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# How does media coverage of oil pipelines affect governmental response?

Haley Walter

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How Does Media Coverage of Oil Pipelines Affect Governmental Response?

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An Honors College Capstone Project presented to  
the faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Arts and Letters  
James Madison University

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by

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Political Science, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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## **Abstract**

How Media Coverage of the Dakota Access Pipeline Affected Governmental Response

by

Haley Walter

This study's purpose was to first explore the significance of agenda-setting, framing, and inference, which assert that the media's daily coverage of event significant impact the way it is understood by the public. Then, I aimed to apply this understanding specifically to media coverage of the oil pipeline process of Dakota Access Pipeline.

To this end, I conducted a content analysis of articles from *The Bismarck Tribune*, the *Associated Press*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, and July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 was conducted. This was to fully analyze the language and potential framing used in each publication.

I also conducted a content analysis of governmental responses made by the Federal Energy Regulatory Committee, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of Justice, Department of the Interior, and Department of the Army to understand the language and potential influence of framing used in each source.

Results showed that the language utilized in the response made by the Department of Justice, Department of the Interior, and Department of the Army shifted to being sympathetic towards the rights of the Standing Rock Sioux, as seen in use by researched publications. These findings have impacts on the modern relationship between media coverage and governmental action.

## **Introduction and Literature Review**

In today's American political system, the media are best known as the unofficial fourth branch of government, acting as a hidden outlet that influences the main three branches that are the legislative, executive, and judicial. This role is essentially comprised of observing the political process and concurrently ensuring that the government is acting responsibly in favor of the people. Similarly, it maintains that the issues most important to the people are brought to the government, therefore, providing a well-functioning channel between the government and the governed to communicate and progress politically. Specifically, when the media analyze relevant political issues to the people, they engage in a pattern of framing which ultimately leads to agenda-setting and inference among both the government and the public. This structures how each issue will be written and offered through countless political texts. Therefore, this literature review will discuss why and how these factors of framing, agenda-setting, and inference matter to the democratic process we engage in each day.

### *Media as the Fourth Branch*

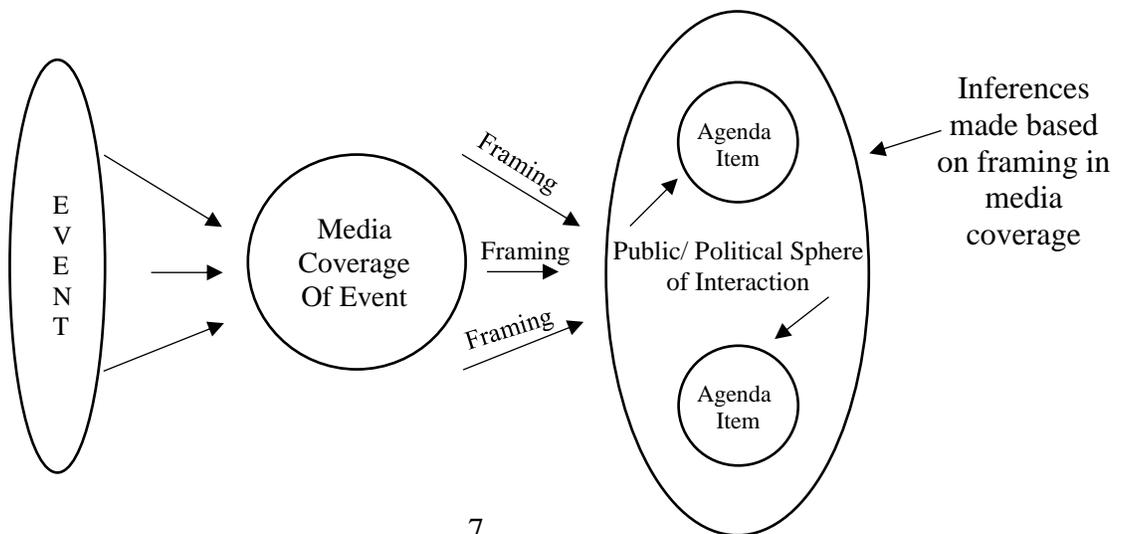
This role for the media is a crucial pillar to democracy for multiple reasons. Since the beginning of the twentieth century and the emergence of muckraking where journalists sought to expose the corrupt and immoral business practices of government officials and corporations, the media have a role in informing the public of political injustice in order to bring about change (McGerr, 2010). For example, through works like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which uncovered large shocks of what was happening in the food processing industry, people then called for a real change from the government. This resulted in important changes like the Pure Food and Drug Act (McGerr, 2010). More recently, notable examples of this include Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who were the journalists that exposed the Watergate scandal. By proving that no

