

The Media in the 2006 Israeli Elections: Who's Manufacturing Consent? Framing the Spin-Doctors

ATARA FRENKEL-FARAN and SAM LEHMAN-WILZIG

The 2006 elections were different from earlier elections in more ways than one. It was an intriguing campaign, full of events and shifts, with a genuine agenda and new heroes.¹ Throughout the campaign—which started with Amir Peretz's victory over Shimon Peres in the Labour party leadership elections—voters watched the media covering the implosion of the Likud and its ensuing electoral debacle, the shrinking of Labour, Sharon's descent from stage, the creation of Kadima.

Although parties were born, split, shrivelled and withered away, the public did not notice major differences between the main parties' platforms.² In light of their ideological weakness the parties sought to brand themselves by concentrating on their prime ministerial candidate's image and building a differentiated political agenda. Those tasks were outsourced, handed over to PR specialists. As a result, leadership grooming and platform composing were replaced by the use of vague catchphrases, well-designed sound bites, misleading examples, and the use and abuse of statistics under the spin-doctors' guidance.

The latter had to decide, among other things, whether to emphasize the issue of security, regarded traditionally as the primary focus of Israeli politics, and to discuss the Intifada, the disengagement plan and Hamas' victory in the Palestinian elections—or to emphasize socioeconomic issues, reflecting the unprecedented number of citizens living below the poverty threshold, massive education, health and welfare budget cuts, state workers fired and salary payment delays, and pensioners condemned to hunger.³ Socioeconomic issues, denied centre-stage for years on the pretext of a national emergency, received greater attention and had more impact

Atara Frenkel-Faran is a lecturer in the department of communications at Sapir College and Sam Lehman-Wilzig is an associate professor in the department of political studies at Bar-Ilan University. The authors wish to thank Shani Tzur and Cobi Yaacobi for their help in compiling the data used in this study.

than ever before, with the Labour party taking the lead, trying to place those issues at the top of the public agenda.

However, Labour's attempt to change the public agenda did not translate into a genuine debate and certainly not into an electoral transformation.⁴ The article will address the media's role in this process. Within the theoretical framework of agenda setting and framing theories this article will explore the main issues discussed by the media during the 2006 election. Following this, the article will examine the prominence of socioeconomic versus security issues on the political agenda as they were presented in the parties' television propaganda, and also the media agenda as reflected in television news broadcasts and news items or columns in the papers. We shall also analyze the correlation between the two agendas, and try to shed light on the behind-the-scenes activities of spin-doctors and their devastating implications for democracy resulting in, among other things, the lowest Israeli voting rates ever. Finally, the article will propose some theoretical revisions and pragmatic recommendations to be implemented as soon as possible (well before the next election campaign).

AGENDA SETTING AND FRAMING—THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Election campaigns have been portrayed as a three-player game involving the candidates, the media, and the voters—the so-called 'golden electoral triangle'. In modern politics the media plays a prominent role acting as a critical link between the public and its representatives, supplying information to the former while supervising the latter.⁵

'First Level' Agenda Setting: 'The Media Telling Us What to Think About'

According to Lippmann,⁶ people do not respond directly to events in the real world, but live in a pseudo-environment composed of 'the pictures in our heads'. The media play an important part in furnishing these pictures. Therefore, the question as to how media organizations decide what stories are important and how to cover them becomes a matter of great importance in our society.⁷

Fusing both mass communication theory and public opinion theory about agenda formation into their self-titled agenda-setting hypothesis, McCombs and Shaw argued in their classic work that a mass-mediated agenda affects the public through a 'simple' increase in reporting on an issue and at the same time public interest increases due to the salience and ubiquity of that issue for the public at large. The agenda-setting theory postulated as its most important effect the mass media's ability to mentally order and organize our world for us, reaffirming Bernard Cohen's famous summary statement that 'the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about'.⁸

Often called ‘first-level’ agenda setting, the core theoretical assertion in traditional agenda-setting research is that media concern with ‘objects’ (e.g., issues, organizations and political candidates) in the news leads to increased public concern with those same ‘objects’.⁹

‘Second Level’ Agenda Setting, or, ‘Framing’: The Media Not Only Telling Us What to Think About, But also ‘How to Think About It’

While the first level of agenda setting deals with the selection of issues by the news media and its impact on the public agenda, the second level of agenda setting deals with selection of elements within a particular issue also known as ‘attributes’ (e.g., a property, quality, or characteristic that describes an object).¹⁰

The core idea is the same for agendas of attributes as it is for agendas of objects: the salience of elements, objects or attributes on the media agenda influences the salience of those elements on the public agenda.¹¹

In addition to object salience, the contemporary explication of second-level agenda setting has linked the concept with framing,¹² suggesting that news media attention can influence how people think about a topic by selecting and placing emphasis on certain attributes while ignoring others.¹³

The way a problem is framed might determine how people understand and evaluate the issue. Framing is the selection of a perceived reality ‘in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’.¹⁴ Frames ‘call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions’.¹⁵

Having said that, Cohen’s statement must be revised to state that the media not only tell us what to think about (the first level of agenda setting—object salience), they also tell us how to think about it (the second level of agenda setting—attribute salience, or framing)—and, consequently, what to think¹⁶ and what to do about it.¹⁷

Frames, or the way public problems are formulated for the media audience,¹⁸ might lead not only to different thoughts, but also to different actions such as voting choices during election campaigns.

The Battle over Agenda Building during Election Campaigns: Who Sets the Media Agenda?

Although the relationship between media and public salience is well documented,¹⁹ researchers have stressed the need to go beyond agenda setting to determine who sets the media agenda, how and for what purpose it is set, and with what impact on the distribution of power and values in society.²⁰

The broader concept of agenda building is useful for addressing such questions in that it conceptualizes the process of salience formation as one of mutual influence among policymakers, the media, and the public.²¹ Simply stated, agenda-building researchers ask who sets the media agenda?

Setting the Public Agenda: A Political Triumph?

On most matters of social or political interest, people are not generally so well informed and cognitively active. Therefore, framing heavily influences their responses to communications. Framing is no doubt a central power in the democratic process.²² Given this, the reasons for the battle over setting the public agenda between the media and the political parties are self-evident.

E.E. Schattschneider summed up the importance of this agenda-setting role of the media when he wrote: 'The definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power'.²³ Politicians seeking support are thus compelled to compete with each other and with journalists over news frames.²⁴ Framing in this light is really the imprint of power.²⁵

Campaigns and routine times might foster different agenda setting and framing dynamics. Studies examine the extent media and political parties are interacting during the campaign and whether the political parties manage to set the media agenda or instead follow media leads. Some argue that during campaigns, the media's impact on candidates' and parties' agendas is limited or even absent.²⁶ On the other hand, candidates have the ability to influence voters directly—through paid advertising/propaganda—or indirectly through their campaigns' attempts to manipulate news coverage.

2006 ELECTION AGENDAS AND FRAMES—RESEARCH QUESTION

This article addresses three perceptions of reality in the 2006 Israeli election campaign. That of the public, as the result of its direct and indirect experience of various aspects of reality; that of the media, interpreting reality for the public, creating sensitivity to, and awareness of, issues, as well as simply informing—in a word, setting the agenda of priorities and saliences; and that of the parties, presenting themselves in such a way as to answer the implied demands of the public and media agendas.²⁷

Against this theoretical background, the key questions are: first, what were the issues on both the media and the political agendas (concentrating on socioeconomic versus security issues)? Second, what was the correlation between the two agendas and how can it be explained (focusing on the 'PR'ization of politics and spin-doctors' behind-the-scenes activities)? Third, what are the theoretical and practical implications of the 'PR'ization of politics to agenda-setting theory and Israeli democracy?

