Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
1984, Vol. 46, No. 4, 778-787

The Evening News and Presidential Evaluations

Shanto Iyengar
Department of Political Science
Yale University

Donald R. Kinder
Institute for Social Research
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Mark D. Peters
Yale University

Jon A. Krosnick
Institute for Social Research
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Two experiments show that by drawing attention to certain national problems while ignoring others, television news programs help define the standards by which presidents are evaluated. As predicted, this effect is greater for evaluations of the president's general performance than for judgments of his competence and integrity, and it is more pronounced among novices than among experts.

Our evaluations of others are deeply influenced by circumstance. Information that circumstance makes accessible often dominates our evaluations, whereas equally pertinent but less accessible information is set aside. In Salancik's (1974) study of teaching evaluations, for example, students were induced to consider either intrinsic or extrinsic reasons for their class participation. Among students primed with intrinsic reasons, course evaluations and grades were virtually independent; among students primed with extrinsic reasons, evaluations and grades were almost perfectly correlated. Salancik's manipulation made one set of standards rather than another accessible and thereby radically altered the information that students relied on in reaching overall evaluations. More generally, as a number of experiments demonstrate, momentarily accessible information may often pervade social judgments. (For excellent reviews consult Higgins & King, 1981, and Wyer & Hartwick, 1980.)

The research reported here is intended to deepen our understanding of the accessibility effect by identifying those general considerations that mitigate or enhance it. In particular, we examine the degree to which the effect depends on the relevance of the triggering stimulus configuration to the judgment at hand and the way in which manipulations of accessibility interact with prior knowledge, here called *expertise*.

Our investigation takes place within the domain of political cognition. Specifically, we focus on the judgments that Americans make regarding the performance and character of their president. Thus our work complements conventional research on social judgment, which ordinarily entails informationally impoverished judgments about hypothetical persons. Presidents are, of course, hardly hypothetical. They are both notorious and complex, judged according to the policies they promote, the party they represent, the achievements and failures they preside over, the personal qualities they exhibit, the feelings they invoke, and more (Kinder & Sears, in press). Like most naturally occurring social judgments, however, evaluations of the president should depend in part on what information happens to be momentarily accessible.

One powerful provider of information pertinent to judgments of the president is television news. Americans depend heavily on that source for their information about politics in general and about the president in particular (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, & Roberts, 1978; Graber, 1980). In previous experimental work (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982), we have demonstrated that the public's beliefs about which national problems are important and which are not are greatly influenced by television news.

Here we take up a further and more subtle question: whether television news programs,

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the National Science Foundation (SES-8012581) and the good advice of Steven J. Rosenstone, Janet A. Weiss, and two anonymous reviewers.

Requests for reprints should be sent to Donald R. Kinder, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.

by calling attention to some aspects of presidential performance while ignoring others, might also determine the standards by which presidents are judged. We suggest that the criteria involved in presidential evaluations may be determined largely by the stories that television news programs choose to cover. Coverage of a particular problem provides new information that is accessible by its recency. Coverage may also provoke viewers to recollect what they already know about the problem. Consequently, both newly acquired and previously acquired information may be made highly available and therefore perhaps particularly influential.[1]

Accessibility does not guarantee influence, however. The impact of accessible information may be great or negligible depending on the relevance of the accessible information to the judgment at hand. The information used in judging a person's intelligence may be largely and safely ignored when judging the same person's honesty (cf. Hamilton & Fallot, 1974). The general point is that information influencing one kind of summary evaluation may be innocuous for another. Increasing the accessibility of some information will not alter all judgments, only those to which the information is relevant, and only to that degree.[2]

In studying presidential evaluations, it is useful to distinguish among three types of judgments: evaluations of the president's general performance, competence, and integrity. Average Americans make such distinctions when they evaluate presidents and presidential hopefuls (Kinder & Abelson, 1981; Kinder, Abelson, & Fiske, 1979; Markus, 1982; Miller & Shanks, 1982); so should we. General performance, competence, and integrity represent correlated but distinct dimensions of presidential evaluation.

Information made accessible by television news coverage that is deemed highly relevant for one of these judgments may be regarded as largely irrelevant for another. Because our experiments manipulated coverage of national problems, we expected to see the greatest impact on the standards that viewers use in judging the president's overall performance. Judgments of overall performance, after all, are presumably just some weighted average of how well the president is doing on unemployment, foreign affairs, energy, and other pressing national problems. Inducing viewers to concentrate on one of these problems should therefore substantially influence the relative importance they assign to it in judging how well the president is performing overall.

