

**Trends in Media Framing of Issues in the 2018 Midterm Election**

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## Abstract

The literature about midterm elections emphasizes that voting is influenced by approval of the incumbent president and two or three national issues. Various models of what happens at midterm elections have analyzed presidential campaigning for candidates. The influence of idiosyncratic local information and conditions have been presented. Voters inability to rationally evaluate legislative performance is acknowledge. Theory has been developed about the existence of a collective or aggregate rationality that emerges from midterm elections. This paper is directed at contrasting how the immigration, health care, and economy issues were framed in 2014 and 2018.

Issue framing in American politics has long been thought to be substantially influenced by mainstream media. As information technology has developed, social media has gained influence in the issue framing. In 2014 and 2018, mainstream media and social media contended for influence. The interaction between mainstream media and social media in issue framing is analyzed because this process is thought to reveal much about U.S. political reality.

Theoretical sampling was used to create image sets presenting the immigration, healthcare, and the economy issue in 2014 and 2018. Qualitative method's interpretivism was then employed to contrast issue framing these two years. This use of interpretive practice was successful in producing some conclusions about trends. Conceptual developments about trends could be analyzed. Secondary data presented the profound influence of social networking. An observable trend away from elite issue framing toward backbencher and articulate citizen issue framing was found. Cognitive heuristics figured in a second trend found in the data. Literature discusses cognitive heuristics as affecting bounded rationality. The mere exposure cognitive heuristic occurs when people positively valence something on the basis of much information about the subject. The increasing sophistication of information devices between 2014 and 2018 was accompanied with more vivid and HDR strength graphics. This was concluded to mean that social networking was gaining in strength with voters through the mere exposure heuristic.

The predominantly qualitative methods of the paper concluded with a reflexive suggestion for future research. Cognitive mapping was suggested as a possible improvement capable of producing better understanding of how interpretivism analyzed qualitative data to research conclusions. A cognitive map with an elite/leadership to backbencher/articulate citizen continuum for one axis was suggested. A traditional images to vivid, HDR images continuum was proposed as the second axis on the cognitive map. Coding the image data sets could be accomplished my placing miniature images at appropriate locations on the cognitive map. An example of what such a cognitive map would look like was included in the paper. The suggestion was made to use several coders and then to follow inter-coder reliability issues.

## **Trends in Media Framing of Issues in the 2018 Midterm Election**

Issues are always included among the factors influencing elections. Candidate personality, partisanship, regional reasons, and group politics all compliment issues as variables determining electoral outcomes. In off-year elections, assessing the importance of each of these variables is difficult. Democratic theory would like to believe that each congressional election is controlled uniquely by conditions directly related to the electoral district. This paper does not purport to present a comprehensive analysis of midterm elections that would resolve the most important determinants of these contests. Instead, this paper attempts to analyze how some major national issues affect off-year elections. For purposes of analysis, this paper's hypothesis is that there are three or four important national issues that exert a shaping influence on midterm elections. The analysis this paper presents intends to improve concepts about how these issues are framed. More specifically, the interaction between mainstream media and social media in developing these important national issues is analyzed.

This paper's theoretical perspective is not unusually different than the literature about midterm elections. Edward Tufte presented midterm elections as substantially influenced by two factors. First, the off-year elections were seen as the electorate's evaluation of the president. Second, the economy was discussed as a major factor. (Tufte, 1975, pp. 813-14) Cohen, Krassa, and Hamman identified four variables that establish a baseline for predicting midterm voting. These variables are party identification, the presidential feeling thermometer,

campaign spending, and opposition party incumbency status. (Cohen, Krassa, and Hamman, 1991, p. 170) These authors analyze if the president's own efforts at midterm campaigning have an effect on outcomes. The conclusion they reach is that "the impact of a president's campaign effort is thought to be trivial or negative." This idea introduces the concept of a reaction to an attempt to influence. As these authors conclude, possibly, "a president's campaign appearance improves the opponent's ability to secure financing or increases his popularity among constituent groups." (Cohen, Krassa, and Hamman, 1991, pp. 166-68).

Lewis-Beck and Tine comment, "The congressional midterm elections stand as a referendum on the president and his party." To these authors, voters react at midterm elections to "White House performance mainly along two dimensions: the president's action on key economic and non-economic issues." The Lewis-Beck and Tine Model for predicting off-year elections, also, includes "idiosyncratic local information drawn from the useful Rothenberg Report." (Lewis-Beck, 2015, p. 297)

James Campbell identifies influences that affect the political climate leading up to the fall campaign of 2018. These include "opinions about the president and national economic conditions and policies to events ranging from Supreme Court nominations to relation with our allies and adversaries as well as the lengthy investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 elections." In order to follow predictions about 2018, Campbell suggest "a broad background of midterm history, congressional arithmetic, and knowledge of the current political climate." Campbell's analysis of the 2018 midterm election appears in a special issue of *PS* that include several experts forecasting the 2018 outcomes. All four forecasters in this *PS* issue "expect a democratic House Majority." In the Senate, Republicans are predicted "to hold their

own and perhaps pick up the seat or two." (Campbell, 2018, pp. 1-3) These predictions proved rather accurate as in 2018 the Democrats picked up 40 seats in the House of Representatives and regained the majority. In the Senate, the Republicans did gain two seats and continued their leadership.

Stokes and Miller conducted research that established that "the midterm election could hardly be regarded as the electorate's evaluation of a legislative record of the two parties in Congress because an embarrassing number of voters lacked the minimal information required to cast a ballot informed by a judgment of a party's legislative performance." (Tufte, p. 826) Tufte's observations about this phenomena have some relevance to this paper's analysis of trends in issue framing by mainstream media and social media. Tufte contrasts the rationality of voters as individuals and collective or aggregate rationality. Individual rationality is influenced by voter decision rules, which voters use decision rules, what conditions encourage rationality, and how may these conditions be nurtured? While individual rationalism is difficult for Tufte to identify, he has more confidence in the aggregate rationality that emerges from midterm elections. As totally aggregate outcomes of individual preferences of millions of voters occur in midterm elections, Tufte is more confident that outcomes are "collectively rational." (Tufte, 1975, p. 826) Some developments occurring in social media's influence could possibly be better comprehended with Tufte's theoretical perspective about collective rationality.

The literature about midterm elections presents these elections as analogous to a referendum about the president's performance. While candidate factors and local issues are not ignored in the literature, several analysis of off-year elections are directed towards how national

politics affect congressional elections. Thus, the literature about midterm elections validates the realism of more thoroughly studying how issue formation occurs in midterm elections. 2018 is probably an excellent example of how national issues develop substantially influenced by electoral ambitions.

Framing issues in American politics has, for some decades, been seen as almost a prerogative of mainstream media. The aggregation of social concerns into the limited number of issues affecting elections occurs as only a few politically relevant concerns are widely accepted. The popular influence of mainstream media in determining issues of substantial importance derives from the mass audience attentive to this journalism. Other influences on issues are so substantially at a disadvantage that few if any contending sources are accepted.

The responsible influence of mainstream media on issue formation is, however, an unstable phenomena. The preceding several elections have caused acknowledging social media's contribution to political process as had not been imagined would happen. Campaign momentum begun in social media and social networking has been seen as capable of sustaining successful election campaigns. The exact mechanisms by which social media accomplishes this feat are still conjecture. Possibly, a nucleus of people who work together with dedication sustain competitive efforts to outdistance all opponents. Another possibility is that social networking can give a candidate the edge in shaping issues to his own advantage. Whatever the exact mechanism connecting social networking and campaigns, there does appear to be significant differences between candidates and their ability to employ social networking advantageously.