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer these questions, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. Concerning the political agenda, the material included the parties' televised campaign spots, as well as their few paid political newspaper advertisements. Regarding the media agenda, the material included televised broadcasting news (Channels 1 and 2), and the news items and columns of an Israeli Hebrew-language, elite daily newspaper (*Ha'aretz*). The public agenda, a subject of struggle between politicians and the media, was analyzed based on public opinion polls published in the media and the public's response at the ballot box as attested to by the election's final results. All three agendas were analyzed over the three-week period prior to election day. In order not to unduly complicate matters, although a variety of parties were analyzed²⁸ our results will focus here on Labour, Kadima, and the Likud as most representative of the Israeli left, centre, and right-wing positions.

Ideology, Image and the Race

In order to address the first research question concerning both the media and political agendas, this study will explore the main issues discussed by the media during the 2006 election. For reasons of simplification and elaboration this study will address three major categories. First, the issues will be divided into three major categories labelled:

- (1) *Ideology*—concerning issue positions or political themes;
- (2) *Image*—personal attributes of the candidates such as biographical information, perceived qualifications, health, personality, and integrity—a result of the fact that the personalization of politics has become a predominant factor in the contemporary world and the voters' choice increasingly depends upon their perception of the individual candidate;²⁹
- (3) *Horse Race*—information regarding campaign strategies, propaganda, prospective winners and losers, polls, etc. Media coverage of democratic election campaigns is characterized as horse-race journalism focusing on the competition between the candidates/parties (emphasizing polls and speculation regarding probable winners and losers) rather than the major themes and the candidates' positions. 'Horse-racism' has become an extremely common reporting practice deserving its own category.³⁰

Media critics have suggested an agreed-upon common distinction between a reporting style or frame called 'strategy coverage' that emphasizes the *how*—the style (aspects of the campaign including slogans, polls, televised propaganda, and politicians' personal attributes);³¹ and an alternative

frame called ‘issue/policy coverage’ that emphasize the *what*—the substance (policy issues including information about who is advocating which policy alternative, and consequences of the problems and proposals).³²

Peace and Security v. Socioeconomics

As the focal point of the research is the tension between peace and security and socioeconomic affairs, each aforementioned category will be further sub-divided and classified as (a) ‘Security’—items dealing with the Arab–Israeli conflict, the army, terror, the barrier, settlements, Palestinian elections, the Iranian nuclear threat, etc.; (b) ‘Social’—fiscal policy, education and culture, poverty/class, violence and crime, health, and so forth; or (c) ‘Other’—all items not included in (a) or (b), such as separation of religion and state, corruption, and ecology.

Affective Classification

Finally, an affective classification will determine whether an item is framed as (i) Positive; (ii) Negative; or, (iii) Neutral.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ideology, Image and the Race

Analyzing the political and media agendas,³³ and comparing them on the basis of the categories ‘ideology’, ‘image’ and the ‘race’, there is clear evidence of what is called ‘media effect’, or, as Marshall McLuhan opined: ‘the medium is the message’.³⁴ Analyzing the media agenda by medium—press versus television—shows that *Ha’aretz* was much more balanced than TV channels 1 and 2.

In descending order, *Ha’aretz* focused primarily on the race (reports of who is leading or falling behind), then (extremely close behind) the candidates and finally, but not far behind, items concerning ideology (see Figure 1). At least in these elections, the print press had no focused media agenda: the coverage was haphazard, depending on breaking news and/or the ideological or professional bent of each reporter/editor. While media researchers have called for more in-depth analysis and a longer-term outlook in the print press in order to survive in a media environment where the Internet (and radio) specialize in short-term breaking news, it seems that the Israeli print press has not adapted itself as yet to the new media environment.

A different story was told on the televised news. Here, the race was the main event. This was the case concerning the three parties—Likud, Kadima and Labour—without major differences (see Figure 2). Coverage of the candidates came in second place, with merely half the reportage. Matters

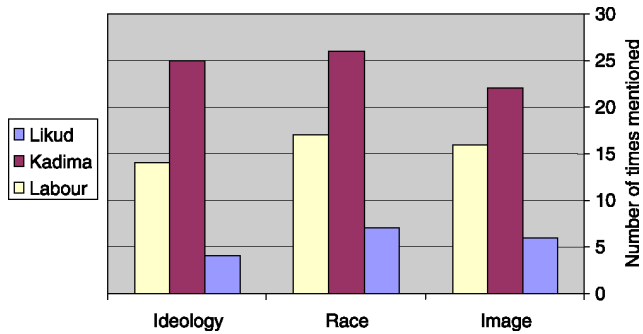


FIGURE 1
MEDIA AGENDA—HA'ARETZ

of substance, i.e. ideological issues, were last with considerably fewer items. A comparison of the news broadcasts of channels 1 and 2 shows that this was true regarding both channels, with ideological issues hardly covered by Channel 2. The lack of substantive coverage is not surprising given the widely recognized superficiality of this medium. After all, 'substance' is far more difficult to present visually than personalities or 'horse-race' graphics. As a result, in almost all cases, the TV channels did not follow the party agenda lead, but rather went their own way—many times in direct contradistinction to the party propaganda in issue areas and attitude. Viewers were thus served contradictory pictures in the space of a few minutes—between the news and the political party advertisements.

The difference in the way the election was covered is mostly to be explained as a function of the 'needs' of the medium.³⁵ There is no evidence

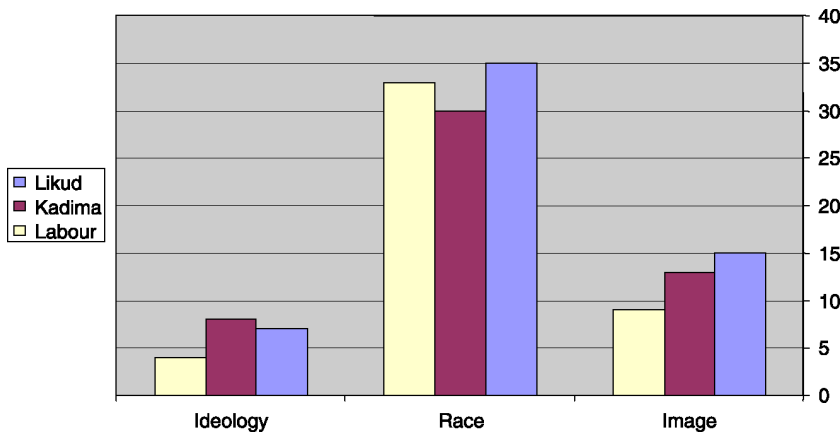


FIGURE 2
MEDIA AGENDA—CHANNEL II

that Israel's print journalists are ideologically or professionally 'different' from their television counterparts. Another conclusion to be drawn is that given the fact that both the press and television were centred on the race and the candidates, it comes as no surprise that the political agenda's effect on the media agenda was sparse.

Moving from analyzing the agendas by medium to a closer inspection of each, and every, party's case, other findings are revealed. Labour's propaganda was mainly centred on substance and concentrated least on the race. Regarding image, Amir Peretz metamorphosed through the campaign, under the influence of the party's spin-doctors—from the winner of the party's primaries as a blue-collar working-class hero to a security-centred, bourgeois politician.³⁶ According to our findings, the discussion concerning the party leader was quite limited, following the advice of media consultants. This could be the result of the fact that Peretz was not considered a 'national' leader, and thus the party strategists probably tried to de-emphasize the personal aspect, focusing instead on issue areas where it was clearly different from the Likud and, to a certain extent, from Kadima. The media agenda went along with this to a large extent, focusing on the race and less on the party leader. It should be stated that the race-centred media coverage seems obvious considering that Labour was depicted as 'second to the throne' throughout the campaign.