The standards used in judging competence should also be influenced, but not as much, because Americans no doubt recognize that performance on any particular problem reflects the president's competence imperfectly. Performance is always determined in part by forces beyond even the most competent president's control. In the case of energy, for example, many other agents and forces come into play: the international economy, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Congress, oil companies, and more. In our nomenclature, variations in television news coverage are more relevant for viewers' judgments of the president's overall performance than for judgments of his competence.

Finally, how well the president is dealing with problems like unemployment or rising prices—the focus of our experimental manipulations—has little to do with the president's personal integrity, a point with which most citizens would no doubt agree. Consequently, judgments of the president's integrity should be little influenced by variations in television coverage of national problems.

The influence of accessible information may depend not only on its relevance but also on the characteristics of the audience. Some people may be more vulnerable to manipulations of accessibility than others. This seems highly plausible, yet research on social judgment has tended to slight individual differences of any kind, focusing instead on knowledge that is assumed to be consensual and strategies that are assumed to be universal. Work on problem solving has explored individual differences, however, and differences in expertise in particular. From this research we know that com-

[1] Here we concentrate on the consequences of accessibility for evaluation. Enhancing the accessibility of knowledge stored in memory may also influence how new and ambiguous information is interpreted (Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Srull & Wyer, 1979).

[2] We do not mean to make too fine a point here, for it is easy enough to demonstrate the intrusion of logically irrelevant factors in social and political judgment (Kinder & Abelson, 1981; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Markus, 1982).

pared with novices, experts not only know more, their knowledge is better organized. As this is true for chess (Chase & Simon, 1973), algebra (Hinsley, Hayes, & Simon, 1977), physics (Larkin, McDermott, Simon, & Simon, 1980), and even dinosaurs (Chi & Koeske, 1983), so should it be true for public affairs. Although some Americans possess an enormous array of facts and theories about the nation's defense, others know hardly anything at all. This difference reflects variations in problem expertise (Fiske & Kinder, 1981).

The significance of extreme natural variation in problem expertise is that experts and novices may react differently to manipulations of accessibility, and for a number of reasons. First, because their knowledge is denser and better organized, experts possess a greater and more flexible ability to deal with new information. Novices have their minds full just coming to terms with the meaning of what is being said; in a sense they are swept away. Experts are free to examine information more deeply and perhaps more critically (Fiske, Kinder, & Larter, 1983). Second, experts possess so much cognitive support for their ideas about the importance of the particular problem that they may be impossible to budge. Third, drawing attention to the problem may only remind experts of what they already know. Manipulations of accessibility are redundant for experts but not for novices.

This line of argument is consistent with our earlier experimental results, which indicated that television news programs influenced experts less than novices in the importance each assigned to national problems (Iyengar et al., 1982). Here we want to see whether experts are also less vulnerable than novices to the influence of television news in their judgments of the president.

To observe the effects of accessibility, relevance, and expertise on presidential evaluations, we conducted two experiments. In each, subjects viewed television news programs in which the amount of attention given to various national problems was manipulated. Consistent with the accessibility hypothesis, we expected that the more attention a problem received (i.e., the more a problem domain was primed), the more viewers would inject information about that problem into their summary evaluations of the president. In keeping with the relevance hypothesis, we expected the effect to be stronger on evaluations of the president's general performance, intermediate on judgments of the president's competence, and smaller still on judgments of the president's integrity. Consistent with our argument regarding expertise, we expected the accessibility effect to be pronounced among novices and sharply diminished among experts (tested in Experiment 2 only).

Experiment 1

Participants in Experiment 1 viewed a collection of network news stories. Depending on condition, they saw either no stories, a few stories, or many stories on the subject of energy. After the presentation, participants judged the importance of various national problems, rated presidential performance, indicated their opinions on political issues, and reported their reactions to the news stories.

Method

Subjects. Seventy-three Yale University undergraduates who were enrolled in an introductory psychology class completed the experiment in April and May of 1981 as part of the course requirement. Roughly 25 students were randomly assigned to each of three experimental conditions defined by level of exposure to stories about energy (none, intermediate, and high).