Tufte wrote about individual rationalism and aggregate rationalism. Analyzing social networking's influence on issue formation may cause one to identify some *prima facie* failures in individual rationalism. Aggregate rationalism, on the other hand, appears an authentic possibility for reasoning about social networking's increasing importance. The confidence people have in ideas emerging from social networking may well be based on beliefs in the strength of what is happening as aggregate rationalism. This questionably is a first trend in issue framing that could be observed in the 2018 election.

A second trend in media framing of issues in the 2018 election happens because of how mainstream media and social media interact. Several hypotheses exist about how this influence happens. Mainstream media can be thought of as picking up ideas now and then from social networking. That is to say the deep roots of an issue may first be recognized by social media and then sold to mainstream media. Alternatively, social media maybe thought of as reinforcing and amplifying ideas that first occur in mainstream media. Those who believe this hypothesis imagine social networking resonating ideas gained from mainstream media among diverse groups of people. A third possibility is that some sort of reaction occurs between the social networking and the mainstream media. There are probably cases where social networking has scoffed at mainstream media and gone off in a substantially different direction.

A third trend is possibly happening around the fake news phenomena. Given the astounding success of social networking influencing elections since 2008, some election analysts are likely confronting a purported invulnerability of social networking. Accepting or not accepting

that future realities are social networking dominated maybe a difficult dilemma for some.

Asking if fake news has emerged as an antidote for the domination of social networking is appropriate. Trends in issue framing affected by fake news could be thought of as attempts by politicians to unwork the spell that social networking has on the electorate.

Analyzing the 2018 election focusing on trends in media framing of issues has the purpose of improving concepts about how social networking powerfully affects the electorate. Influenced substantially by technology, social media is bound to follow innovation. Information technology can develop at an astounding rate and keeping up with how innovation affects electoral outcomes is an important concern. Following trends in issue framing allows the analyst an excellent theoretical perspective on how new political realities determine electoral outcomes.

Trends in how issues occur allow a useful theoretical perspective on the powerfulness of social media in electoral contests. Estimating if any candidate could succeed in 2020 without formidable ability in social networking is an excellent analytic question. Among this paper's purpose is strengthening analytic concepts useful in assessing the likely future influence of social networking phenomena. The 2018 midterm election is thought of in this paper as a useful example capable of producing some improved knowledge about the extent to which social media has control of the voters. Trends in issue framing could reveal some of the cognitive mechanisms behind social networking's power.



## **Technology, Social Media, Mainstream Media, and Decisive Trends in Campaign Issues**

The issues that were deemed important in the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections appear to occur in approximately the manner with the literature would predict. The decisive influence in both contests appears divided between a referendum about the incumbent president and voter deliberation about two or three issues. In both 2014 and 2018, immigration, health care, and the economy were the leading issues. The ordering of these three issues differed between 2014 and 2018. Immigration led as the top issue in 2018. The economy was the greatest concern of the voters in 2014. Health care stayed approximately a second issue in both 2014 and 2018.

The influence of mainstream media is still recognized as the preponderant influence in agenda setting. Rogstad states, "Mainstream media, such as TV, radio, and newspapers, still represent the most important platforms for public debate and creation of the public agenda today." (Rogstad, p. 142) The issue is not so much whether online media rivals mainstream media, but how Internet influences by redefining some determinate issues. The effect of Internet is usually theorized as providing an echo chamber for news related issues that first appear in mainstream media. In a few instances, Internet effectively promotes a subject until mainstream media takes over. There is a third possibility which is that somehow defining issues are taken over by Internet.

Martin and Peskowitz considers the media influence issue with an emphasis on mainstream media. These authors observe that communications directly between campaigns and voters

rarely occurs. Instead, intermediaries of various kinds including media outlets, volunteers, organized interest groups, and so on "stand in between candidates and the electorate, selecting and shaping the campaign messages that managed to reach the voters."

Mainstream media according to these authors are "a universal, defining feature of democratic politics." Television advertising is described as the dominant information source in many campaigns. (Martin and Peskowitz, p. 246)

The analysis presented here recognizes the importance of mainstream media, but seeks to question if Internet's real influence is based on an ability to selectively develop issues with substantial determinative strength. Phenomena including influence leaders and political empowerment could contribute to the real political power of Internet. Possibly, the most influential people in political groups are more tuned in to Internet. Content received online could be thought of as of greater salience than ideas receive from mainstream media. Empowerment follows from ICT, in many instances. The same people do not become politically active when ICT is ubiquitous. How ICT produces different political leaders has been viewed phenomenologically throughout Internet's development.

Figure One presents a 2018 Pew Research Center poll about the leading issues in the midterm election. The Pew poll shows voters are aware the midterm election ordinarily does involved approval or disapproval of those in power. Immigration is the issue that attracts the most attention. Health care is rated as the second most important issue. This poll finds education third in significance. Economic issues are rated fourth.

## Figure One 2018 Issue People Want to Hear Discussed

### Voters in both parties cite immigration as an issue they want to hear discussed

*What one issue would you most like to hear the candidates in your state or district talk about this fall?*  
[OPEN END]

	All voters	Rep/Lean Rep	Dem/Lean Dem
Immigration	19	21	18
Health care	13	8	16
Politicians/Govt. system	8	6	8
Education	9	5	11
Economy/Economic issues	7	10	6
Guns/Gun control/Gun laws	8	8	9
Jobs/Employment	6	5	7
Taxation	6	8	5
Environment	4	3	5
Balanced budget	4	5	3
Drugs	3	4	2
Racism/Equality	3	*	5
<b>NET: Economic</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>NET: Foreign policy</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>

Notes: Based on registered voters. See topline for all mentions and full trend.

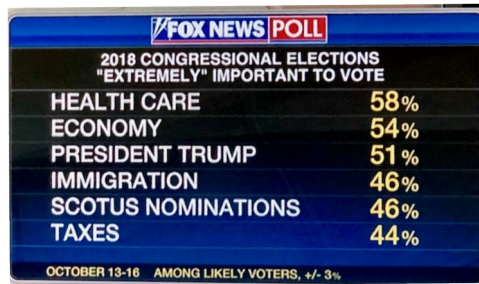
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-12, 2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(source: Pew Research Center, "The 2018 congressional election")

Figure Two presents a Fox News poll asking about those issues in the 2018 congressional election that are "extremely important" to voters. This poll differs from the Pew poll in how the leading issues are ranked. There is substantial similarity between those issues seen as most important by voters except that in the Fox News poll health care is identified as the top 2018 issue. Immigration is still seen as a significant issue, but less so than the economy and health care.

## Figure Two 2018's Leading Voter Issues



(source: Fox News Poll, October 3-16, 2018)

Since the paper intends to attempt to follow trends in issue framing, some data is needed from preceding midterm elections. Figure Three presents 2014 important election issues. The data follow three economic ideas including the economy in general, unemployment/jobs, and federal deficit/debt. Taken together these three economic realities are the most important concern evidenced in this Gallup Poll. Concern with the government and incumbents is presented as a substantial issue. Health care and immigration, also, turn up as authentic concerns of 2014 midterm voters.