figure, even the President of the United States, is immune to the exposure of the truth, American politics have significantly changed in that politicians, knowing the media are closely watching, are increasingly motivated to conduct honest and open campaigns (Bernstein, 1974). These instances show that a key role the media has developed over time as the fourth branch of government is the responsibility to consistently be observing and inspecting political elites, ensuring behavior that is accountable and beneficial to the people. Otherwise, these figures will be exposed to the public, therefore allowing the public the opportunity to demand justice and bring about change.

Another component within the role of the media acting as the fourth estate is the duty to keep the public informed of relevant current events such as political achievements and occurrences. Since the media have expanded from being a print-based industry of newspapers and magazines into an enlarged collection of media technologies such as television, film, and the internet, there have been multiple new platform through which the media can release news and information to the public (*How Has Media Changed and Developed*, n.d.). Though the public is previously known for a tendency to be disengaged with print media when it comes to following the news or being involved in local politics, new wave media technology allows for the reporting of news and current events through social media or on television, providing unlimited access to the public (Wilkins, 2001). The media must adhere to its role and be able to make relevant information to the public accessible because largely the news coverage and reporting of local issues supply the, “political information that voters base their decisions on” (Kumar, 2016). The media acting as the fourth branch of government helps to keep the general public engaged with balanced issue coverage and the events that affect them each day, providing for a direct, relevant channel of information in order to increase political participation and awareness.

### *Framing, Agenda-Setting, and Inference*

The primary consideration for how the media tangibly implements its role as the fourth branch is through its subconscious implementation of framing. Framing is best defined as how the, “subtle changes in the wording of the description of a situation might affect how the audience members interpret” the story being presented to them (Scheufele, 2009: 309). This is a significant power because depending on how an issue is framed by the media, the audience can be influenced to think about the issue in a positive or negative light. For example, in terms of politically relevant issues, the public can be motivated based on an issue’s frame to view it as helpful or harmful, potentially influencing their voting behavior. This is because the framing has activated “interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation” of incoming information related to an issue (Scheufele, 2009: 309). Therefore, the framing of an issue is largely contingent on the political leanings of the reporting media source, as the coverage will likely present the issue of focus in a way that either displays agreement or disagreement with the political values of the source. Overall, framing within the media recognizes the capability of a publication to, “define a situation, to define the issues, and to set the terms of a debate” (Scheufele, 2009: 305). This, therefore, allows for the media publication source choosing to bring an issue to light to decide where it falls within the political landscape and how it potentially interacts with other concepts.



In an important relation to framing, agenda-setting also places an issue within the political landscape. Framing is related to the agenda-setting theory but it expands on it by centering its focus on the core significance of the relevant issue rather than a broader topic. (*Mass Communication Theory*, 2014). Framing works on a broad level to organize and, structure message meaning in order to create a level of influence determining how the public will interpret information (*Mass Communication Theory*, 2014). For example, *The Art of Framing* by Fairhurst and Sarr posits that framing is an overall, “construction of reality” through the utilization of foundational methods such as, “defining the situation... interpreting uncertainty, and designing the response” (Fairhurst, Sarr, 1996). Consequently, when the mass media inherently decide an issues’ salience and newsworthiness, it is setting the political agenda.

A study performed by Lang and Lang after the Watergate scandal of 1972 established a four-step model of agenda-setting. Step one is comprised of the mass media highlighting, “events, activities, groups, or personalities” that are felt to be of pertinence or note to the public (Scheufele, 2009: 303). In the second step, these elements relating to the highlighted story are combined into a general frame or description to be presented to the public. This is followed by the third step which is to connect these elements that are linked to their shared political landscape (Scheufele, 2009: 303). In the final phase of information being released to the public are the political representatives who act as an issue’s spokesman or spin master by working to establish a loop of interaction with the coverage throughout various media platforms (Scheufele, 2009: 303). This step is fundamental because once the media have framed and set the agenda with relevant political issues, it is the politicians and governmental response that can create tangible, lasting change for the public. This construction and implementation of the agenda-setting process in daily news coverage, “attributes a key role both to the mass media for picking up an issue and

to the political actors... increasing its prominence” (Scheufele, 2009: 298). Agenda-setting is crucial because it is largely through the media alone that the public will become aware of an issue within the political sphere. This appointed role of the media acting as a “watchdog” for the public wholly shapes its importance because the public entrusts the media to maintain a watchful eye on governmental officials and the political domain, always setting the agenda and reporting the issues most relevant and substantial in a fair and balanced manner.