Materials. The various collections were assembled from videotape recordings of 1979 and 1980 network evening newscasts, selected from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Each ran approximately 40 min. The high-exposure condition presentation included six stories about energy, totaling 16 min; the intermediate-exposure condition presentation included three, totaling 8.5 min; and the no-exposure presentation of course made no reference to energy problems at all (see the Appendix for a description of the target problem stories). In the high- and intermediate-exposure conditions, the energy stories were distributed evenly throughout the collection. All three presentations were filled out by stories bearing on a variety of other contemporary problems: United States–Soviet relations, civil rights, environmental deterioration, weaknesses in defense, and economic difficulties. No condition included more than a single story on any of these other problems.

After viewing the videotape, participants completed a questionnaire that covered a wide range of political topics. Central to our hypotheses are (a) judgments of President Carter's performance in each of eight specific areas, including "implementing a national energy policy" (ranging from very good to very poor); (b) judgments of President Carter's general performance as president (ranging from very good to very poor); and (c) judgments of how well each of six trait adjectives described President Carter (ranging from extremely well to not well at all). Three of the traits—knowledgeable, smart, and weak—reflect judg-

ments of President Carter's competence; the remaining three—dishonest, power-hungry, and unstable—reflect judgments of Carter's integrity (Kinder & Abelson, 1981; Kinder et al., 1979). Replies to the first set were averaged to form a competence index (with ratings of weak reflected); replies to the second set were averaged to form an integrity index. All judgments—problem-specific performance, general performance, competence, and integrity—ranged in principle (low to high) from one to four. As expected, the three represent correlated but distinct components of presidential evaluation: The Pearson correlation between general performance ratings and competence ratings among all subjects was .53; between general performance and integrity ratings, .27; and between competence and integrity ratings, .33.

Procedure. As many as three students were permitted to sign up for any single experimental session, which was then randomly assigned to experimental condition. When students arrived, they were seated in front of a television monitor and told that the purpose of the study was to investigate selective perception: the way individuals' political values influence their evaluation of television news. To test for selective perception, the students were told, they would view a half hour's worth of "typical" news stories taken from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. They were informed that following the news presentation they would complete two questionnaires, one assessing their political opinions and the other soliciting their reactions to the news stories. The videotape was then played and, following that, the questionnaires administered. Post-experimental discussions confirmed the plausibility of our cover story. Not a single student expressed any skepticism about what the experiment was really about.

Results

If the accessibility hypothesis is correct, then students who saw stories about energy should have attached greater importance than control subjects did to energy performance in evaluating President Carter. An appropriate test of the hypothesis is provided by regression analysis. We computed regression coefficients indexing the effect of energy performance ratings on judgments of overall performance, competence, and integrity and then compared coefficients between groups of subjects assigned to different conditions. In line with the accessibility hypothesis, we expected the coefficients to be greater among subjects who saw news about energy than among those who did not. Because we could detect no difference whatsoever associated with the moderate- versus high-exposure conditions (neither here nor in Experiment 2), our analysis combines the two. We relied on unstandardized rather than standardized regression coefficients (or correlation coefficients), because comparisons based on the latter can be misleading should the variances of the measures differ across conditions (Duncan, 1975).

Table 1
Impact of Energy Performance Ratings on Overall Ratings: Experiment 1

	Condition			
	No coverage (n = 21)		Some coverage (n = 73)	
Category	Coeffient	*SE*	Coefficient	*SE*
General performance	0.10	0.14	0.27	0.09
Competence	0.15	0.20	0.19	0.11
Integrity	0.00	0.09	0.06	0.08

Note. "Coefficients" are unstandardized regression coefficients.

Table 1 displays the appropriate unstandardized regression coefficients, computed separately within control and experimental groups, for general performance, competence, and integrity. Consistent with the accessibility hypothesis, the coefficients are larger in all three instances among experimental subjects. And consistent with the relevance hypothesis, the experimental–control difference is most pronounced for judgments of the president's general performance. Indeed, the impact of ratings of Carter's energy performance on ratings of his general performance was nearly three times as great among experimental subjects than among control subjects (.10 vs. .27). Although in the correct direction the differences were far weaker in ratings of Carter's competence (.15 vs. .19) and integrity (.00 vs. .06).