## Figure Three 2014 Important Election Issues

*Most Important Problem Facing the U.S. in 2014*  
Issues averaging 2% or higher

	Yearly average <sup>^</sup>	Highest monthly result	Lowest monthly result
	%	%	%
Government/Congress/Politicians	18	21	15
Economy in general	17	20	13
Unemployment/Jobs	15	23	8
Healthcare	10	16	5
Immigration	8	17	3
Federal deficit/debt	6	9	3
Ethics/Moral decline	5	7	3
Education	4	6	3
Poverty/Homelessness	4	5	2
Focus overseas/Foreign aid	4	7	1
Gap between rich/poor	3	4	1
Race relations/Racism	3	13	1
Lack of money	3	5	1
Crime/Violence	2	3	1
Judicial system	2	3	1
Lack of respect for each other	2	2	1
Wars/War (non-specific)	2	3	1
Terrorism	2	4	0
Wage issues	2	2	1
National security	2	3	1

<sup>^</sup> Based on average of 12 monthly surveys

GALLUP

(source: Gallup. "Cluster of Concerns Vie for Top U.S. Problems in 2014")

This paper is attempting to discern if technology and the increasing importance of social media can be analyzed as having an effect on the 2018 midterm election. How issues are framed can no longer be ascribed unequivocally to the mainstream media. Social networking has more to say about what happens every election. Polling may identify issue concerns that voters discuss when they discuss politics. The difference between decisive issues that determine elections and those mentioned to pollsters may be significant. The more able the election analysis is able to identify how voters are motivated, the more useful the election analysis.

Possibly, trends in media framing of issues allows a useful perspective on how innovation is affecting our politics. The era when politics was dominated by the nightly news framing the relevant issues is gone. Technology has created a vastly more diverse reality with many alternative media collaborating in establishing an election's most important issues. This paper hypothesized that the process by which diverse media aggregate popular sentiment into leading election issues is not distant from how election outcomes happen.

Election analysis has made venerable the perspective that two or three issues dominate midterm elections. From all the social concerns and interests that affect politics, a profound narrowing process elevates a few concerns to leading issues at midterm elections. Possibly the pragmatic side of politics comprehends that only two or three issues are capable of supporting meaningful midterm election coalitions. Improved comprehension of the process that creates prominent election issues is the objective of this analysis.

Theoretically, improved election prognostication and analysis can result from improved comprehension of how diverse media collectively aggregate the few issues that dominate elections. Appraising if conflict between would be framers of election issues happens is an authentic concern. Visceral reaction to potential issues maybe a factor in the development of electoral politics. Were one to concede that mainstream media is no longer in charge of elevating the awesome issues, who would be in charge of our politics? Analyzing trends in issue framing gets at these sort of questions, and is promising in producing improved election analysis.

### **Methodological Problems in Analyzing Trends in Media Framing of Issues, Searching for Appropriate Data**

The methodology decided upon to research trends in media framing of issues would like to appraise changes occurring in the relative influence of mainstream media and social networking. Some existing research has attempted to resolve this issue. Rogstad has researched how mainstream media issues and Twitter issues compare. She has also analyzed how content from one media affects what happens in the other media. (Rogstad, pp. 148-153) This research is relevant to this paper's methodological perspective as Rogstadt improves conceptualizing about the trends this paper's research would like to observe.

An attempt is made in Rogstad's research to correlate the ten news stories receiving the greatest volume of attention on Twitter and in mainstream media. There were five overlapping new stories on the agendas top ten lists. How similar these overlapping news stories were was researched. A Spearman's correlation coefficient of 0.19 was obtained. In other words, there was a low level of correlation between the content in overlapping stories appearing on

the two medias. Rogstad concludes, "This shows that the agendas are dissimilar."

Overlapping stories were found to make up 60% of the Twitter agenda and 30% of the mainstream media agenda. (Rogstad, p.148)

The other important finding of the Rogstad study is that there is little doubt that mainstream media affects the Twitter agenda more than the other way around. Tweets may, however, directly refer to mainstream media and contribute "new perspectives or critical evaluation of mainstream media news coverage." In some instances, mainstream media focused on heavy criticism of Twitter. The mainstream media and social media together phenomena was found to be influenced by the public's ability to direct feedback about media within minutes.

(Rogstad, p. 153)

A change phenomena is identified in Rogstad's research that is directly relevant to the primary concern of this paper. Rogstad theorizes, "Twitter is contributing to the creation of an expanding of the elite, meaning that it gives voice to a group of eloquent and media-savvy people outside the traditional political, economic, or academic elites." The people favored by Twitter include comedians, bloggers, activist, and public debaters. Young and local politicians as well as parliamentary backbenchers appeared to have better access to the political limelight. Twitter expands the elite by allowing people to build a name and access the public agenda. (Rogstad, p. 152)

The methodological problem for this paper can more clearly be identified from Rogstad's theoretical perspective. In order to gain perceptiveness about the mechanisms that accomplished issue framing, a technique must be devised that allows gaining knowledge

about any trends that may exist in issue formation. This paper resolve this methodological problem by contrasting issue-oriented images from two midterm elections, 2014 and 2018.

Theoretical sampling was used to create longitudinal image sets for the three leading issues for the 2014 and 2018 elections. In all, six image sets of 25 images each were constructed for the immigration, health care, and the economy issues in both 2014 and 2018. This data is presented in Figures Four through Nine that follow. Qualitative methods approves of theoretical sampling as a productive technique that allows the researcher to follow his concerns in data collection. The paper's theoretical sampling was accomplished with the objective of identifying images that would be potentially useful in contrasting issue framing in 2014 and 2018.

The qualitative methods data this paper uses can be analyzed using interpretivism. Interpretive practice relies upon the perceptive abilities and aptitudes of the researcher. Reasoning from data to conclusions, the qualitative methodologist attempts to discern faint patterns that can be informative about the complex phenomena he may be studying. The interpretivism this paper relies on appear capable of improving concepts about how changing media phenomena influence framing issues and election outcomes.