Similar to Labour, the Likud focused its propaganda on matters of substance with coverage of the head of the party, Benjamin Netanyahu, in second place. This could have resulted from the advice of the party's spin-doctors dealing with the problem of an unpopular party leader whose economic policy was successful at the macro-level, but caused great pain to wide sections of the public on the micro-economic plane. Thus, here too de-emphasis of personalities was called for. However, to the dismay of the Likud spin-doctors the media opted for a different agenda, focusing on exactly what the spin-doctors wished to avoid—both the candidate and the race (negatively, one must add). As the rules of the medium dictate, that was the case regarding the press and more so regarding the televised news broadcasts (Figures 1 and 2).

Kadima's political agenda was different from the two parties discussed above. The party was advised by its spin-doctors to concentrate on its candidate—Ehud Olmert, presented as Sharon's heir—and other party members, rather than on ideological matters. In an attempt to build the image of the 'new Olmert', the party devoted the lion's share of its advertising to building up Olmert's image. There could be several reasons for this. First, this was a new party so that the public had to get used to the names leading the list, even though most of them were recognized personalities from their previous party or institutional affiliation. Second, the list was quite attractive—among others, Avi Dichter who was the former head of the 'Shabak' (counter-intelligence), widely credited to have

successfully stopped the second Intifada; Uriel Reichman, the charismatic former president of the Herzliyah Interdisciplinary College; and Tzipi Livni, the minister of foreign affairs. Third, the centrist party was a jumble of members, very different ideologically from one another, not to mention the fact that the party simply had no written platform for much of the campaign.

Another piece of spin-doctors' advice was to rely on the 'bandwagon effect' and to accord the race, or more precisely Kadima's high probability of winning the election, relative importance in its propaganda (although in third place, but emphasized more than was the case in any other party). The race being the favourite category of the press and especially television, with Kadima considered indisputably triumphant, the result was a higher correlation between the party political agenda and the media agenda.

Peace and Security v. Socioeconomics (Positive/Neutral/Negative)

In analyzing the tension between peace and security and socioeconomic affairs in each party's political agenda (see Figure 3) and in the media agenda (see Figures 4, 5 and 6), it is not at all surprising that the findings here show the Likud to have downplayed social issues given Netanyahu's economic policy and its wide public condemnation. Thus, when the Likud did mention social issues the advertisements presented the picture in positive terms. The fact that national security issues were given a bit more emphasis is also unsurprising given the Likud's longstanding focus on this issue. Why was it not the central focus? Probably because the Likud itself was split on some elements of national security, e.g. several Likud members

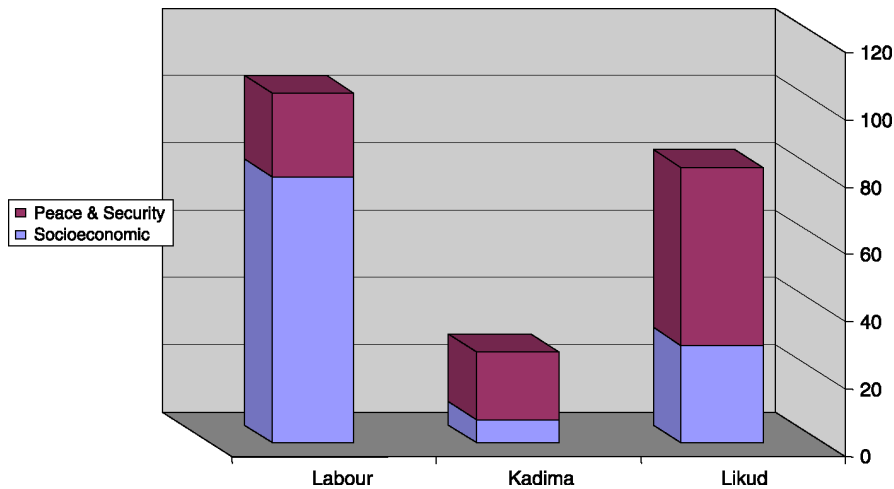


FIGURE 3
POLITICAL AGENDA—TV

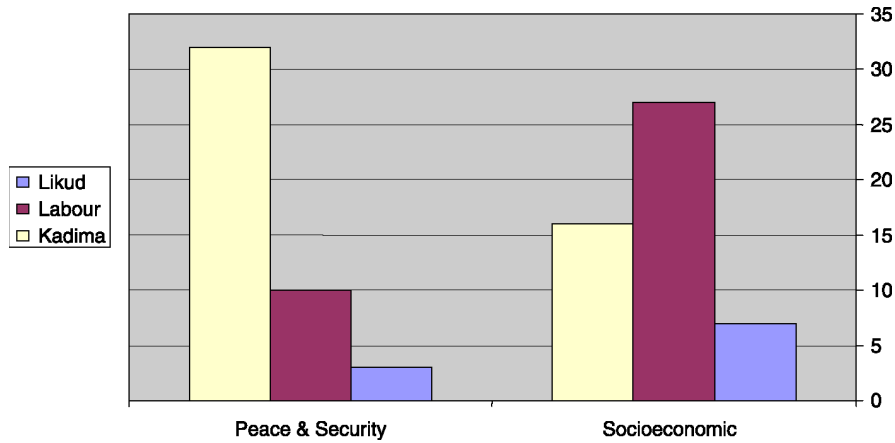


FIGURE 4
MEDIA AGENDA—HA'ARETZ

opposed the Gaza disengagement while others (perhaps reluctantly) supported it. Nevertheless, this issue was presented in strongly negative terms through an attack on the dovish policies of Labour (promised) and Kadima (being carried out).

In contrast, the media agenda as presented in the press focused heavily on social issues (Figures 4 and 5). This continued the media's longstanding anti-Netanyahu slant, exploiting social issues as his Achilles heel. To the distress of the party's spin-doctors the same was true regarding television. The media dealt with security and social issues, but discussed in-depth Likud's decline and future defeat. Criticizing Netanyahu, emphasizing social aspects contrary to the party agenda, and negative framing were all