To test the statistical significance of these differences—and hence to test formally the accessibility and relevance hypotheses—we made use of multiple regression analysis. Three regression equations were estimated, one for evaluations of President Carter's general performance, one for ratings of his competence, and one for ratings of his integrity. In each case, overall evaluation (general performance, competence, or integrity) was regressed upon ratings of Carter's management of energy and an interaction term that captured the treatment effect, as specified in Equation 1.1, as follows: Summary evaluation = $b_0 + b_1$ (energy performance) + b_2 (Energy Performance ×

Table 2
Ratings of President Carter: Experiment 1

	Condition			
	No coverage (n = 21)		Some coverage (n = 73)	
Category	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
General performance	2.54	0.39	2.67	0.53
Competence	2.46	0.55	2.36	0.63
Integrity	3.33	0.29	3.31	0.45
Energy performance	3.71	0.77	3.28	0.83

Note. None of the experimental–control comparisons surpasses statistical significance.

Treatment) + u, where Treatment = 1 for treatment subjects and 0 for control subjects. The accessibility hypothesis is tested by b_2. It estimates the increment in the influence of energy performance ratings on overall evaluations that results from exposure to energy news. A statistically significant and positively signed b_2 means that students exposed to stories about energy increased the weight they granted to Carter's energy performance in their summary evaluations of the President.[3]

The results from this formal test were as expected. Consistent with the accessibility hypothesis, energy performance ratings were more influential in evaluations of Carter's general performance among students exposed to stories about energy than among those exposed to no stories about energy (b_2 = .07, $p < .05$). Elsewhere, however, accessibility effects were negligible (for competence ratings, $b_2 = 0.00$, *ns;* for integrity ratings, $b_2 = -0.02$, *ns*). This pattern of diminishing effects is of course consistent with the logic of the relevance hypothesis. We expected a gradient of effects, though, not a cliff.

Although consistent with the accessibility hypothesis, the one positive result can be understood in another way. Perhaps our experimental manipulations influenced viewers to alter their judgments of Carter's performance on energy, which then had predictable consequences for their evaluations of his general performance. This influence interpretation implies that there should be systematic differences in ratings of Carter between subjects who saw energy stories and those who did not, but there were none. As indicated in Table 2, control subjects rated President Carter's general performance a shade more favorably (2.54 vs. 2.67), $F(1, 67) = 0.88$, $p = .35$; were slightly less impressed with his competence (2.46 vs. 2.36), $F(1, 66) = 0.39$, $p = .53$, and his integrity (3.33 vs. 3.31), $F(1, 69) = 0.04$, $p = .83$; and were somewhat more critical of his performance on energy (3.71 vs. 3.28), $F(1, 65) = 3.43$, $p = .07$. These results mean that experimental manipulation of coverage did not systematically alter students' evaluations of President Carter. Consequently, to the degree we find effects, they appear to be due not to influence but to accessibility.

In sum, the results of Experiment 1 are checkered: strong support for accessibility and more dramatic support for relevance than we had anticipated. To explore these findings further, to examine their external validity, and to see how they might interact with viewers' expertise, we conducted Experiment 2. There we tested our hypotheses with three national problems rather than just one and recruited New Haven, Connecticut, residents rather than Yale undergraduates as subjects.

Experiment 2

Experiment 2 was run during September and October of 1981 and followed a 2 × 3 factorial design. As in Experiment 1, two levels of exposure were investigated, this time for each of three problems: energy, defense, and inflation. Participants assigned to either of the two exposure conditions for a particular problem (e.g., defense) saw no stories about the other two problems (energy, inflation). This arrangement enabled us to test for accessibility effects associated with some exposure to a problem versus no exposure, as in Experiment 1. One hundred forty participants served in Experiment 2, with approximately 24 ran-

[3] Technically, Equation 1.1 and those that follow should include all lower order terms implied by higher order interactions. In the particular case of Equation 1.1, this would mean including a term for the main effect of treatment. In fact, we did include all of the implied lower order terms in each of the equations we estimated. The coefficients associated with these lower order terms did not differ from zero, however, even under generous interpretations of statistical significance (with the exception of Equation 2.2; see footnote 5). For the sake of simplicity, therefore, the lower order terms were deleted from the estimating equations.

domly assigned to each condition. Except as noted below, the Experiment 2 procedure was identical to that of Experiment 1.

Method

Subjects. Participants were recruited from the New Haven community via a classified advertisement in the local newspaper. The advertisement promised $5 for watching one half hour of television and completing a questionnaire. Individuals who responded to the advertisement were scheduled for an experimental session at their convenience. Sessions were then randomly assigned to treatments. As we hoped, this procedure recruited a diverse pool of participants, roughly representative of the New Haven population. Participants were evenly divided between men and women, predominantly white, and drawn primarily from blue-collar and clerical occupations.