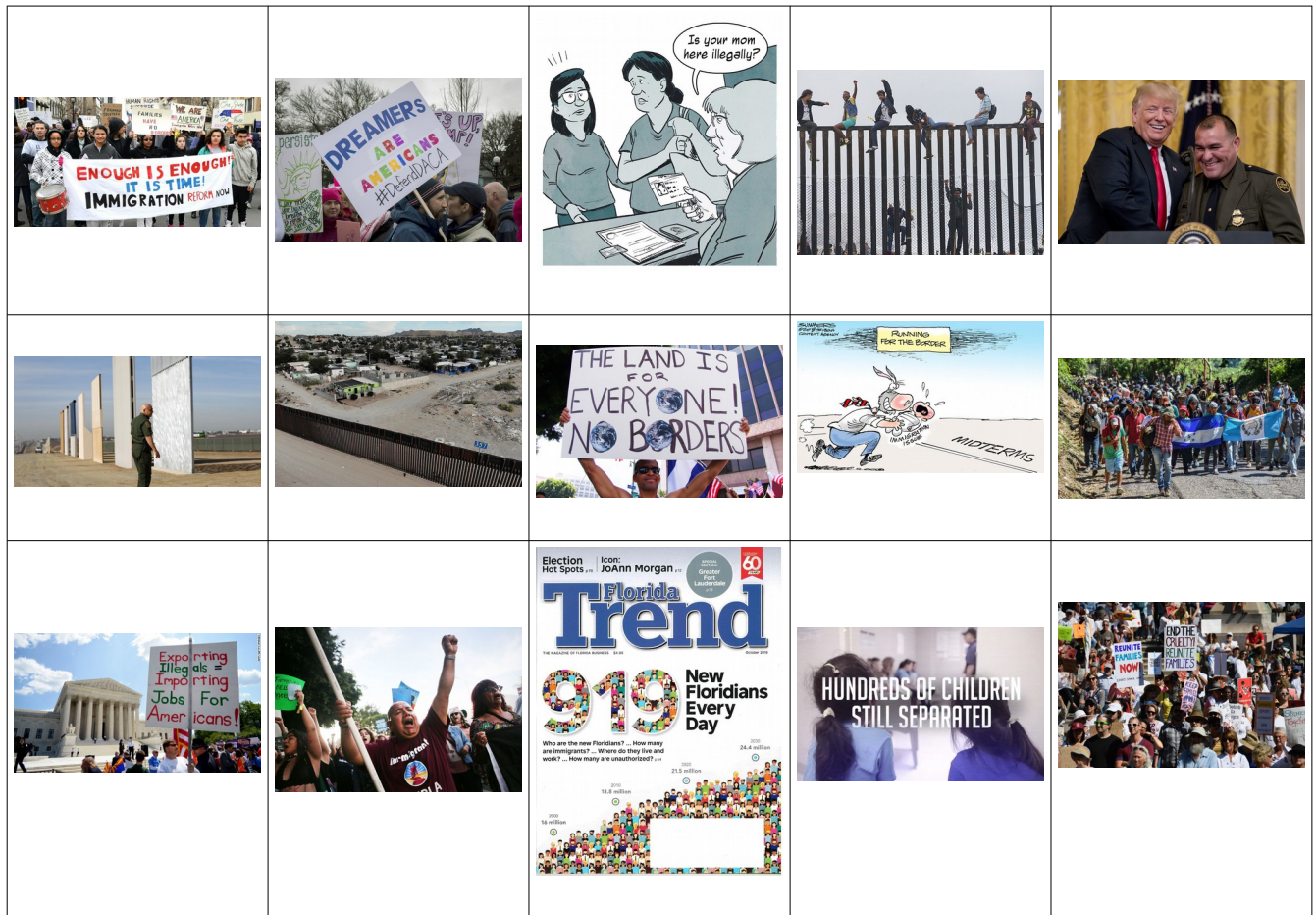
The following six figures contrast the presentation of midterm election issues in 2014 and 2018. Qualitative methods is no different than other social science about data requirements. Images from 2014 and 2018 presenting the immigration, health care, and economy issues are data qualitative methods can use to improve concepts about trends in issue framing. These figures allow an appraisal of the possibilities interpretivism has for identifying trends in issue



framing. Advocates of qualitative methods argue that among the reason for this methodological innovation is an ability to recognize faint patterns. That advantage of qualitative methods plus this technique's strength in improving research question conceptualization appears to acknowledge some potential in this social science data.

## The Immigration Issue

**Figure Four**  
**The Immigration Issue in 2018**





**Figure Five**  
**The Immigration Issue in 2014**






# The Health Care Issue

## Figure Six The Health Care Issue in 2018

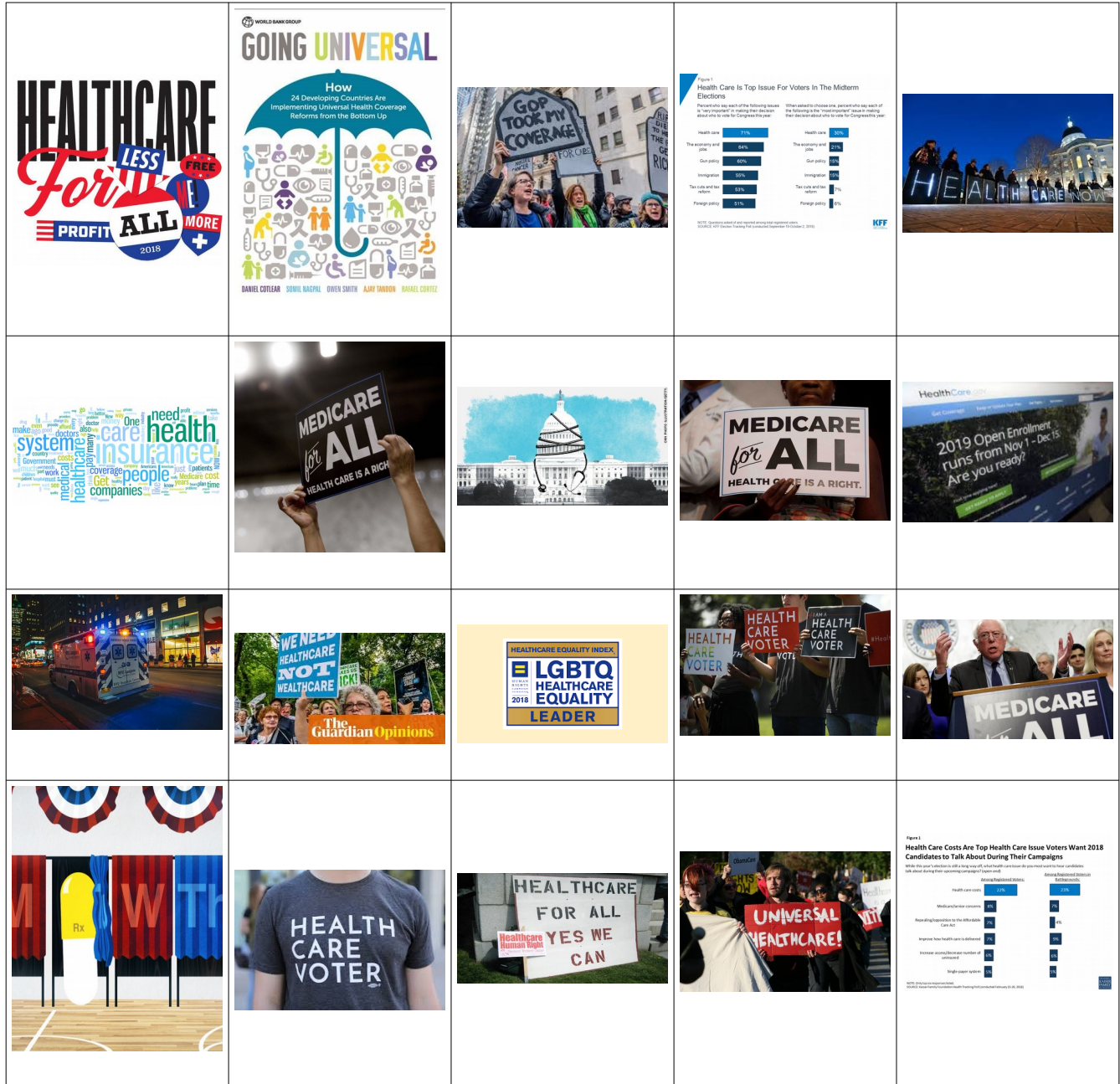
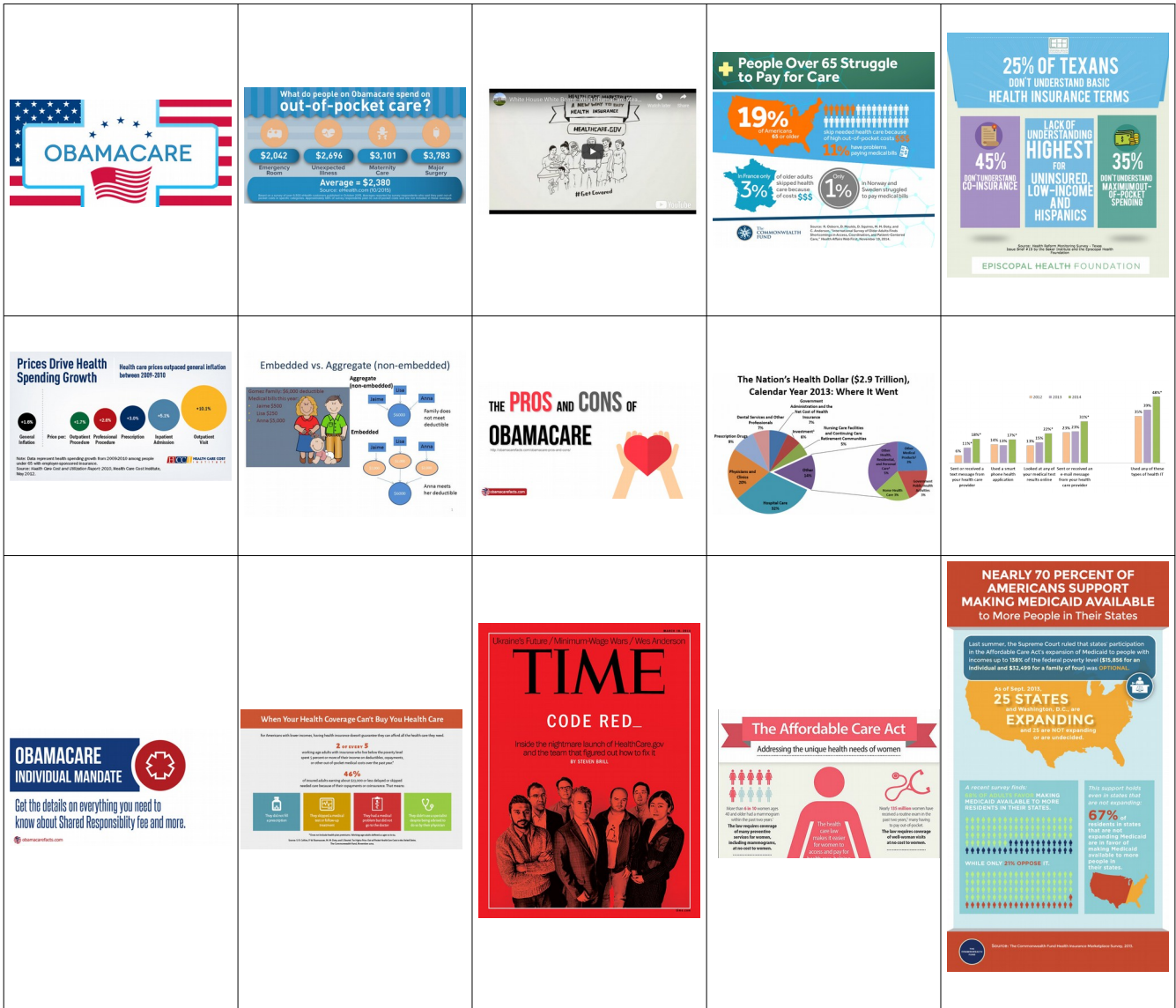