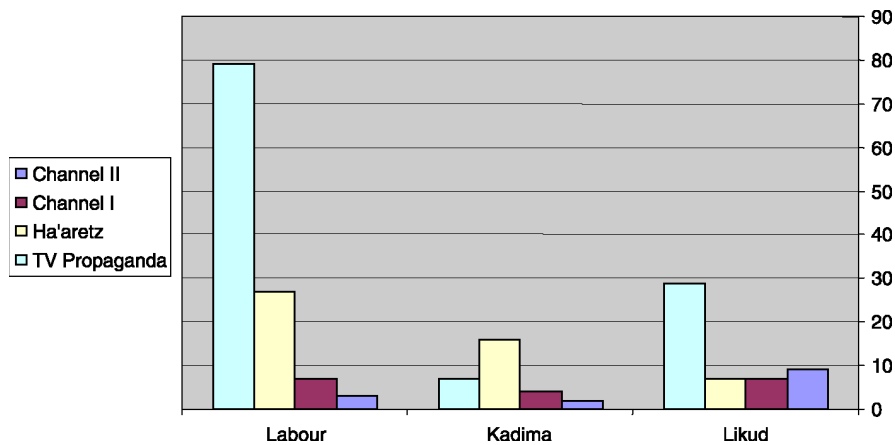


FIGURE 5
SOCIOECONOMIC AFFAIRS

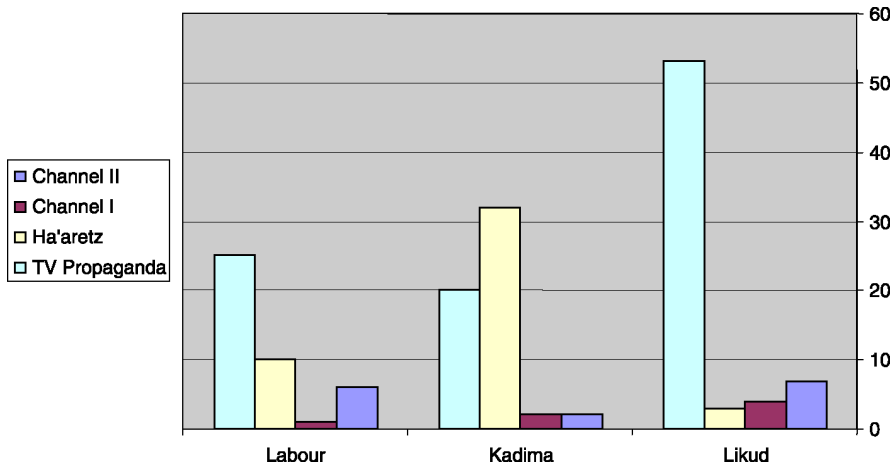


FIGURE 6
PEACE AND SECURITY AFFAIRS

different parts of extremely negative media coverage of the Likud across the newspaper and television channels.

In stark contrast, Labour's election propaganda heavily emphasized the social issue area (Figures 3 and 5)—in positive terms regarding what it intends to do once in power. Given that this was the party's strength and even *raison d'être* (after all, as noted earlier it elected Amir Peretz as its leader, a bona fide 'social issue' candidate), such an outcome was almost preordained. Later on, following the advice of spin-doctors aware of the loss of votes as a result of growing criticism regarding the party and its leader's security weakness, more importance was given to security issues and to the party's 'security-hive' (cadre). All that sounds rather ironic from a post-election perspective, given Peretz's eventual role in the new government as defence minister.

Labour's political agenda was adopted by the media (press and TV) to a great extent (see Figures 4–6). Or perhaps it was the media adopting the public agenda post-Netanyahu's economic policy, hence emphasizing social aspects (approximately twice as much as security). This, however, continued to be the case once the spin-doctors started acting behind-the-scenes to transform the agenda and get more exposure for security issues. It is worth mentioning that Amir Peretz, who was positively presented at the start of the campaign after his surprising victory over Peres, came under increasing criticism as the campaign progressed.

In this context, one should note that Shelly Yechimovitz, a popular broadcaster from Channel 2 and Israel Radio, was an early prominent supporter of Peretz and was then elected as one of Labour's leading candidates. Interestingly enough, Channel 2 concentrated its coverage of

Labour on security matters. This might have pleased the party's spin-doctors, except that adopting the security prism resulted in the party and its leader coming under criticism. This could serve as an example of the fact that adopting the prism promoted by the party's spin-doctors by the media does not necessarily benefit the party—if the 'frame' is presented in negative terms.

The Kadima picture is the reverse image of the one presented above, with defence topics receiving almost three times as much broadcast time as social issues (Figure 3)—probably because Olmert and his new party were viewed as needing strengthening on the National Security front. Unsurprisingly, Kadima's propaganda was highly negative vis-à-vis Amir Peretz's lack of experience on this score, ignoring to a large extent the Likud, which was far harder to attack here (given Netanyahu's longstanding experience as an anti-terror strategist and his experience as prime minister).

Kadima's spin-doctors—enjoying the benefits of working for the incumbent party, unusually also a new party,³⁷ relying on former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's record and public support—first advocated a don't-rock-the-boat strategy. Even after Sharon was hospitalized twice, and subsequently replaced by Ehud Olmert, Kadima's spin-doctors still opted for narcotizing the election campaign, a strategy that would eventually cost the party quite a few votes.³⁸ Still, it is evident that the fact that Kadima was created by a military hero and a former Likud leader gave the party an advantage in the security realm. That common knowledge was well understood and taken advantage of by the party's spin-doctors, placing the subject at the centre of its propaganda and at the top of its political agenda priorities (see Figure 1). Although Olmert is no military figure, the spin-doctors did not fear that his image would be hampered by the ideological–security bias, given the fact that his major opponent, Amir Peretz, was also not renowned for his military record.

Concurrent with the spin-doctor's objectives, the party's political agenda was reflected in the media agenda. The press focused on Olmert (Figure 4) even though the coverage was negative at times and dealt with such matters as corruption. The spin-doctors' success in influencing the press agenda was also evident from the newspaper's choice of devoting twice as many items to security issues (Figure 4). The spin-doctors' achievements in influencing television news were less significant—partly for reasons having to do with the medium's tendency to focus on the race and on visual aspects. Once television did address ideological issues it focused on social issues to the dismay of the party's media consultants (Figures 5 and 6). One interesting point is that the media concentrated on the horse-race, but did so using a neutral or negative tone in most cases. This seems odd given the fact that the party was depicted as the definite winner from day one, and was the media's favourite according to the public³⁹—a fact

that seemed to help its spin-doctors' ability to convince the media to adopt their party's agenda (at least at the start of the campaign).

However, it should be noted that the resemblance between Kadima's political and media agendas could also be explained regardless of spin-doctor tactics. This correlation might also have resulted from the media's perceptions of the public agenda, i.e. the importance their voters attributed to security issues. Having said that, it is clear that the spin-doctors are valuable to the parties and very influential, and that the rising public concerns regarding spinning demands a separate discussion of the phenomenon.

SPINNING THE 2006 ELECTION

The 'PR'ization of Politics

Simply stated, agenda building and framing researchers ask who sets the media agenda. Given the high correlation found between the political agenda and the media agenda the answer shifts from major news editors or 'gatekeepers' to politicians and their public relations (PR) professionals also known as spin-doctors. Perhaps more than any other factor, PR activities are deemed paramount in influencing the media agenda. As a result, PR has become integral to the conduct of politics.⁴⁰ Public relations may not just influence what topics are covered in media coverage, but also how those topics are portrayed and ultimately how they are defined in public opinion. Public relations professionals fundamentally operate as frame strategists, who strive to determine how situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues and responsibility should be posed to achieve favourable objectives. Thus, framing decisions are perhaps the most important strategic choices made in public relations efforts.⁴¹

For better or worse, ours is an age of propaganda and political marketing.⁴² Party agitators and old-style propagandists have given way to politically neutral advertising experts, employed to sell politics in a professional, 'non-political' way.⁴³ Political parties and auxiliary organizations see themselves as forces to influence voting decisions propagandistically, analogous to the way advertising influences buying decisions.⁴⁴ In today's modern election campaigns, the role of political PR is considered integral to the communication activities of any successful candidacy. And as the role of the media has become much more central to the political process than ever before, the increased importance of the news media has interacted with the rise of PR, lobbying and 'spin' in politics so that we now live in an era of 'promotional culture'. Israel is of course no exception to this 'promotional culture'. As in the rest of the world, we are witnessing in Israel an expanding role played by communication consultants and political PR specialists in the last few years. Ever since television entered our living rooms, bringing with it debating politicians during their election

campaigns, the topic of media manipulation has been placed on the media and public agendas. This trend peaked with Benjamin Netanyahu's excellence in controlling and manipulating the media, and eventually the voting public, that advanced the critical debate regarding the 'PR'ization of Israeli politics a step further. During the 2006 Israeli elections Netanyahu's skills apparently did not help to garner support for the Likud, but the importance of political marketing was palpable, as one can deduce from the example (among others) of Tel Aviv University's decision to dedicate a conference to the issue: 'Towards the 2006 Election—The Big Bang or Business as Usual: Political Marketing Effects on Election Outcomes' on 15 January 2006.