Materials. As in Experiment 1, high-exposure conditions included 6 stories bearing on the target problem; intermediate-exposure conditions contained 3. (See Appendix for details.) The total number of stories was held to 12 across all conditions. Following the television presentation, participants evaluated President Carter's performance in specific areas, including implementing a national energy policy, holding inflation in check, and maintaining a strong national defense. They also rated Carter's general performance, his competence, and his integrity. As in Experiment 1, these judgments were correlated but distinct. The Pearson correlation between general performance and competence was .49; between general performance and integrity, .38; and between competence and integrity, .35. Finally, participants also completed a nine-item battery intended to tap political expertise. The nine items were distributed equally among the three target problems. In the case of energy, for example, participants were asked to identify three members of OPEC, name the country from which the United States imports the greatest quantity of crude oil, and describe any policy decision made by the Reagan Administration bearing on energy.[4]

Results

Did experimental manipulations of coverage increase the impact of subjects' ratings of Carter's performance in specific areas on their impressions of his general ability, as the accessibility hypothesis prescribes? Preliminary answers are given in Table 3, which reports the appropriate unstandardized coefficients indexing the importance of specific problem ratings for overall general judgments. As in Experiment 1, the coefficients are generally larger among subjects receiving coverage of the particular problem than among those who received no coverage. And as in Experiment 1, the results are clearest for general performance ratings and seem to disappear, if not reverse, for judgments of the president's integrity, in keeping with the relevance hypothesis.

For a precise test of our hypotheses, we turned again to multiple regression analysis. The procedure that was required to estimate accessibility effects is slightly more complicated here than in Experiment 1, because Experiment 2 involves three problems, not just one. Consequently, we need to estimate the impact of any one specific performance rating controlling on the effects of the other two. Equation 2.1, which tests the accessibility and relevance hypotheses, therefore contains six predictors: Summary evaluation = $b_0 + b_1$ (energy performance) + b_2 (Energy Performance × Treatment$_1$) + b_3 (defense performance) + b_4 (Defense Performance × Treatment$_2$) + b_5 (inflation performance) + b_6 (Inflation performance × Treatment$_3$) + u, where Treatment$_1$ = 1 for subjects exposed to energy stories and 0 otherwise; Treatment$_2$ = 1 for subjects exposed to defense stories and 0 otherwise; and Treatment$_3$ = 1 for subjects exposed to inflation stories and 0 otherwise.

The results from the equation indicate strong support for the accessibility hypothesis. In the first place, the impact of enhanced coverage on general job performance evaluations was sizable. For energy, defense, and inflation alike, exposure to stories about the problem substantially strengthened the relationship between specific problem performance ratings and evaluations of general performance. To take the case of energy, which is of intermediate magnitude, the strengthening amounts to a near doubling of the baseline relationship. That is, for viewers who saw no stories about energy, the impact of energy performance ratings on general performance evaluations is 0.186 (b_1); among those who saw energy stories, the impact rose to 0.323 ($b_1 + b_2$; $p < .05$). For defense, the corresponding comparison is 0.035 versus 0.118 ($p < .20$), and for inflation, 0.251 versus 0.393 ($p < .05$). Such effects constitute strong support for the accessibility hypothesis.

By comparison, ratings of the president's competence were much less influenced by manipulations of accessibility. For each of the three problems, the pertinent coefficient was positively signed, as predicted, but none quite reached statistical significance (ps = .19, .20, .24, respectively). The effects of accessibility

[4] Answers to none of the nine knowledge items could be picked up from the experimental news presentations.

Table 3
Impact of Problem Performance Ratings on Overall Ratings: Experiment 2

Category	Energy		Defense		Inflation	
	No coverage (n = 92)	Some coverage (n = 48)	No coverage (n = 94)	Some coverage (n = 46)	No coverage (n = 94)	Some coverage (n = 46)
General performance						
Coefficient	0.43	0.51	0.37	0.52	0.65	0.71
SE	0.07	0.10	0.10	0.12	0.11	0.08
Competence						
Coefficient	0.17	0.13	0.17	0.33	0.28	0.28
SE	0.06	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08
Integrity						
Coefficient	0.14	0.19	0.17	0.03	0.24	0.15
SE	0.06	0.08	0.07	0.12	0.09	0.08

diminished still further when it came to judgment of the president's integrity. In fact, each of the three coefficients indexing the impact of accessibility was negatively signed, contrary to prediction, though none significantly so ($ps > .25$ in all three instances).