Figure Seven  
The Health Care Issue in 2014





<p><b>AMERICANS AGE 19-64 FOR WHOM HEALTH CARE DEDUCTIBLE IS 5 PERCENT OF INCOME OR MORE</b></p> <p>THE CENTURY FOUNDATION</p>	<p><b>OBAMACARE EMPLOYER MANDATE</b></p> <p>Get the facts on the Employer Mandate. Find out how it works and how it affects you.</p> <p>obamacarefacts.com</p>	<p>Patients contribute to health care costs through out-of-pocket expenses, the copay and coinsurance. These cost-sharing mechanisms are intended to help patients manage costs and encourage more efficient use of health care resources.</p> <p><b>When is higher cost-sharing for patients less acceptable?</b></p> <p>Check out NPC's 5 guiding principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>"Try and fail" is important</b> If the initial treatment through a conventional patient should have access to higher-cost therapy and lower out-of-pocket costs, this is also known as "reward the good soldier."</li> <li><b>Benefits are certain and significant</b> If there is high confidence the health benefits of a treatment are significant, then financial barriers should be lowered.</li> <li><b>Costs must align with benefits</b> If the treatment costs are balanced with better effectiveness and safety, then cost-sharing should be lower.</li> <li><b>Don't penalize for "bad luck"</b> If patients need higher-cost treatments based on their biology or genetics, their cost-sharing should be reduced.</li> <li><b>Lower, but do not eliminate, out-of-pocket costs</b> Cost-sharing differences incentivize trying lower-cost treatments first, but big jumps in costs for patients should be avoided.</li> </ul> <p>National Patient Care Foundation</p>	<p><b>WHAT IS OBAMACARE?</b></p> <p>What is the Affordable Care Act and what does it mean for American health care?</p> <p>obamacarefacts.com</p>	<p><b>SIGN UP FOR OBAMACARE</b></p> <p>How to sign up for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act.</p> <p>obamacarefacts.com</p>
<p>HealthcareReform PersonalGenomicsRegulation CollaborativeCapital 2014 QuantifiedSelf PatientCentered DemocratizingScience</p> <p>BreakingThroughAFDA OpenSource PlayingNice</p> <p>BRAINIACS</p>		<p><b>AHLA</b></p> <p><b>Tax Issues</b> for Health Care Organizations</p> <p>October 19-21, 2014 • Capital Hilton Hotel Washington, DC</p>		