This significance of the media and agenda-setting to modern democracy is demonstrated in a study done by McCombs and Shaw regarding political elections. McCombs and Shaw sought to investigate the agenda-setting capacity of the media by conducting 100 interviews with local Chapel Hill residents that remained undecided in who to vote for in the upcoming presidential election. The interviews centered around each respondent outlining their personal opinion of key electoral issues, “regardless of what the candidates might be saying” and then examining whether these answers and key issues were also present in the local news and editorials (McCombs, Shaw, 1968: 178). Overall, they found a strong correlation between the major issues reported by the media and the independent judgments of voters that also deemed what the major issues were during the campaign cycle (McCombs, Shaw, 1968: 180). These findings demonstrated a durable relationship between the believed importance of political issues on the agenda and the responding judgments of the public as to their overall salience (McCombs, Shaw, 1968: 181). This further proves that agenda-setting and framing by the media is important to upholding democratic values as it informs the public of potentially significant and relevant political issues to their daily lives.

Following the implementation of framing and agenda-setting in media coverage is inference. Inference is defined as a conclusion reached on the basis of evidentiary reasoning,

such as if someone is seen recycling it can be inferred that they are trying to practice environmental consciousness (Crow, 2010: 145). Utilizing inference in daily situations allows for the ability to draw conclusions about an event or issue when the direct significance is not obvious. This ability to infer and draw conclusions from information presented directly relates to how the media permeate news to the public because media writers and reporters initially select topics based on their view of what is most important in society at the time. In *Local Media and Experts: Sources of Environmental Policy Initiations*, it is asserted that based on messages presented by the media, individuals will make inferences and, “assume that the issues being covered by the media are the most important issues of the day” (Crow, 2010: 146). Through these inferences made by the public, the media then will infer in response to the overall relevancy of issues in comparison to others (Crow, 2010: 145). This use of inference by the media is significant because it is also largely through the media’s use of inference combined with agenda-setting that an issue will become known to the general public. Therefore, the media holds a significant amount of power in deciding what issues the public will agree are relevant and worthy of further examination and coverage.

Another relevant facet of inference is the assumption that the way media frames and covers an event also represents how the public feels about it to the person reading the coverage. When the media is reporting on a relevant story, those who view the coverage will infer that the coverage also reflects public opinion, or, “what mass media are saying today must be what the public will be thinking tomorrow” (Gunther, 1998: 487). In *The Persuasive Press Inference*, a study was done by Albert C. Gunther to test the significance of inference and the media. Participants in the study received political articles to read and were asked to estimate overall public opinion regarding the issue focus of the article. However, each of the articles had several

versions distributed that included the altering of key terms, as well as an addition or omission of anecdotes that could present favorable or unfavorable accounts of each story (Gunther, 1998: 489). Participants were then asked to estimate what percentage of Americans would agree or disagree with the story. This allowed for the partaker to infer from the story what they evaluate its overall salience and political impact on the public to be. It was concluded that there was a strong amount of evidence indicating people are significantly more likely to, “infer public opinion from their own reading of ... media coverage” (Gunther, 1998: 490). This finding of the weight of inference is important to media coverage today because it reinforces that depending on how a topic is framed and presented to the public, the public will then swiftly formulate its own interpretation and impression of what others additionally think about the information.