This pattern of diminishing accessibility effects conforms nicely to the relevance hypothesis. The consequences of accessibility are most pronounced in evaluations of President Carter's general performance; they appear modestly in evaluations of Carter's competence and are altogether invisible in judgments of his integrity.

Once again, these results could be due to social influence. Yet once again, they seem not to be. Table 4 presents President Carter's average ratings across conditions. Even more emphatically than in Experiment 1, there were no differences. In some instances experimental subjects rated Carter more favorably; in other instances, they rated him less favorably. In no instance was the difference statistically significant. Presenting information about a problem did not lead viewers to alter their judgments regarding President Carter's performance; instead, greater coverage of a problem increased the significance of that problem for viewers' overall judgment.

This brings us finally to expertise. We expected that those viewers who already knew a good bit about a particular problem would be influenced less by television news programs than would those viewers who knew little. To test this expectation, we estimated Equation 2.2: Summary evaluation = $b_0 + b_1$ (energy performance) + b_2 (Energy Performance × Treatment$_1$) + b_3 (Energy Performance × Treatment$_1$ × Energy Expertise) + b_4 (defense performance) + b_5 (Defense Performance × Treatment$_2$) + b_6 (Defense Performance × Treatment × Defense Expertise) + b_7 (inflation performance) + b_8 (Inflation Performance × Treatment$_3$) + b_9 (Inflation Performance × Treatment$_3$ × Inflation Expertise) + u, where the expertise variables are scored from 0 (all answers wrong) to 3 (all answers correct), and all other variables are as defined in Equation 2.1.[5]

The coefficients of interest here are b_3, b_6, and b_9. We expected them to be negatively signed, meaning that exposure to stories about, say, energy problems would influence presidential judgments less among those who knew a lot about energy than among those who knew little.

The estimated coefficients support this hypothesis well: Eight of the nine coefficients took the predicted negative sign, and the only exception differed trivially from zero (b = 0.022, p = .56). Moreover, five of the eight properly signed coefficients at least approached statistical significance ($p < .15$).

The results regarding expertise for evaluations of Mr. Carter's general performance are summarized in Table 5. Table 5 presents the estimated impact of treatment, taken from Equation 2.2, for those most knowledgeable about a particular problem (score of 3) and for those who are most ignorant (score of 0). Table 5 makes clear the importance of ex-

[5] Because the main effects associated with treatment and expertise approached conventional levels of statistical significance, these terms were also included in Equation 2.2.

Table 4
Ratings of President Carter: Experiment 2

Category	Energy		Defense		Inflation	
	No coverage (n = 92)	Some coverage (n = 48)	No coverage (n = 94)	Some coverage (n = 46)	No coverage (n = 94)	Some coverage (n = 46)
General performance						
M	3.14	2.96	3.10	3.04	3.00	3.24
SD	0.96	1.06	1.01	0.97	1.01	0.95
Competence						
M	2.50	2.42	2.44	2.54	2.48	2.46
SD	0.63	0.67	0.66	0.61	0.64	0.66
Integrity						
M	3.26	3.28	3.32	3.15	3.22	3.36
SD	0.69	0.72	0.65	0.79	0.75	0.57
Energy performance						
M	3.24	3.02	3.16	3.38	3.72	3.71
SD	1.16	1.26	1.02	1.05	0.84	1.08

pertise. As expected, the effects of television news coverage on the standards that are applied to presidential evaluations were much more pronounced among the uninformed; experts were influenced much less.

Discussion

By providing glimpses of some national problems while neglecting others, television news broadcasts help define the evaluative standards that viewers apply to presidents. In our experiments, evaluations of President Carter by people exposed to news about inflation were influenced especially by judgments of how well Carter was managing the economy, evaluations of President Carter by those shown stories about the country's energy problems were influenced especially by judgments of Carter's performance on energy, and evaluations by those exposed to stories about the nation's defense were influenced especially by judgments of his performance on defense. These results constitute strong support for the accessibility hypothesis.