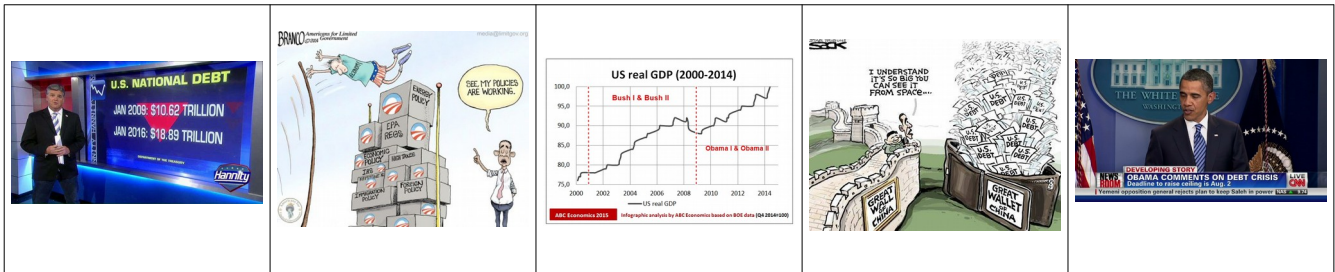
**The Economy Issue**

**Figure Eight**  
**The Economy as an Issue in 2018**

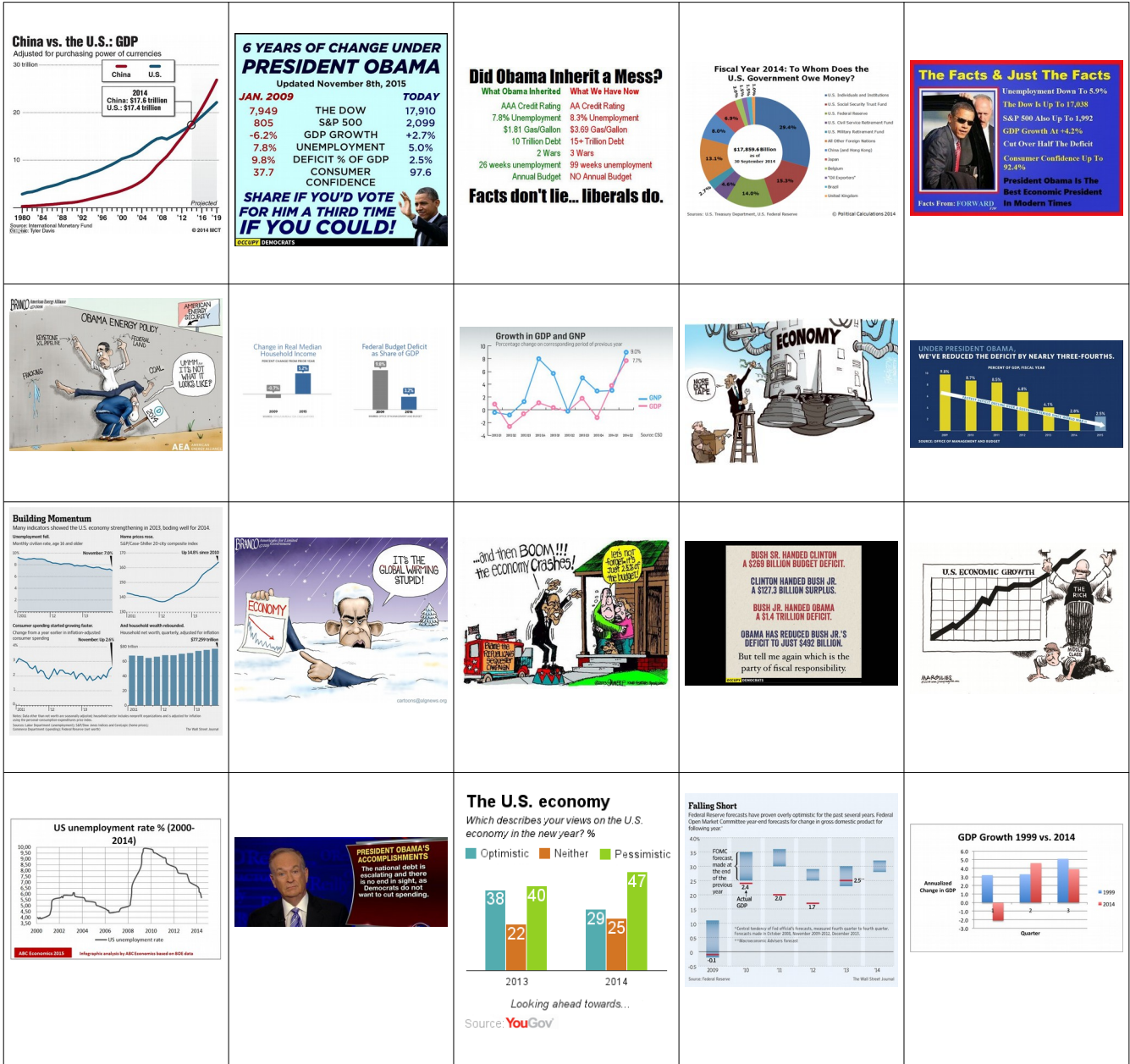
<p><b>BE INFORMED: national debt</b></p> <p>JUST FACTS.</p>	<p><b>AGRIC COMMODITIES</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Wheat</th> <th>Cash</th> <th>Cocoa</th> <th>Sugar</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wheat is a key commodity in the US and globally.</li> <li>Wheat is a major export for the US.</li> <li>Wheat is a major import for many countries.</li> </ul> </td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cash is a key commodity in the US and globally.</li> <li>Cash is a major export for the US.</li> <li>Cash is a major import for many countries.</li> </ul> </td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cocoa is a key commodity in the US and globally.</li> <li>Cocoa is a major export for the US.</li> <li>Cocoa is a major import for many countries.</li> </ul> </td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sugar is a key commodity in the US and globally.</li> <li>Sugar is a major export for the US.</li> <li>Sugar is a major import for many countries.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>prnshare.com</p>	Wheat	Cash	Cocoa	Sugar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wheat is a key commodity in the US and globally.</li> <li>Wheat is a major export for the US.</li> <li>Wheat is a major import for many countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cash is a key commodity in the US and globally.</li> <li>Cash is a major export for the US.</li> <li>Cash is a major import for many countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cocoa is a key commodity in the US and globally.</li> <li>Cocoa is a major export for the US.</li> <li>Cocoa is a major import for many countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sugar is a key commodity in the US and globally.</li> <li>Sugar is a major export for the US.</li> <li>Sugar is a major import for many countries.</li> </ul>		<p><b>USA - Chronic Deficits &amp; Debt</b></p>	<p><b>Deep Debt</b></p>
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	<p><b>TARIFFS</b></p>	<p><b>Economic Collapse</b></p>		<p><b>DEBT</b></p>								



Figure Nine  
The Economy as an Issue in 2014







# How Much Connectivity Do Future Elections Have to Electoral Contests of Past Decades?

The theoretical idea that voting behavior exemplifies bounded rationality is useful in answering if elections have continuity with the past. The bounded rationality theory upholds that "voters are rational and that they have preferences and act in line with their preferences"



in the act of voting." The cognitive apparatus that voters use accepts "cognitive heuristics to process information, to make inferences about the world, and partly based decisions--specifically active voting--on those heuristics." (Kovic *et al.*, p. 349)

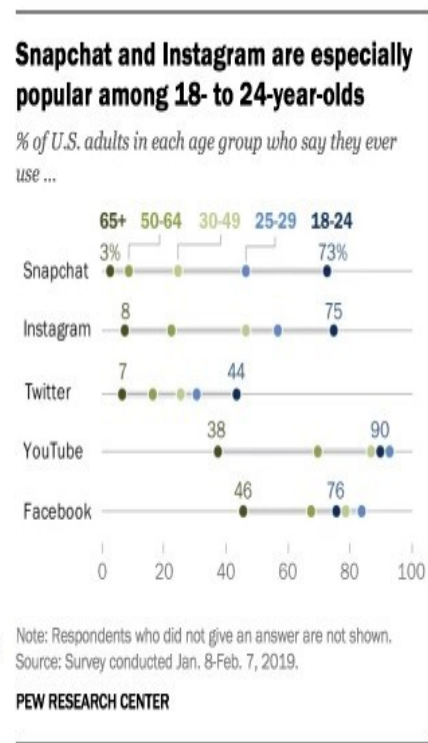
A cognitive heuristic useful in appraising trends in issue framing is the so-called mere exposure effect. Humans have a tendency "to develop positive attitudes towards information, objects or people merely by being exposed to that information, those objects, or those people." (Kovic *et al.*, p.349) Issue framing can utilize this heuristic by valencing issues that are frequently called to the attention of voters. The more strength an issue has in repetitive presentation, the more likely the issue is to become a leading election issue. The increasing importance of technology in reaching voters can produce a trend in issue framing because of this heuristic.

A second heuristic relevant to issue framing is the *vox populi* signaling effect. Social media benefits from this heuristic. People appear to have a tendency to accept what is visible on social media as representing public opinion. Although social media has been described as "an extreme form of non probability sampling," resolving if social media disproportionately influences issue formation may involve heuristics. (Kovic *et al.*, p. 350) Since a significant question throughout this paper is the decisive influence of social media in issue framing, the *vox populi* signaling affect heuristic is of authentic interest.