#### *Media Effects and Environmental Policy*

Overall, this consolidation of the news and its presentation to the public through the utilization of framing, agenda-setting, and inference are vital to understanding the role of the media as the fourth estate of the government. The application of this role throughout the political sphere aids in creating a successful channel where the media and the public may interact and determine which current political issues are the most pressing and relevant to cover. One of the most pressing issues today is the global issue of the impact of climate change and ongoing environmental crises. While there is most commonly a focus in the mass media on large-scale environmental events such as natural disasters, there is less persistent coverage on the aftermath or conceivable causes behind the reoccurring issues. This most often includes a discussion of the relevance of climate change and the rising amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The lack of coverage stems from multiple explanations, predominantly the theory that the media focuses on what it knows the public will find great interest in such as, “episodic coverage of

dramatic events... and economic impacts” (Stamm, Clark, Eblacas, 2000: 219). By not focusing on expanded issues related to the environment, the agenda-setting precedent supports that public concern and attention will be lacking because this concern only reflects the amount media attention received (Stamm, Clark, Eblacas, 2000: 220). This is a cause for concern because as previously stated, it is the media’s role to provide balanced information and coverage to keep the public informed of the issues most relevant to them.

In a study done by Stamm, Clark, and Eblacas awareness of various environmental issues was tested by analyzing public perceptions. Participants were asked questions regarding their belief in the existence of global warming, such as whether it is a problem, if actions should be taken, and whether they could list examples of global warming (Stamm, Clark, Eblacas, 2000). Additionally, this study documented how much each participant engaged with daily media sources and absorbed news coverage of various environmentally related issues. Overall, results included a general agreement among participants that there is a link between global warming and causes such as greenhouse gas emissions. However, from this level of awareness subsequently developed misconceptions of what constituted a greenhouse gas, of other contributions to global warming, and what consequences of global warming resemble.

Causes of global warming were shown to be understood due to a general presence of media coverage regarding relevant environmental facets, however, there was limited coverage regarding any likely further consequences other than dramatic environmental events. This is what can most likely be attributed to these common misconceptions made by the public, leading to an overall lack of environmental literacy. Notably, within the group of participants that were more aware of global warming when answering survey questions, there was also a stronger relationship with media content and absorption. This reinforces the idea that the relationship

between the media and the public is most importantly a channel, and the public also plays a role in becoming more aware and informed of the issues set on the political agenda by the media.

Interestingly, this sets the stage for the notion that in the modern political arena issues of environmental concern or justice often go unreported or inadequately covered because they are not as interesting to the public in comparison to other issues.

#### *Case Study of Framing, Agenda-Setting, and Inference*

Media coverage of environmental issues is a subject of significance because it is only through mainstream media that environmental consciousness can be spread. This was prominently exemplified through Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which ultimately engendered the modern environmental movement. *Silent Spring* was released in 1962 with the ambition of garnering the public's attention to the, "impending crisis brought on by the indiscriminate use of pesticides" through her intense, vivid, and thorough documentation (Lytle, 2007: vi). Carson was prompted to explore the increasing use of pesticides in the United States after receiving a copy of a published letter from her friend Olga Owens Huckins, originally written to the Boston *Herald*, and described the great number of birds around her property dying in response to the spraying of DDT, an aerial pesticide aimed at killing mosquitos (Lear, 1993: 34). Carson spent four years uncovering the previously unknown enormity of the pesticide problem in America through the research of relevant court trials. These trials attempted to prevent the government from further pesticide use by presenting evidence of DDT damage to fish, birds, wildlife, and people (Lear, 1993: 34). Upon its publication, *Silent Spring* represented a chilling, dystopian future to Americans by beginning with powerful descriptions of a, "strange blight" that crept over a particular town killing both farm animals and humans in its, "shadow of death" (Carson, 1962:

10). It reveals that while, “this town does not actually exist, it might easily have a thousand counterparts in America or elsewhere in the world” (Carson, 1962: 11).

*Silent Spring* was featured in the June issue of *The New Yorker* within its first week of release, which was significant as this distinguished periodical, “had a history of bringing important social issues and authors to the reading public” (Lear, 1993: 35). Though environmental issues had previously not been thought of as a prominent social topic, this impactful writing captured and framed the severe and lethal impacts of DDT, setting a new agenda for environmental reform (Lear, 1993: 35). Other media outlets picked up Carson’s striking exposé that demonstrated the concealed side-effects of technological progress in agriculture and it eventually garnered the attention of the national media (Lear, 1993: 36). Carson became a prominent figure across multiple platforms for her work, and likewise caught the attention of the Kennedy presidential administration (Lear, 1993: 38). President John F. Kennedy viewed the findings of *Silent Spring* as, “political dynamite” and set up a panel to investigate the use of pesticides and look into tangible public policy changes (Lear, 1993: 38). Upon receiving a solid position in the political agenda from the media and the government, governmental departments became flooded with letters, “protesting government spraying programs” and conservation organizations reported, record membership (Lear, 1993: 38). The investigative committee established by Kennedy ultimately concluded that Carson’s findings were correct and that the only way to prevent more environmental damage from pesticides was by immediate reductions of these very pesticides (Lear, 1993: 39).

