26.1%
Evidence to Legitimize	16.2%
Evidence to Delegitimize	9.8%
Strategic Structuring	24.8%
Referencing Elites	3.9%
Fact-Checking	1.3%
Editorializing	11.8%
Editorializing to Legitimize	5.1%
Editorializing to Delegitimize	6.6%
Fostering or Resolving Ambiguity	38.4%
Fostering Ambiguity	27.4%
Resolving Ambiguity	11.0%
Association	5.5%

Table 14

Legitimizing Strategies by Content Type

	Reported Stories (<i>N</i> = 609)	Editorials/ Columns (<i>N</i> = 128)	Op-Eds (<i>N</i> = 138)	Significance
Use of Evidence				
Evidence to Legitimize	16.9%	13.4%	13.0%	.36
Evidence to Delegitimize	9.4%	7.0%	13.0%	.21
Strategic Structuring Within Stories	29.6%	12.7%	12.3%	.00**
Referencing Policy Positions of Elites	4.4%	3.2%	1.4%	.23
Fact-Checking	1.1%	1.3%	1.4%	.96
Editorializing				
Editorializing to Legitimize	0.3%	25.5%	2.2%	.00**
Editorializing to Delegitimize	0.0%	6.6%	2.4%	.00**
Ambiguity				
Fostering Ambiguity	25.0%	23.6%	37.0%	.01*
Resolving Ambiguity	10.8%	5.7%	15.2%	.01*
Association	6.2%	2.5%	4.3%	.16

Note. The statistical significance of differences in percentages between samples was estimated using a chi-square test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 15

Legitimizing Strategies by Time Period

	Time 1 (<i>N</i> = 717)	Time 2 (<i>N</i> = 158)	Significance
Use of Evidence			
Evidence to Legitimize	15.5%	16.6%	.71
Evidence to Delegitimize	8.2%	14.4%	.01*
Strategic Structuring Within Stories	26.4%	15.0%	.00**
Referencing Policy Positions of Elites	4.3%	1.6%	.10
Fact-Checking	1.4%	0.5%	.34
Editorializing			
Editorializing to Legitimize	4.9%	5.3%	.80
Editorializing to Delegitimize	6.7%	5.3%	.50
Ambiguity			
Fostering Ambiguity	26.4%	27.3%	.80
Resolving Ambiguity	11.7%	6.4%	.10
Association	5.4%	4.8%	.73

Note. The statistical significance of differences in percentages between samples was estimated using a chi-square test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 16

Legitimizing Strategies by City by Time Period

	Philadelphia (N = 498)			Santa Fe (N = 304)			National (N = 73)		
	T1	T2	<i>p</i>	T1	T2	<i>p</i>	T1	T2	<i>p</i>
Evidence									
Legitimize	13.3%	21.2%	.04*	18.3%	3.2%	.03*	20.0%	14.0%	.49
Delegitimize	6.0%	15.0%	.00**	11.7%	6.5%	.38	6.7%	18.6%	.14
Structuring	31.2%	15.0%	.00**	17.6%	0.0%	.01*	40.0%	25.6%	.19
Elites	6.3%	0.9%	.02*	1.1%	6.5%	.03*	6.7%	0.0%	.09
Fact-Checking	0.5%	0.0%	.45	2.9%	0.0%	.33	0.0%	2.3%	.40
Editorializing									
Legitimize	5.8%	8.0%	.40	2.6%	0.0%	.37	13.3%	2.3%	.07
Delegitimize	10.1%	2.7%	.01*	2.2%	3.2%	.72	0.0%	14.0%	.03*
Ambiguity									
Legitimize	10.1%	6.2%	.38	14.7%	12.9%	.79	6.7%	2.3%	.35
Delegitimize	24.9%	23.0%	.68	30.0%	54.8%	.01*	13.3%	18.6%	.55
Association	6.0%	5.3%	.77	4.0%	0.0%	.26	10.0%	7.0%	.64

Note. The statistical significance of differences in percentages between samples was estimated using a chi-square test. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Table 17

Source-Driven and Journalist-Driven Legitimizing Strategies

Source-driven strategies	Journalist-driven strategies
Using evidence	Using evidence
Fostering or resolving ambiguity	Structuring policy positions in stories
Endorsement of elites	Fact-checking
Association	Editorializing

Note. Source-driven strategies represent those that news sources pursue, enabled by journalists as gatekeepers. Journalist-driven strategies represent those that journalists execute outside the gatekeeping function.