Analysis of trends in framing issues cannot ignore data that identifies differences and social media usage between age groups. There is a definite trend for younger age groups to utilize social media substantially more than older groups. A recent Pew Research Center study

concluded, "As was true in previous surveys of social media use by the Center, there is substantial age-related differences in platform use. This is especially true of Instagram and Snapchat, which are used by 67% and 62% of 18 to 29 year-olds, respectively." (Pew, 2019)

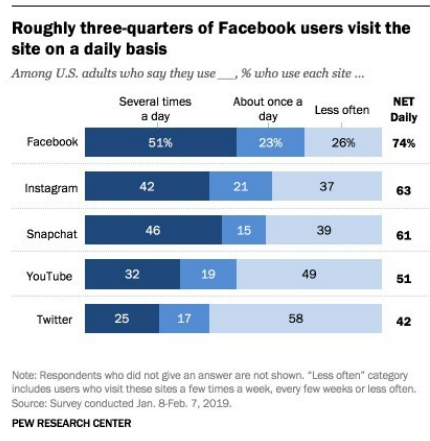
**Figure Ten**  
**Snapchat and Instagram Are Especially Popular among 18 to 24 Year Olds**



(source: Pew Research Center, "Share of U.S. Adults Using Social Media")

Denying the issue framing significance of social media is almost impossible. Social media is accessed on a daily basis by most U.S. adults. On the basis of the cognitive heuristics affecting the bounded rationality of voters, the amount of social media access would almost undeniably have significant influence on issue framing. Figure Eleven by the Pew Research Center is convincing data substantiating the extent of social media influence.

## Figure Eleven Roughly Three-Quarters of Facebook Users Visit the Site on a Daily Basis



(source: Pew Research Center, "Share of U.S. Adults Using Social Media")

More complete demographics about use of online platforms is complementary to some other ideas about social media influence presented in his paper. Except for age, the differences between demographic groupings exist but are not overwhelming. This data is consistent with the hypothesis that social media's influence on issue formation is to create a less elite process. If one has followed from the data that issue framing is becoming more popular, the demographic data in Figure Twelve could be seen as supporting this perspective. The significant truth presented in Figure Twelve is that social media usage is remarkably thoroughly distributed throughout the U.S. adult population. (Pew, 2019)

**Figure Twelve**  
**Use of Different Online Platforms by Demographic Groups**

<b>Use of different online platforms by demographic groups</b>									
<i>% of U.S. adults who say they ever use the following online platforms or messaging apps</i>									
	<b>YouTube</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Instagram</b>	<b>Pinterest</b>	<b>LinkedIn</b>	<b>Snapchat</b>	<b>Twitter</b>	<b>WhatsApp</b>	<b>Reddit</b>
U.S. adults	73%	69%	37%	28%	27%	24%	22%	20%	11%
Men	78	63	31	15	29	24	24	21	15
Women	68	75	43	42	24	24	21	19	8
White	71	70	33	33	28	22	21	13	12
Black	77	70	40	27	24	28	24	24	4
Hispanic	78	69	51	22	16	29	25	42	14
Ages 18-29	91	79	67	34	28	62	38	23	22
18-24	90	76	75	38	17	73	44	20	21
25-29	93	84	57	28	44	47	31	28	23
30-49	87	79	47	35	37	25	26	31	14
50-64	70	68	23	27	24	9	17	16	6
65+	38	46	8	15	11	3	7	3	1
<\$30,000	68	69	35	18	10	27	20	19	9
\$30,000-\$74,999	75	72	39	27	26	26	20	16	10
\$75,000+	83	74	42	41	49	22	31	25	15
High school or less	64	61	33	19	9	22	13	18	6
Some college	79	75	37	32	26	29	24	14	14
College+	80	74	43	38	51	20	32	28	15
Urban	77	73	46	30	33	29	26	24	11
Suburban	74	69	35	30	30	20	22	19	13
Rural	64	66	21	26	10	20	13	10	8

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.  
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 8-Feb. 7, 2019.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

(source: Pew Research Center, "Share of U.S. Adults Using Social Media")

Moving from data to conclusions, the images in Figures Four through Nine presented a faint pattern of technology's increasing influence on issue formation. Contrasting the health care issue in 2014 and 2018 presents possibly the best example. By 2018, the phrase "healthcare voter" begins appearing in the images. Various theoretical perspectives on changes affecting issue framing would predict this development. The backbenchers and their influential friends are taking over thanks to social media. The sophisticated and dry presentation of the health care issue in 2014 has experienced some sort of transformation. By 2018, health care issues are presented in more vivid and personal terms. The unit of analysis in 2014 could be described as dissemination of information from elites. The 2018 unit of analysis has changed

to collective action promoting self-interest. A trend is observable on issue framing in health care between 2014 and 2018.

The immigration issue allows some hypothesizing about technology's influence and the mere exposure effect. Between 2014 and 2018, the media that conveys information has become more sophisticated. High quality graphics presentation devices including a substantial range of smartphones have become ubiquitous. The information being provided about the immigration issue in 2018 is substantially more vivid and graphically oriented than was the case in 2014. One could theorize that immigration's potential as a leading issue is accentuated by new technology's sophisticated graphics capabilities. There is a noticeable shift towards more emotionally charged graphics presented more vividly in 2018. There is substantially greater social media interest in immigration. The immigration issue in 2018 likely follows from how compatible the improved technology is to vivid emotional images. These observations suggest issue framing about immigration is increasingly the result of the demographic profile of social media users.

The economy issue may present the clearest contrast between 2014 and 2018 in issue framing. The images about the economy issue in 2014 are substantially influenced by the incumbent president explaining economics. In 2014, the economy appears to have happened because of presidential economics. Information about the state of the economy is undeniably being communicated downward from the national leader. 2018 presents a stark contrast. Various factors affecting economic well-being including tariffs, deficits, and national debt are more prominent in the presentation of the issue. As with the immigration issue, the economy is presented in substantially more vivid and personal terms. The trend that can be discerned

is away from downward flow of information and toward a more involved debate among less influential leaders and articulate citizens.

From a methodological perspective, the qualitative data this paper has relied upon has succeeded satisfactorily in improving knowledge about trends in issue framing. Contrasting images about election issues in 2014 and 2018 did allow reasonable interpretivism. The differences between these two years can be discerned. When one combines these observations with some theoretical perspectives about what is happening in issue formation, improved concepts about trends affecting American elections results. The procedure of going from qualitative data to conclusions with interpretive practice appears sound.