Political PR and Spin-Doctors: Where Does One End and the Other Begin?

What is a spin-doctor? What does a spin-doctor do? Is the term just a catchphrase used by the mass media, along with similar phrases such as 'sound bite' and 'photo op'? Or does it refer to a genuinely new communication role with unusual potential for manipulating the media, and, in turn, the public?

Political PR has its roots in the United States of the 1920s. However, the 'PR'ization of politics really took off during the 1950s election campaigns. PR experts—proliferating numerically, using new tools and gaining influence on the political scene—became an ever-expanding feature of American politics and subsequently of the rest of the world. The next level was reached during the Nixon presidency (1969–74), from which the genesis of 'spin control' can be traced.

The term 'spin-doctor' originated in the 1950s from sports terminology, meaning making a ball go in a certain direction. In the political arena spinning refers to 'the blatant art of bending the truth'. The pejorative term signifying a heavily biased portrayal of an event or situation in one's own favour translates in election campaigns to the politicians' ability to turn the story about their favourite issue into something 'sexier', in order for it to be published at the expense of other stories of rival politicians.

While political imagery and hype are as old as Athenian democracy, public discussion regarding the phenomenon of spin-doctors is not. In recent years we have witnessed growing public awareness regarding spin-doctors, due among other things to vivid coverage of the subject by the media, whether the press, television or cinema. In the United States, where it all began, movies such as *Wag the Dog* (1997) and *Primary Colors* (1998), and more recently *American Dreamz* (2006) have led to, and are a reflection of, growing interest that manifested itself in the press offering its readers a line-up of each presidential election candidate's spin-doctors.

Israel was soon to follow. In the 2006 election, behind-the-scenes activities of spin-doctors were overtly presented in the media. The names

and actions of the parties' spin-doctors were published (even if sometimes unfortunately only after election day). In addition, a number of documentaries concerning spin-doctors were aired on television, such as two focusing on the primary election campaigns of MKs Limor Livnat and Binyamin (Fuad) Ben-Eliezer. However, the film that attracted the most viewers and public attention was no doubt *All the Campaign's Men* (paraphrasing the 1976 American movie *All the President's Men*, which spotlighted 'Watergate'), directed by Anat Goren. The movie was broadcast more than once on Channel 10 and was covered extensively, as expected, given the media's self-interest. Showing journalists resonating to spin-doctors' catchphrases and sound-bites, and exposing the common belief among spinners that candidate strategy is much more important than the party's advertising campaign, the movie focused on Kadima's spin-doctors headed by Reuven Adler. The latter contributed his name to the phenomenon, known in Israel as 'Adlerism'. In order to better understand what that means, a distinction between traditional PR consultants and spin-doctors is required.

Spin-doctors differ from traditional public relations practitioners along a number of dimensions, including: goals, media utilization, typical clients, common tools, communication techniques, orientation to the public, breadth of appeal, approach to ethics, and concern with self-image. Spin-doctors put greater stress on personal contacts with the media. They attempt to deal with negative turns of political events, and intervene earlier in the news-making process. By using new technology to greater advantage, spin-doctors flood media channels with the politician's message and interpretation of events, using unorthodox methods to get the job done while maintaining low visibility. Borrowing tactics from the world of PR—including the use of emotional language designed to provoke gut-level reactions, vague catchphrases and well-designed sound-bites, ambiguous statements that imply what one does not want to state outright, and the use and abuse of statistics⁴⁵—the spin-doctors seem to have found ways of circumventing the reporters' traditional wariness of their advocacy sources, being more skilled at this than traditional public relations practitioners. These skills and connections give the best spin-doctors a sort of 'institutional power' that remains even after a political administration changes hands.⁴⁶

Spin-Doctors and the Media: A Symbiotic Relationship

The relationship between the political elite, its spin-doctors, and the news media is characterized by conflict and cooperation. The power of 'presenting' politicians to the audience lies in the hands of the media through their agenda-setting and framing role. Unsurprisingly, politicians wish to retain as much control as possible over political agendas. This requires reducing the journalists' capacities to do so by employing

spin-doctors who deploy their knowledge of media practices to side-step the establishment media and facilitate un-mediated communication to voters. Given the aforementioned conflict, it is understandable why spin-doctors cooperate with the media—but what is the media's motive for doing so?

PR and spinning not only suit politicians, but media organizations as well, faced with pressures to be economically viable. Contemporary media economics has led to significant downsizing and deskilling in the newsroom in the form of fewer and cheaper staffers. However, these staffers are able to process media releases, which become a cheap way of producing news. In a sense, the growing pressure to use PR materials is simply a form of journalistic outsourcing, saving the media time and money doing background research, offering exclusivity, scripting speeches, providing sound-bites and photo-opportunities, and leaking stories for time-pressed journalists. Spin-doctors feeding the media manage to supply them with the sorts of stories and images they need to please their bosses hungry for scandals, entertainment and soft news. Good spin-doctors knows how to place their spin (stories) by making it easier for the media to 'do its job'. Thus, the core feature of spinning is to understand how the media work and to exploit one's knowledge of journalistic practices in order to provide the newsroom with what it needs to produce news.⁴⁷

Apart from 'manipulating' journalists, the other ways in which spin-doctors use the media include: writing letters to the press or Internet talkbacks as well as calling radio talkback programmes and staging questions when politicians meet the 'public' in order to create an impression of a groundswell of public opinion; lobbying key people in the media, such as columnists and op-ed writers; and providing journalists with access to politicians or 'off-the-record' information; running smear campaigns against opponents; conducting research to gauge 'public opinion', etc.

Given all this, the media's motives to cooperate with spin-doctors seem obvious. And, indeed, research has suggested that public relations impacts anywhere from 25 percent to 80 percent of news content. Although spin-doctors are undoubtedly influential, scholars are careful to recognize the reciprocal relationship between media and PR professionals/spin-doctors in generating news content. It takes two to tango—either the source or the journalist can lead—but more often than not it is the spin-doctor that does the leading.⁴⁸ Gans (2003) went further by asserting that 'journalists respect their official sources, reporting what these sources tell them'.⁴⁹ In a political campaign environment, Kaid (1976) observed that candidate news-releases are often run in newspapers exactly as they are disseminated by PR practitioners. More recently, Lancendorfer and Lee (2003) noted that the salience of issues in campaign news releases affected the salience of issues in news coverage.⁵⁰ According to our research findings, that can be

said to be the case as well regarding spin-doctors' behind-the-scenes activities in general. Thus, the correlation between the political agenda and the media agenda can be attributed to PR in general and to spin-doctors specifically.

Spinning the 2006 Election: Whose Spin Is It, Anyway?

The different correlations uncovered in this research between the political agenda and the media agenda of the parties in various media lead to several conclusions regarding spinning. First, although each of the three parties analyzed employed spin-doctors, one should consider the fact that certain 'clients' are easier to work with. Some political candidates are more effective than others in impacting on the media. Second, notwithstanding this, setting the media agenda might reflect the candidate's communication skills, but might just as much be the product of its spin-doctors' capabilities. Hence, a higher correlation between the political and media agendas can be explained by better spinning competence or for that matter by a bigger spinning budget. Third, spinning can be more effective in one medium than in another. For reasons to do with spin-doctors' expertise, or for reasons intrinsic to the medium itself, the (same) spin-doctor might contribute to different correlations between the political and media agendas of the press or television. Finally, spinners do not operate in a vacuum. The media agenda might reflect other factors besides spin-doctors' activities, such as the public agenda or more generally what the media think the public wants to hear and think about.