At least two mechanisms may underlie such effects. First, it may be that watching a story about, say, the nation's defense automatically evokes the knowledge that viewers have accumulated in the past on that subject. As a result, such information is more easily accessible and comes to mind more quickly when the viewer is asked to evaluate presidential performance. This account portrays citizens as highly susceptible to the vagaries of circumstance and largely unaware of their own swaying back and forth. Alternatively, viewers may be quite aware of shifts in their evaluational standards. We know that increased exposure to stories about a national problem enhances the importance that people attach to that problem (Iyengar et al., 1982). As a result, they may consciously decide to accord more weight to that problem in presidential evaluations. Thus, the process may occur within consciousness or outside of it; our results are noncommittal on this point.

Our experiments do, however, specify some boundaries of the accessibility effect. It is not as if television news can unilaterally and completely define the way the public thinks about the president. Real constraints are operating here. In the first place, accessible information will be more or less influential depending on its perceived relevance to the judgment at hand. Manipulations of the impact of accessibility were most pronounced for evaluations of President Carter's general performance, in-

Table 5
Estimated Coverage Effect on General Job Performance by Level of Expertise

Issue	Novices	Experts
Energy	0.19	0.06
Inflation	0.16	0.05
Defense	0.15	0.10

Note. Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, estimated by Equation 2.2.

termediate for appraisals of his competence, and absent for appraisals of his integrity. Effects such as these, falling regularly along a gradient defined by relevance, should be the rule in studies of accessibility.

The particular shape taken by the gradient here is most likely a product of our particular experimental manipulations, however. The presentations we assembled concentrated on three substantive problems facing Mr. Carter: United States' dependence on foreign oil, rising prices, and deterioration in the nation's defense. When such problems are made accessible, as by television news programs, it is only natural that viewers consider Carter's performance in dealing with such problems as more relevant to his competence than to his integrity. Had we instead compiled a collection of news stories bearing on "moral" performance—the Bert Lance affair, Hamilton Jordon's escapades, brother Billy's wheeling and dealing—then integrity and competence might well have exchanged positions on the effects gradient.

Accessible information will be more or less influential depending also on the viewer's expertise. Experts are relatively immune to manipulations of accessibility by television news programs, perhaps because they have already worked out for themselves the national significance of the problem and how heavily the president figures into it. Their standards are well established and already highly accessible. In contrast, novices, whose standards are not nearly so entrenched, are influenced much more by television news stories. These results serve as a general reminder that the criteria people apply in reaching social judgments have both internal and external origins; they reflect both predisposition and circumstance.

Finally, we should say a word about the political implications of our results. A president's power in Washington depends partly on how favorably he is evaluated by the nation. A popular president tends to have things his way with Congress, the bureaucracy, the private sector, and the executive branch itself (Neustadt, 1960; Rivers & Rose, 1981). As a consequence, understanding the part played by accessibility in presidential evaluations tells us something about the exercise of tangible political power. One implication of our results is that a president's program may be advantaged or completely undone by what happens to come flickering across the nation's television screens.

References

Chase, W. G., & Simon, H. A. (1973). The mind's eye in chess. In W. G. Chase (Ed.), *Visual information processing* (pp. 215–281). New York: Academic Press.

Chi, M. T. H., & Koeske, R. (1983). Network representation of a child's dinosaur knowledge. *Developmental Psychology, 19,* 29–39.

Comstock, G., Chaffee, S., Katzman, N., McCombs, M., & Roberts, D. (1978). *Television and human behavior.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Duncan, O. D. (1975). *Introduction to structural equation models.* New York: Academic Press.

Fiske, S. T., & Kinder, D. R. (1981). Involvement, expertise, and schema use: Evidence from political cognition. In N. Cantor & J. Kihlstrom (Eds.), *Personality, cognition, and social interaction* (pp. 171–190). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Fiske, S. T., Kinder, D. R., & Larter, W. M. (1983). The novice and the expert: Knowledge-based strategies in political cognition. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 19,* 381–400.

Graber, D. (1980). *Mass media and American politics.* Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Hamilton, D. L., & Fallot, R. D. (1974). Information salience as a weighting factor in impression formation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 30,* 444–448.

Higgins, E. T., & King, G. (1981). Accessibility of social constructs: Information-processing consequences of individual and contextual variability. In N. Cantor & J. Kihlstrom (Eds.), *Personality, cognition, and social interaction* (pp. 69–121). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Higgins, E. T., Rholes, W. S., & Jones, C. R. (1977). Category accessibility and impression formation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 13,* 141–154.