APPENDIX A

Source-driven strategies	Journalist-driven strategies
<p>Using evidence</p> <p>A spokeswoman for the American Beverage Association argued otherwise in an email: “The obesity rate in America went up steadily (24 percent) from 2000-2014 at the same time calories in the American diet from soda went down 39 percent, and soda consumption is at a 30-year low.”</p>	<p>Using evidence</p> <p>While Mayor Kenney pitched his sugary drink tax as needed to fund early childhood education, it turns out that nearly 20 percent of the money raised would go to other city programs and employee benefits.</p>
<p>Fostering or resolving ambiguity</p> <p>Carmichael Dominguez, the committee chair, said his biggest concerns were whether the city even had the authority to impose the tax and about governance of the funding program, such as how will the money would be distributed. “I want to know more about how this money will be used,” he said.</p>	<p>Structuring policy positions in stories</p> <p>[The Teamsters], whose members deliver beverages, said Bloomberg was “coming into our city to force low-income Philadelphians to pay dearly in order to fulfill their own personal agendas.” Feeley countered that Bloomberg was interested only in “helping to implement good public policy.”</p>
<p>Endorsement of elites</p> <p>[Former Pennsylvania Governor Ed] Rendell also pointed out that if the tax significantly diminishes soda consumption, a new revenue stream will be needed to fund the City’s programs.</p>	<p>Fact-checking</p> <p>The proposal actually calls for a 2-cents-per-ounce tax, not just 2 cents. The ad could leave the impression that a 12-ounce bottle of soda, for instance, would cost only 2 cents more when, in fact, the tax could add nearly a quarter to the cost.</p>
<p>Association</p> <p>“Thousands of people from all corners of the city would have to pay more to see their favorite films because of this tax,” [the theater association’s] DiSanto said. “This tax will prevent families from spending quality time together doing something they love.”</p>	<p>Editorializing</p> <p>The beverage industry has called the sugary-drink tax a “Grocery Tax,” but it really is not. You can avoid it entirely by choosing other options.</p>

APPENDIX B

CODING MANUAL

ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF NEWS MEDIA IN POLICY DEBATES REGARDING TAXATION OF SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES

Case study context

This dissertation seeks to determine how journalists, as the moderators of policy debate, serve to legitimize or delegitimize policy positions that are introduced in their coverage. It employs a case study of a hotly contested policy issue: taxes on sodas and other sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Santa Fe, New Mexico.

About the dataset

The dataset includes relevance-screened documents from the news media, new/online media, social media, and policy settings in Philadelphia and Santa Fe across two time periods:

Time 1: Philadelphia: 01.29.2016 to 07.16.2016. Santa Fe: 11.10.2016 to 06.02.2017.

Time 2: Philadelphia: 07.17.2016 to 01.16.2017. Santa Fe: 06.03.2017 to 12.03.2017.

*News media sources*Philadelphia

- Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News
- Philadelphia Magazine
- WKYW 3 (CBS)
- WPVI 6 (ABC)

Santa Fe

- Albuquerque Journal
- Santa Fe New Mexican
- Santa Fe Reporter
- KOAT 7 (ABC)
- KRQE 13 (CBS)

National

- The New York Times
- Wall Street Journal
- USA Today
- ABC World News Tonight
- CBS Evening News
- FOX National News
- NBC Nightly News

Coding scheme

Step 1: DESCRIPTORS (document tracking information)

For each document, we want to record some basic information that will help us to identify it later. This codebook will guide you through how to fill in each field. To access the descriptors for each Dedoose file, load the media document that you want to code and look at the top right corner of the document display pane. You will see a small icon that looks like a chart or table. Double-click on that icon, and a pop-up window will appear that contains all the descriptor fields that you need to fill in.