Spinning Democracy

During election campaigns citizens are asked to make choices, culminating ultimately in the final vote at the ballot box. For that purpose, they should be informed as thoroughly and as precisely as possible regarding their alternatives.⁵¹ In this regard, the vital questions to be asked seem to be: who represents better the public's right to know? And who contributes more to informing the public: the parties or the media? The answers to these questions are to be located in the context of the democratic debate and the 'informed citizen' ideal.

The media are always reserved a place of honour in this discourse, especially so during election campaigns. The media consider that they, more than the parties, represent the conscientious citizen's right to know.⁵² And, indeed, an important role of a free press in a democratic society is ostensibly to provide the public with information necessary for them to govern themselves. Therefore, the question of how media organizations decide what stories are to be included in the agenda and how they should be framed becomes a matter of great importance in our society. Although the press is the primary institution connecting the public to national politics, the media serve not only as a source of information, but also as the primary check on

public officials. By acting as both information providers and watchdogs, the media are considered critical to the health of any democracy.⁵³

Alas, our research reveals a gloomy picture regarding the role played by the media in the 2006 Israeli elections. An array of elements combined to present a real danger to Israeli democracy. These include time and budget constraints limiting the media, their dependence on political sources and the pressure they administer, as well as their attraction to scandals, entertainment and soft news—all undercutting serious criticism.⁵⁴

As a result, spin-doctors are becoming increasingly important in delivering votes rather than the media (or traditional party bosses). This in turn has changed the power equation within political parties. In addition, the symbiotic relationship between the media and spin-doctors tends to represent symbolically and reinforce the existing power structure in society's institutional order in general.⁵⁵

According to our research findings, the term 'spin-doctor' appears to be more than a catchphrase. There is evidence that it refers to a genuinely new communication role. According to critics, this phenomenon has reached such proportions that it sometimes seems as though national debate has been reduced to an endless barrage of spin.⁵⁶ Some even go so far as to claim that we are dealing with a plague, and that a virus is infecting our political system. According to cynics, its symptoms, in Israel and elsewhere, are misleading public statements, a disregard for the value of honest discussion, and treating policy debate as little more than a marketing challenge—a devastating combination for democracy.⁵⁷

The ramifications of this tendency to each side of the abovementioned 'golden electoral triangle' are clear. The media's objectivity is hampered and it loses its capacity to fulfil its democratic role.⁵⁸ The candidates' actions and words are dictated to them by image consultants obsessed with sound-bites and photo-ops, making them dependent upon their budget and television capabilities, rather than their persuasiveness and reliability. And what about the voters? Those have changed too, as a result of citizen's participation changing from direct personal involvement to spectatorship.⁵⁹

The unambiguous results of the outcomes mentioned above were to be detected in the Israeli public's dissatisfaction with the media's coverage of the elections. But the consequences go much further. A survey conducted post-election reveals that, in general, the public has low confidence in the work of the media.⁶⁰ Whereas contrary to media specialists' assessments the public showed interest in the media coverage and almost half followed the reporting to a large extent, this involvement did not improve the prevailing sentiment of political impotence;⁶¹ this was also manifested by the lowest voter turnout ever (in 2006 turnout fell to 63.2 percent from 67.8 percent in 2003).⁶²

The implications of ‘spinning’ democracy are even more alarming given the fact that these are not exclusively reserved for election campaigns. ‘Permanent campaigning’ has obliterated the distinction between campaigning and governing. Nowadays, elected leaders try to win public support for themselves and their policies by using campaign-style tactics from the day they take office. Under the permanent campaign, governing is turned into a perpetual campaign. Moreover, it remakes government into an instrument designed to sustain an elected official’s public popularity. It is the engineering of consent with a vengeance.⁶³

As a result, if the media—according to the theory—are successful in telling us not only what to think about, but also what to think and how to act accordingly, then the fact that we live in an era where politics is essentially second-hand reality to voters who passively consume the images presented in the media⁶⁴ is quite daunting. Democracy is definitely endangered as spin-doctors ensure, in conformity with Marx’s dictum, that once again ‘the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class’.⁶⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to expectations, most of the Israeli public closely followed the media coverage of the 2006 elections,⁶⁶ apparently because of the great drama involved. Alas, the media as usual neglected issues of substance and ideology, preferring to focus on personal aspects of the candidates and the race itself. Our analysis of the media’s coverage reveals how spinning techniques transformed Amir Peretz from a working-class hero into a security-centred, bourgeois politician and how Ehud Olmert was transformed from an elitist heading a virtual party to a security-oriented leader, thus inheriting Sharon’s mantle and becoming the media’s favourite.⁶⁷ The latter presented Kadima as invincible from day one, and even while the party seemed to lose steam, it continued to be supported by the media, a fact that did not escape the public’s eye.⁶⁸

Moving from appearance to substance, it is clear that Labour’s attempt to move socioeconomic issues to the top of the media agenda did help to attract greater attention and promote public discussion. But this did not result in an electoral transformation. Although the 38 Knesset seats won by Labour, Shas and Gil (the Pensioners’ party) reflect the voters’ interest in a public and political agenda prioritizing social and economic grievances,⁶⁹ Kadima’s solid victory (29 seats) demonstrates that even while social issues are considered important in the eyes of the voters, security concerns are more decisive in influencing voting choices. In this light, one can only question Labour’s campaign signs all around Tel Aviv: ‘Because it’s time’ (to handle social issues).

Overall, then, in analyzing the political and the media agendas, as well as the election results, it appears that Labour’s attempt to promote social

issues did not completely succeed, even if it did not fail miserably. This tendency might reflect the public agenda, but the question of the media's influence still remains. On the basis of the established correlations between the different agendas the present study shows that Kadima's success was due to its ability to promote a media agenda that paralleled its political agenda (the obverse side of this coin is the media's highly critical coverage of the Likud, contributing to its defeat on election day).

The parties' success or failure in setting the media agenda is to be attributed, among other things, to the work of the spin-doctors. During this campaign, image consultants worked extra hours and their work was indeed noticeable. The result was that Israel's 2006 campaign was more subterranean than above ground. The real battlefield was not the advertising spots broadcast after the television news programme, but rather the news itself. The best campaign strategy was not frontal advertising but behind-the-scenes public relations, and the most effective tactic was not to address the public directly, but rather to manipulate the public through indirection.

Theoretical Revisions and Pragmatic Recommendations

As a result of spin-doctor activities, post-election media campaign analysis has become not only more interesting, but also methodologically that much more complex and difficult. More than 30 years after McCombs and Shaw introduced agenda-setting theory based on the role of the media in the 1968 presidential campaign, our analysis of the 2006 Israeli election media coverage confirms the need to inspect more thoroughly the intermediate factor between politicians and the media—the spin-doctors—whose activity and impact have grown from one campaign to the next.⁷⁰

Proceeding from the theoretical realm to the practical one, this research study proves yet again the need to amend anachronistic legislation governing campaign propaganda. The time has come to refresh the format of televised propaganda in Israel (whose ratings are in constant decline). In addition, behind-the-scenes activities of spin-doctors call for abolishing the media's 30-day ban on news events related to elections which denies the public receiving vital information and distorts news coverage.⁷¹ This has become more important than ever considering the high proportion of the electorate that made their decisions during the latter part of the campaign.⁷² Another matter that requires amending is the regulation of election polling coverage. This is an important research tool, but the growing use and abuse of statistics by spin-doctors raises questions regarding their negative effect on political debate, on politicians, and on Israeli democracy in general.⁷³

In this regard, although spin will never disappear, one can hope that an informed and active citizenry can still prevent the worst excesses of PR-driven deception from corrupting our democracy.⁷⁴ During and after

the 2006 elections a lot has been said, written and aired regarding the phenomenon, including conferences, articles in newspapers, documentaries and films dedicated to the subject. Thus, at least the media can be credited for starting to do a good job of informing the public on the subject.

