**Proposal:**

A major contemporary challenge for democracy is public perception political figures in the other party are extremists who refuse to follow political norms. In this proposal we examine the language used to cover elections to determine its role in influencing this perception. We distinguish between framing politics as a sport versus treating it as a war, and measure how these different frames influence perceptions of the other side as extreme.

Research in political science has tracked the rise of the “game frame” in coverage of political events (Patterson 1994). A core part of a frame is the use of metaphor, helping people understand potentially unfamiliar political events by references to topics that they may have a better understanding of (Bougher 2012; Burgers, Konijn, and Steen 2016; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The two metaphors most commonly used in coverage of politics are sports and war (Howe 1988).

Existing research in framing has not distinguished between sports metaphors and war metaphors, interpreting them both as equivalent components of the “game frame”. For example, in their analysis of game frame coverage of the Supreme Court, Hitt and Searles ask coders to look for “language of sports and war”, treating words like “umpire” and “weapon” as interchangeable evidence that coverage is using a game frame (Hitt and Searles 2018). But there is reason to suspect that the language of sports and war may influence attitudes differently in the news consumer, and that “umpire” and “weapon” invoke different feelings in the reader.

Sports are contests regulated by rules which are enforced by neutral arbiters. War on the other hand is largely unconstrained by rules and brings to mind the threat of annihilation and violence, not just defeat. In a pair of studies, Kalmoe used vignettes to demonstrate that violent language leads to increased support for political violence and issue polarization among those higher in trait aggression (Kalmoe 2014; Kalmoe, Gubler, and Wood 2018). In these studies however, the manipulations contrasted violent language with non-violent language in vignettes that were ambiguously competitive. This means the manipulation of including violent language was not only priming violence but also potentially sending a signal that the vignette was describing a zero-sum struggle between opposing groups.

We aim to extend the existing work in two ways. First, by directly comparing the language of sports and the language of war we can disentangle the effects of two different common metaphors used by news media to make political competition engaging. Second, we plan on evaluating not endorsement of violence among a subset of the population but perceptions of how extreme a politician is among all respondents. This shows how language choices used by media outlets to make coverage exciting influence perceptions of political figures.

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