

SECURITIZATION AS A THEORY OF MEDIA EFFECTS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation proposes a particular form of media framing effect from securitization, a process in which political actors seek to create consensus about security-related issues such as terrorism and immigration by portraying them as imminent threats to a state's physical or cultural survival. The dissertation offers a two-stage model, in which securitization is first examined as an effect in news media accounts and then tested in an experiment as an effect of media accounts.

A content analysis found that a salient example of securitization, the idea of a "war on terrorism," appeared as a consensual frame in distinct sectors of the media market after the September 2001 attacks. The frame diverged predictably in ensuing years, suggesting that the securitization frame changes in response to news organizations' sense of audience expectations and perceptions of the boundaries of political debate.

The experimental portion found that securitization does not affect how accurately audiences comprehend the central point of a story but does appear to produce less attentive processing among those opposed to the government. The absence of securitization, on the other hand, appears to produce more attentive processing among those who consider themselves politically to the right of the media. Emotionally, the frame has no effect on opponents of the government but produces more trust in government among pro-government audiences and those to the right of the media.