The spread of communication technology provides leaders with new opportunities to listen, just as it provides new opportunities for citizens to speak. The Internet in general, and second-generation Web ('Web 2.0') with its user-generated content (including blogs, talkbacks, video-sharing, Wikipedia, etc.) specifically, are changing the rules of the game as power passes in part to ordinary men and women.⁷⁵ Today the agenda-setting power of the mass media, although still substantial, is being widely diffused, along with the power of the journalists, national leaders and their spin-doctors who once could almost exclusively direct public attention.

The peer-to-peer revolution has helped to create a culture of fact-checking and bringing citizens into public debate.⁷⁶ This process can promote democratic citizenship and channel the wisdom of the public, bringing a diversity of ideas and perspectives to bear on the issues and widening the bounds of political conversation, as well as helping to hold the media organizations and politicians accountable, thereby improving the prevailing political culture.⁷⁷

In the age of peer-production, empowered by the Internet, one can hope that 'the key problem for agenda-setting theory will change from what issues the media tell people to think about to what issues people tell the media they want to think about'.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, here too the public must be on guard against manipulation by Internet spin-doctors who have begun paying biased bloggers and talkback writers, and use sophisticated statistical analysis for targeted propaganda campaigns focusing on each individual surfer.⁷⁹ Regardless of spin-doctors' activities and their efforts to promote one subject or another as part of their construction of reality for the voters, it is not to be forgotten that they are acting under the constraints of the 'Desert of the Real'⁸⁰ with its day-to-day comings and goings. Considering the fact that a few months after the elections, in the summer of 2006, Israel embarked on the 'Second Lebanon War' against Hezbollah, and that Israeli towns continue to be bombarded by Kassam missiles, security issues will inevitably continue to be highly salient (as is customary in Israel), and dominate the agenda, overshadowing social concerns.

While this remains constant over the years, growing public awareness, shifts in media coverage, the Internet and other factors mentioned above, foster hope for change. Given all this, even though the media are being manipulated by spin-doctors, and politics is in the hands of PR consultants, it seems that on election day the voters—or, to use marketing jargon, the wise consumers—have the capability to price-check and not to be automatically influenced by the package. In sum, in the future Israeli

voters can, and should, ask themselves whether they really want that specific product and how much it will cost them in democratic terms.

NOTES

1. Nahum Barnea, 'History Lesson', *Ha'ain Hashviit*, Vol. 61 (March 2006), pp. 6–7.
2. Gabby Weiman, Yariv Tsfati and Riva Tukachinsky, 'Media Coverage of the 17th Knesset Elections', *Index of Public Confidence in the News Media—Report No. 5*, Tel Aviv, March 2006.
3. Ruth Sinai, 'Education for the Kids, Apartment, to Live', *Ha'aretz*, 31 March 2006.
4. Daniel Ben-Simon, 'Who Asked for a Social Revolution and Didn't Get Any?', *Ha'aretz*, 31 March 2006.
5. Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Winfried Schulz, 'Mediatization of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?', *Political Communication*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1999) pp. 247–62; Paolo Mancini and David L. Swanson, 'Politics, Media and Modern Democracy: Introduction', in David L. Swanson and Paolo Mancini (eds.), *Politics, Media and Modern Democracy*, Westport, CT, 1996; James David Barber, *The Pulse of Politics: Electing Presidents in the Media Age*, New York, 1980.
6. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, New York, 1922.
7. Aaron Delwiche, 'Agenda-setting, Opinion Leadership, and the World of Web Logs', *First Monday*, Vol. 10, No. 12 (December 2005), available at http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_12/delwiche/index.html, accessed 2 March 2007.
8. Bernard Cohen, 'Prologue: "The Game is Afoot"', in Maxwell McCombs, Donald L. Shaw and David Weaver (eds.), *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory*, London, 1997, p. 13.
9. See Spiro Kioussis and Maxwell McCombs, 'Agenda Setting Effects and Attitude Strength: Political Figures During the 1996 Presidential Elections', *Communication Research*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (February 2004), pp. 36–57; Maxwell McCombs, Esteban Lopez-Escobar and Juan Pablo Llamas, 'Setting the Agenda of Attributes in the 1996 Spanish General Election', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (June 2000), pp. 77–92.
10. Salma Ghanem, 'Filling in the Tapestry: The Second Level of Agenda Setting', in McCombs *et al.* (eds.), *Communication and Democracy*, p. 8; Xu Wu and Trent Seltzer, 'First- and Second-Level Agenda-Building and Agenda-Setting Effects: Exploring the Linkage Among Candidate News Releases, Media Coverage, and Public Opinion During the 2002 Florida Gubernatorial Election', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2006), p. 269.
11. *Ibid.*, p. x.
12. Em Griffin, 'Agenda-Setting Theory', Chapter 28 in *A First Look at Communication Theory*, New York, 2003.
13. Robert M. Entman, 'Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (December 1993), pp. 51–58; Esteban Lopez-Escobar L, Juan Pablo Llamas and Maxwell McCombs, 'Agenda Setting and Community Consensus: First and Second Level Effects', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1998), pp. 335–48; Wayne Wanta and Yu-Wei Hu, 'The Agenda-Setting Effects of International News Coverage: An Examination of Differing News Frames', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1993), pp. 250–64; Shanto Iyengar and Adam Simon, 'News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion', *Communication Research*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1993), pp. 365–83; Vincent Price and David Tewksbury, 'News Values and Public Opinions: A Theoretical Account of Media Priming and Framing', in George Barnett and Franklin J. Boster (eds.), *Progress in Communication Sciences*, Greenwich, CT, 1997, pp. 173–212; John W. Rhee, 'Strategy and Issue Frames in Election Campaign Coverage: A Social Cognitive Account of Framing Effects', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 26–48.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

16. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, 'The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Research: Twenty-five Years in the Marketplace of Ideas', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1993), p. 65; McCombs *et al.*, 'Setting the Agenda of Attributes', p. 78.
17. Griffin, 'Chapter 28; Agenda-Setting Theory'.
18. Salma Ghanem, 'Filling in the Tapestry: The Second Level of Agenda Setting', in McCombs *et al.* (eds.), *Communication and Democracy*, p. 8.
19. Joe B. Hester and Rhonda Gibson, 'The Economy and Second-Level Agenda Setting: A Time Series Analysis of Economic News and Public Opinion about the Economy', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (2003), pp. 73–90; Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, 'The Agenda-setting Function of the Mass Media', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 17 (1972), pp. 176–87; David Weaver, Doris A. Graber, Maxwell McCombs and Chaim Eyal, *Media Agenda Setting in a Presidential Election: Issues, Images and Interest*, New York, 1981.
20. John A. Fortunato, 'Public Relations Strategies for Creating Mass Media Content: A Case Study of the National Basketball Association', *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Winter 2000), pp. 481–97; Gerald M. Kosicki, 'Problems and Opportunities in Agenda-Setting Research', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1993), pp. 100–127; Oscar H. Gandy, *Beyond Agenda Setting: Information Subsidies and Public Policy*, Norwood, NJ, 1982, p. 266.
21. Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang, *Politics and Television: Re-Viewed*, London, 1984.
22. John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Cambridge, 1992; Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 'Choices, Values, and Frames', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 39 (April 1984), pp. 341–50; Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*, Chicago, 1991.
23. Delwiche, 'Agenda-setting, Opinion Leadership, and the World of Web Logs'.
24. William H. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation*, New Haven, CT, 1986.
25. Robert M. Entman, 'Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (December 1993), pp. 51–58.
26. Heinz Brandenburg, 'Who Follows Whom? The Impact of Parties on Media Agenda Formation in the 1997 British General Election Campaign', *Harvard Journal of Press and Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3, (2003), pp. 34–54; Pippa Norris, John Curtice, David Sanders, Margaret Scammell, and Holli Semetko, *On Message: Communicating the Campaign*, London, 1999; Russell Dalton, Paul Beck, Robert Huckfeldt and William Koetzle, 'A Test of the Media-Centered Agenda-Setting: Newspaper Content and Public Interests in a Presidential Election', *Political Communication*, Vol. 15 (November 1998), pp. 463–81; Marilyn Roberts and Maxwell McCombs, 'Agenda Setting and Political Advertising: Origins of the News Agenda', *Political Communication*, Vol. 11 (1994), pp. 249–62.
27. Judith Elizur and Elihu Katz, 'The Media in the Israeli Elections of 1977', in Howard R. Penniman (ed.), *Israel at the Polls: The Knesset Elections of 1977*, Washington, DC, 1979, p. 244.
28. Including: Kadima, Labour (Am Echad and Meimad), Likud, Shas, Israel Beiteinu, the Pensioners party, and Meretz-Yahad.
29. See Dan Caspi, 'Electoral Rhetoric and Political Polarization: The Begin-Peres Debates', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 1 (1986), pp. 447–62; Dan Caspi, 'American-style Electioneering in Israel: Americanization versus Modernization', in Swanson and Mancini (eds.), *Politics, Media and Modern Democracy*, p. 181.
30. See Thomas Patterson, *Out of Order*, New York, 1993; Thomas B. Littlewood, *Calling Election: The History of Horse-Race Journalism*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame press, 1999.
31. Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, Washington, DC, 1993; Kathleen H. Jamieson, *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction, and Democracy*, New York, 1992.
32. John W. Rhee, 'Strategy and Issue Frames in Election Campaign Coverage: A Social Cognitive Account of Framing Effects', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 26–48; Gabby Weiman and Tamir Shefer, *Media Coverage of Elections in Israel: An Introspective Study of Four Election Campaigns—Report No. 2*, Tel Aviv, February 2004.
33. The political agenda included the parties' televised campaign spots, as well as their few paid political newspaper advertisements; the media agenda included televised broadcasting news (channels 1 and 2), and the news items and columns of *Ha'aretz*, an Israeli Hebrew-language

daily newspaper. It should be noted that the parties hardly used print advertisements in these elections. Advertisements were published solely by Meretz and Gil. The parties seemed to devote the energy and budget once invested in advertising to explicitly influence the news coverage and commentary on TV and in the press.

34. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding the Media: The Extensions of Man*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
35. Tiki Balas and Sam Lehman-Wilzig, 'The Editorial Gap Between Ideal and Real: Do Television News Editors/Journalists Broadcast What They Believe Their Audience Wants?', in Angela Schorr and Stefan Seltmann (eds.), *Changing Media Markets in Europe and Abroad: New Ways of Handling Information and Entertainment Content*, Lengerich and Berlin, 2006, pp. 127–47.
36. Barnea, 'History Lesson'; Amira Lam, 'Rality Politik', *Yediot Ahronot*, 31 March 2006.
37. Lam, 'Reality Politik'.
38. Offer Shelach, 'Bye Bye Ideology, Hello Circus', *Ynet-Elections 2006*, 28 March 2006, available at www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3233490,00.html, accessed 2 March 2007.
39. Weiman *et al.*, 'Media Coverage of the 17th Knesset Elections'.
40. Ben Fritz, Bryan Keefer and Brendan Nyham, *All the President's Spin: George W. Bush, the Media, and the Truth*, New York, 2004.
41. Randy Sumpter and James W. Tankard, 'The Spin Doctor: An Alternative Model of Public Relations', *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1994), pp. 19–27.
42. Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, *Age of Propaganda*, New York, 1992, pp. 5–6.
43. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA, 1994, p. 216.
44. Atara Frenkel-Faran and Sam Lehman-Wilzig, 'La Bell(e) Epoque? A Comparison of Party Platform and Television Propaganda Ideology in the 1999 Israeli Elections', *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 7, Nos. 2–3 (Winter/Spring 2001), pp. 245–268.
45. Fritz *et al.*, *All the President's Spin*, p. 10.
46. Randy Sumpter and James W. Tankard, 'The Spin Doctor: An Alternative Model of Public Relations', *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1994), pp. 19–27.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Wu and Seltzer, 'First- and Second-Level Agenda-Building and Agenda-Setting Effects', p. 268.
49. *Ibid.*; Herbert J. Gans, *Democracy, and the News*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
50. *Ibid.*; Lynda Lee Kaid, 'Newspaper Treatment of Candidate's News Releases', *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 53 (1976), pp. 135–157; Karen M. Lancedorfer and Byoungkwan Lee (August 2003) 'Agenda Building and the Media: A Content Analysis of the Relationships between Media in the 2002 Michigan Governor's Race'. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, MO.
51. Weiman *et al.*, 'Media Coverage of the 17th Knesset Elections'.
52. Elizur and Katz, 'The Media in the Israeli Elections of 1977', p. 243.
53. Fritz *et al.*, *All the President's Spin*, p. 31.
54. Delwiche, 'Agenda-setting, Opinion Leadership, and the World of Web Logs'.
55. Jerry Palmer, *Spinning into Control: News Values and Source Strategies*, London and New York, 2000, p. 141.
56. Fritz *et al.*, *All the President's Spin*, p. ix.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.
58. Sumpter and Tankard, 'The Spin Doctor: An Alternative Model of Public Relations'.
59. Frenkel-Faran & Lehman-Wilzig, 'La Bell(e) Epoque?', p. 63.
60. Weiman *et al.*, 'Media Coverage of the 17th Knesset Elections'.
61. *Ibid.*
62. Steven Erlanger and Greg Myre, 'Voters in Israel Support Parties Vowing Pullout', *New York Times*, 29 March 2006.
63. Fritz *et al.*, *All the President's Spin*, p. 9.
64. Eric Louw, *The Media and the Political Process*, London, 2005.
65. Karl Marx, 'The German Ideology: Chapter 1, Section B', *Marxist Internet Archive*, available at www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm, accessed 10 February 2007.
66. Weiman *et al.*, 'Media Coverage of the 17th Knesset Elections'.

67. Barnea, 'History Lesson'; Lam, 'Reality Politik'.
68. Weiman *et al.*, 'Media Coverage of the 17th Knesset Elections'.
69. Sinai, 'Education for the Kids, Apartment, to Live'.
70. Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, 'Agenda-setting Function of Mass Media', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36 (1972), pp. 176–184.
71. Elizur and Katz, 'The Media in the Israeli Elections of 1977', p. 229.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
73. Weiman and Sheffer, *Media Coverage of Elections in Israel*, p. 31.
74. Fritz *et al.*, *All the President's Spin*, p. 255.
75. Ran Binyamini, 'The Most Vulgar Spin', *Ha'ain Hashviit*, Vol. 60 (July 2006), p. 36; Chris Anderson, 'People Power', *Wired* (March 2006), available at www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.07/people.html, accessed 2 March 2007.
76. Sam Lehman-Wilzig, 'Worth an Agora? 2003 E-lection Party Sites and Public Discourse', *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Summer 2004), pp. 242–62.
77. Fritz *et al.*, *All the President's Spin*, p. 251.
78. Steven H. Chaffee and Miriam Metzger, 'The End of Mass Communication?', *Mass Communication and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (2001), pp. 365–379.
79. Philip N. Howard, *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*, New York, 2006.
80. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, London, 2002.