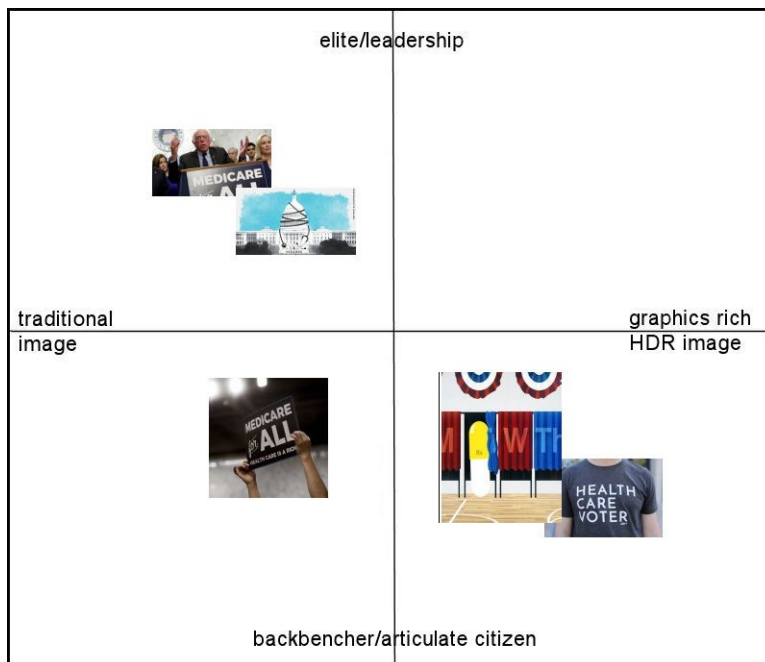
The issue of interpretive practice and producing results on the basis of the image data can be reasoned reflexively. Were one to ground subsequent efforts analyzing trends in issue framing on these beginnings, undeniably some suggestions for more perceptive analysis could be made. Improved explanation for what happens between data and conclusions could lead to more insightful analysis. Cognitive mapping is one technique that might be added to the analysis of many images.

Cognitive mapping would involve placing each image being analyzed on a two-dimensional map. This could be accomplished for this research problem by identifying two relevant dimensions. From the preceding analysis, one dimension could be a continuum from elite/leadership oriented to backbencher/articulate citizen oriented. The second dimension could be a continuum based on technology. One end of this proposed continuum could be traditional images and the other end could be graphics rich HDR images. The second

continuum would be useful in assessing the extent sophisticated high graphics capable devices are influencing politics. Possibly, the second continuum would add perspective on the social networking phenomena influencing issue framing.

Figure Thirteen exemplifies the type of instrument that would be used to accomplish cognitive mapping of the images being analyzed. The researcher could place a miniature images on this graph on the basis of locating the image somewhere on the cognitive map's X & Y axis. This method for analyzing qualitative image data could be accomplished by several coders. The results of how different coders located various images on the two axis graph could be compared. Issues of inter-coder reliability could be analyzed.

**Figure Thirteen**  
**A Cognitive Mapping Analytic Tool for Analyzing Issue Framing Related Issues**



## Conclusion

The conventional wisdom about U.S. midterm elections was written decades ago. All midterm elections are analyzed as substantially a referendum about the incumbent president. Two or three national issues develop and influence electoral outcomes throughout the country. Beyond that, there are local issues, candidate issues, and local party issues. From the literature's perspective, the electing of representatives and senators goes on in off-year elections without much change over the decades.

This paper has focused upon the two or three National issues that influence voting behavior in the midterm elections. How these issues are framed has been compared using the midterm elections of 2014 and 2018. Aware that issue framing is no longer altogether dominated by mainstream media, this paper has sought to present the real change happening in US politics as a result of technological innovation. Increasingly sophisticated devices are conveying digital content pervasively throughout the electorate. Improve technology has produced a profound social networking phenomena. The electorate's involvement with social networking is so substantial that ignoring how this phenomenon contributes to issue framing is imprudent.

Mainstream media and social media somehow share in issue framing in midterm elections. This analysis has sought to improve concepts about what is happening in U.S. politics in off-year elections. The objective of the paper has been to effectively present how new politically relevant phenomena are shaping developments in American politics. By focusing on issue framing a more perceptive explanation for present political realities in the U.S. is imagined to



be possible. The microcosm of issue framing in midterm elections is exemplary of more profound trends presently influencing American politics.

From a methodological perspective, the paper has produced a qualitative methods analysis of images of three issues prominent in the 2014 and 2018 elections. Immigration, health care, and the economy are the three issues identified as leading issues in both of these elections. Images of how each of these three issues were presented in both years are identified using theoretical sampling. Images were chosen by theoretical sampling that contrasted how these issues were presented to the voters in 2014 and 2018. This data proved adequate for interpretive analysis resulting in a more perceptive analysis of what is happening in U.S. politics.

Social media is explained in the literature as producing a change in issue framing from leadership dominated influenced my backbenchers and articulate citizens. Comparing data from 2014 and 2018 appears to substantiate this theory. The health care issue provides the best example. In 2014, health care was presented so as to inform citizens about what was happening. By 2018, the idea of the health care voter was prominent in election issue images. In other words, health care had become a self-interested reason among voters. No longer were voters listening to what was happening so much as they were acting based on what they understood. The leadership role in framing issues had yielded to the rationalism of backbenchers and articulate citizens.

Profound concern with immigration issues appears influenced by more sophisticated information device's sophisticated imagery. Research about the importance of social

networking presents that social networking is a phenomena access by over half the US adult population everyday. The election issue significance of this substantial use of increasingly sophisticated information technology is difficult to ignore. Theory about bounded rationality and voting presents voters as rational but using cognitive heuristics. One heuristic identified as affecting voting is the mere exposure effect. This heuristic causes the voter to positively valence something as he receives information more frequently. The increasingly sophisticated and vivid images about immigration cannot be disassociated from increasingly sophisticated devices of all sorts. The demographics about social networking presents fewer differences among demographic groupings than might have been imagined. All this likely results in an issue framing process with declining leadership influence.

Another bounded rationality heuristic affecting issue framing is the *vox populi* effect. The cognitive apparatus of voters appears to associate ideas appearing on social media with public opinion. Both increasing sophistication of information technology and the demographics about social networking are important factors. The voting public is demanding issues presented in high definition. The articulate citizen strengths of social networking are combining to affect how election issues are framed. The economy issue is an outstanding example. In 2014, the economy was presented as an explanation from the incumbent president. By 2018, how the issue was presented focused on tariffs, deficits, and national debt. The greater sophistication with which the economy issue was understood in 2018 well exemplifies the changes occurring in U.S. politics as social networking and mainstream media now contend in framing election issues.

As a methodological idea, analyzing images of how three issues were presented in 2014 and 2018 was productive. The literature that analyzed how developments in shared issue framing including mainstream media and social networking proved useful. Interpretive practice was able to develop contrast between the two election years that were successful in producing perceptive analysis of changes occurring in American politics. Combining theory, secondary data, and this paper's own qualitative image data was effective and convincing at portraying the extensive and profound influence social networking may well be having on U.S. politics.

Following the qualitative methods precept of reflexivity, a suggestion was made for an alternative interpretive procedure that might be useful in further researching the issues in this paper. How qualitative methodology accomplishes interpretivism could possibly be better explained. Were the methodology to include cognitive mapping to assist moving from qualitative data images to conclusions, the methodology might be more readily comprehensible. A cognitive map for locating each image could be comprised of two axes devised from relevant concepts. One possible axis could be a continuum from elite/leadership to backbencher/articulate elite. The other axis could be a continuum from ordinary images to those extensively influenced by the vivid graphics capabilities of increasingly more sophisticated information technology. The researcher would code by placing a miniature image on the cognitive map according to how the image located on both axes. This coding technique could be accomplished by other persons with interpretive skills and inter-coder reliability could be analyzed.

Presenting how American politics is developing from the theoretical perspective of issue framing appears a useful technique. Changes in political reality are almost certainly

happening in the present day. The increasing sophistication of information technology continues to influence issues and outcomes. Better understanding how voter rationalism occurs in this changing reality requires perceptive concepts that combine understanding of behavior with reasonable evaluation of the influence of sophisticated information devices. Since technology is popular and continues to attract the interest of the vast majority of voters, American politics likely is changing. More comprehension of this phenomena better connects citizens with the ability to reason with their political culture.

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