Step 2: CONTENT CODES

Read through each document and evaluate whether and how to apply the codes outlined in pages 3 through 7 of this codebook.

Recording codes

All coding will be performed using Dedoose. Training on the codebook and Dedoose will be provided.

There are several important rules that all coders must follow:

1. You must be connected to the Internet to work in Dedoose.
2. Only code the documents assigned to you. Please do not open anyone else's documents or modify any coding that others have done.
3. Never delete or modify a document, and do not modify the underlying structure of the Dedoose project (e.g., the order or nesting of the codes). Be especially careful when applying codes that you want to "double click" without dragging — the dragging action tends to accidentally reorder codes.
4. When in doubt regarding a particular coding decision, or if you encounter a technical problem or have a coding-related question that hold up your ability to make progress, please raise this issue by email or text message as soon as you are able.

Accuracy and quality control

Quality work entails careful scanning of each document for relevant information, paying close attention to details, using the coding instrument properly, and achieving precision in applying codes. Additional training will be provided as needed. Please do not hesitate to speak up if you are in doubt.

Variable name	What it means	What to highlight + possible values	Specific coding instructions
DESCRIPTORS (Document tracking information)			
Document filename	Actual computer file name	Enter into descriptors field.	
Document date	Publication or air date	Enter into descriptors field (MM-DD-YY).	
Document type	Type of document	<p>Choose the best option from the drop-down menu in the descriptors field.</p> <p><i>News media document types</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newspaper story Newspaper editorial Newspaper op-ed Newspaper column (in-house columnist) Newspaper – other type (please specify) Magazine story Magazine commentary/opinion piece TV news segment TV commentary/opinion segment 	<p>Helpful note: For news items, editorials are opinion pieces written “by” the news organization itself, by the editorial board, or by a member of the editorial board. They represent the official opinion <u>of the publication</u>. Op-eds are opinion pieces written by outsiders who are representing their own viewpoint – think of these as “guest” opinion pieces published by the newspaper. These are different from columns, which are opinion pieces written by in-house staff writers who regularly contribute commentary or analysis.</p>
News organization	Publication or TV station	Choose the appropriate name from the drop-down menu in the descriptors field.	

Variable name	What it means	What to highlight + possible values	Specific coding instructions
<i>CONTENT CODES</i>			
POLICY POSITIONS			
Policy position	The actual position that a person or organization expresses with regard to soda taxes (for taxes or against them, and why).	Highlight the entire policy position and apply this code. Also apply the appropriate child code: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position without rationale • Position with rationale 	The term “policy position” is used broadly here to be as inclusive as possible. An <u>argument</u> in policy debate needs to have a rationale behind it: “We need a soda tax because too many adults in this city are developing diabetes.” In contrast, a policy position doesn’t need to have a reason or justification; it just needs to take a stand on the issue: “I am firmly against the soda tax.”
Policy position valence	Pro or con?	Highlight the policy position and apply code. Also apply the appropriate child code: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-tax • Anti-tax 	In the rare event that a policy position is taken that is neither pro-tax nor anti-tax, do not apply this code.
Policy position function	The role that the policy position plays in the policy debate.	Highlight the policy position and apply code. Also apply the appropriate child code: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refers to objective status of problem • Suggests cause of a problem • Assigns responsibility for handling problem • Suggests soda taxes are a solution to policy problem • Suggests soda taxes are <u>not</u> a solution to the policy problem • Suggests an alternative response to the policy problem • Predicts the consequences of implementing a soda tax 	Objective status refers to measures of the policy problem itself: e.g., how big of a deal the obesity problem is in a city, how many children lack access to pre-K. Cause refers to the root of the policy problem. Because people may view the problem itself differently (e.g., whether it is a health problem or a revenue problem) you are likely to find a range of attributions of cause. Responsibility refers to who is responsible for responding to the policy problem. For example, some people may view pre-K tuition as an individual family’s

Variable name	What it means	What to highlight + possible values	Specific coding instructions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predicts the consequences of <u>not</u> implementing a soda tax Other 	responsibility while others see it as the government's obligation. Some people may consider beverage choices an individual's responsibility while others think it is the government's role to guide them.
Policy position frame	The general interpretive frame that the policy position uses.	<p>Highlight the policy position and apply code.</p> <p>Also apply appropriate child code <u>AND</u> sub-code:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual choice frame <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government overreach Liberty to choose what to buy Social good frame <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public health Beneficial programming Social cost frame <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detriment to large industry Detriment to small business Detriment to household finances Detriment to the poor in society <p><i>(list continued on next page)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventionism frame ("outside money") Partisanship frame ("Democrats' fault") Frame not listed here 	You can apply more than one of these if a policy position makes multiple points.