Hinsley, D. A., Hayes, J. R., & Simon, H. A. (1977). From words to equations: Meaning and representation in algebra word problems. In M. A. Just & P. S. Carpenter (Eds.), *Cognitive processes in comprehension,* pp. 89–106. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Iyengar, S., Peters, M. D., & Kinder, D. R. (1982). Experimental demonstrations of the not-so-minimal political consequences of mass media. *American Political Science Review, 76,* 848–858.

Kinder, D. R., & Abelson, R. P. (1981, September). *Appraising presidential candidates: Personality and affect in the 1980 campaign.* Paper delivered at the 1981 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York City.

Kinder, D. R., Abelson, R. P., & Fiske, S. T. (1979). *Developmental research on candidate instrumentation: Results and recommendations.* Report available from Center for Political Studies, ISR, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.

Kinder, D. R., & Sears, D. O. (in press). Public opinion and political action. In G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Larkin, J. H., McDermott, J., Simon, D. P., & Simon, H. A. (1980). Models of competence in solving physics problems. *Science, 208,* 1335–1342.

Markus, G. B. (1982). Political attitudes during an election year: A report on the 1980 NES Panel Study. *American Political Science Review, 76,* 538–560.

Miller, W. E., & Shanks, J. M. (1982). Policy directions and presidential leadership: Alternative interpretations

of the 1980 presidential election. *British Journal of Political Science, 12,* 299–356.

Neustadt, R. E. (1960). *Presidential power.* New York: Wiley.

Nisbett, R. E., & Ross, L. (1980). *Human inference: Strategies and shortcomings of social judgment.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review, 84,* 231–259.

Rivers, D., & Rose, N. (1981, April). *Passing the president's program.* Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-West Political Science Association, Chicago.

Salancik, G. R. (1974). Inferences of one's attitude from behavior recalled under linguistically manipulated cognitive sets. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 10,* 415–427.

Srull, T. K., & Wyer, R. S. (1979). The role of category accessibility in the interpretation of information about persons: Some determinants and implications. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37,* 1160–1172.

Wyer, R. S., & Hartwick, J. (1980). The role of information retrieval and conditional inference processes in belief formation and change. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 13, pp. 241–284). New York: Academic Press.

Appendix

Table A1
Target Problem Stories

Low accountability	High accountability
Energy (Experiments 1 and 2)	
1. Gas shortages expected. Picture of lines at gas stations during embargo shown. Summer travel off.	5. Carter makes speech in Kansas City on his energy program—discusses key provisions.
2. OPEC oil ministers meet and discuss new price. Sheikh Yamani urges small increase. Radicals oppose him.	6. Congress denounces Carter's proposed 10¢/barrel tax on imported oil.
3. Coal industry booming as industries seek to convert from oil to coal. Bankers and executives in Kentucky interviewed.	7. Carter tours coal mine and speaks out on need to reduce U.S. dependence on imported oil.
4. Elderly on fixed incomes having trouble with heating costs. Minnesota legislature proposes subsidies.	8. New "windfall profits" tax sent to Congress by President Carter. Opposition expected.
Inflation (Experiment 1)	
1. Prices of various products shown.	5. Carter claims his program is working. Country is in "mild recession."
2. Shoppers interviewed.	6. Carter says country faces "dangerous situation." Announces budget cuts, "austerity program."
3. Consequences of tight money for business detailed.	7. Wall Street has no confidence in Carter. Carter appeals for cooperation.
4. "Special feature" on inflation broadcasted. Price increases in various sectors shown. Projections for 1979 given.	8. Inflation increases from 1976 to 1979. Implications for Carter's reelection bid examined.
Defense (Experiment 2)	
1. Nerve gas production in U.S.S.R. and United States compared. United States training soldiers in gas warfare.	5. Carter reacts to presence of Soviet training brigade in Cuba. United States to monitor their activities.
2. NATO and Warsaw forces compared—emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons.	6. Neutron bomb and related controversy covered. Carter wants more time.
3. Can United States intervene in Persian Gulf in event of Soviet aggression? New rapid deployment force said to be inadequate.	7. Carter veto of new aircraft carrier sustained. Carter attacked as being soft on defense.
4. Film of battle in Afganistan shown. Rebels putting up strong resistance.	8. Carter's State of the Union Address to focus on United States military policy.

Received March 17, 1982
Revision received October 19, 1983 ■