Variable name	What it means	What to highlight + possible values	Specific coding instructions
Policy position supplier category	The “category of social actor” introducing the policy position.	<p>Highlight the policy position and apply this code.</p> <p>Also apply the appropriate child code:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politician • Government official or agency • Researcher • Advocacy group • Large industry • Small business • Journalist • Citizen (not affiliated with any of above) • Other 	Note: If a policy position in a news story is made within the text and not attributed to anyone, select “journalist” here.
EVIDENCE			
Piece of evidence	An item of evidence introduced into the policy debate, either empirical or anecdotal.	<p>Highlight the evidence itself and apply this code.</p> <p>Also apply the appropriate child code:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empirical evidence (e.g., survey results, statistics, research studies, facts about real-life events) • Personal evidence (e.g., narratives, anecdotes, stakeholder testimony) 	
Supplier of evidence category	The “supplier” is the person/organization introducing the evidence into the policy debate. In the news media, this might be someone who is quoted, or it could be a person/organization to whom evidence is attributed in a paraphrased form (e.g., according to ____, or ____ said)	<p>Highlight the name of the person or organization supplying the information and apply this code.</p> <p>Also apply the appropriate child code:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politician • Government official or agency • Researcher • Advocacy group 	

Variable name	What it means	What to highlight + possible values	Specific coding instructions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large industry • Small business • Journalist • Citizen (not affiliated with any of above) • Other 	
Additional function of evidence	Participants in policy debate—including journalists—have the opportunity to give people access to information (e.g., linking to the URL of a budget-forecasting study, or providing a chart of the number of children attending pre-K over the last decade) and to help them understand information (e.g., providing helpful analogies that make complicated research findings easier to comprehend)	<p>Highlight the information and apply this code.</p> <p>Also apply the appropriate child code:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides direct link to <u>data</u> (e.g., URL of a government dataset or research report) • Provides data in a map, graph, or chart • Provides explanation, synthesis, translation, or context for information 	You might not see a ton of examples of this, and that's all right. At least this code will capture it if there are instances of it.
LEGITIMACY			
Support for policy position	If someone says something in a news story, do subsequent speakers pile on in support? This code is meant to capture that phenomenon.	Highlight the statement of support and apply code.	
Questioning of policy position	If someone says something in a news story, are there subsequent speakers and perspectives that call it into question? This code is meant to capture that phenomenon.	Highlight questioning statement and apply code.	
Indication of normative acceptability	Indications that there is (or isn't) wide social support for the soda tax proposal.	Highlight the entire passage that points to alignment (or lack of alignment) with social norms.	Example: opinion polls or other quantifications of social reaction to the policy proposal

Variable name	What it means	What to highlight + possible values	Specific coding instructions
ENGAGEMENT			
Relevance	Indicates why someone should care about soda taxes.	<p>Highlight the text that indicates relevance and apply this code.</p> <p>Also apply one of these child codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a “problem frame” (interests the audience by causing people to see an issue as a pressing problem that warrants a policy solution) • Indicates potential impact on individuals • Indicates potential impact on community • Other indication of relevance 	
Mobilization	Illustrates to people how they can get involved with the soda tax issue (provides a “call to action”)	<p>Highlight the text that points to avenues for involvement and apply this code.</p> <p>Also apply one of these child codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly encourages action • Quotes a source who encourages action • Provides information about an upcoming opportunity for action (e.g., hearings, rallies, town hall meetings) • Open-ended 	
UNCLASSIFIED			
Unclassified	Something that is not captured by any of the other codes but appears to be of interest.	Highlight the entire item and apply this code.	

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