These large-scale changes in governmental action that resulted from media coverage of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* can potentially be significantly attributed to the media’s consistent coverage and voracity for the truth. Highlighting the previously stated mechanisms of the fourth

branch, the media coverage of *Silent Spring* importantly included the framing of environmental concerns as important to society, as well as to the political agenda. Consequential, society can be argued to have inferred this framing and agenda-setting, allowing for a channel of communication that this issue was worthy of investigation. This momentous environmental work was able to achieve acknowledgement from the highest office of the government and enact real legislative change that improved the lives of millions of Americans. Additionally, from this issue and the recognition of its importance in American daily life, the media potentially bred a new generation of environmental scientists and activists seeking to expand this platform of environmental consciousness and lay the foundation for the modern environmental movement (Lear, 1993: 42). Without the media to aid in the projection and promotion of these issues brought to the forefront by Rachel Carson and others throughout history there would arguably be less ecological progress in modernity and less attention to matters closely connected to the human experience such as environmental conservation and preservation. From these findings, I am going to take this idea of framing, agenda-setting, and inference and analyze its salience in the media coverage of oil pipelines.

## **The Fourth Branch, Environmental Coverage, and Crude Oil Pipelines**

The implementation of oil pipelines is one of the issues most prominent within the established modern environmental realm that typically continues to gather less attention from the media but meanwhile receives significant contentious attention from both liberal and conservative politics. Crude oil pipelines are described as the, “foundation of our modern liquid energy supply” and transport oil drilled from around the globe to common inland production areas such as Texas, Wyoming, North Dakota, Louisiana, Alaska, and western Canada (*Crude Oil Pipelines*, 2016). For the United States, these oil pipelines represent a, “renaissance of domestic energy production” because they are able to carry millions of gallons of oil each day across a country or vast expanse of land, crucially assisting in providing the foundation for plastics, fuel for cars, and heating in homes (*Crude Oil Pipelines*, 2016). Pipeline construction has, therefore, become more sought after as it permits the transference of oil in an efficient and inexpensive manner while allowing Americans to maintain their daily lives and mass consumption of energy. Currently, the United States has the largest network of oil pipelines in the world with millions of miles of pipe mainly concentrated in the Midwest, lower Midwest, and Gulf Coast region (*Where are Pipelines Located*, 2016).

While these facts and figures represent the positive, widespread standpoints of those who support crude oil pipelines in the United States, controversy is introduced by the opposing political viewpoint that magnifies negative costs following the implementation of these pipelines. For example, in the current political climate that seeks to reduce greenhouse emissions, one of the largest concerns with pipelines is their further addition of greenhouse gases. Though the argument for crude oil pipelines maintains that they are environmentally responsible because they move oil better than individual trucks and transportation sources, it remains that these

pipelines pose to release an immense amount of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency conducted a study regarding the prospective environmental impact of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline, which seeks to expand the already existing Keystone pipeline. The EPA found that the expansion would lead to, “1.3 billion additional tons of greenhouse gas emissions over the pipeline’s 50-year lifespan” (Magill, 2015). This amount only serves to add to the amount of greenhouse gases and toxic emissions that already come from tar sand and crude oil transport into cities central to the Keystone pipeline (Magill, 2015).

### *The Policy Process of Crude Oil Pipelines*

It is these opposing political viewpoints regarding oil pipeline construction that characterize the government’s pipeline certification process. The chief governmental organization tasked with initial approval of interstate transmission of electricity, natural gas, and oil is the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, or the FERC (*What FERC Does*, n.d.). When a company seeks to erect an oil pipeline, it first must approach the FERC with a, “description of the project, route maps and alternatives, construction plans, ... regulatory approvals required from other agencies, milestones and schedules, and various environmental reports studying the potential impacts on the environment, cultural resources, land use, and other impacts” (Tierney, 2017: 10). The inclusion of these aspects allows the FERC to analyze the potential costs and benefits, and determine the, “balance of public benefit with adverse consequences” such as environmental degradation (Tierney, 2017: 1). While conducting this analysis of costs and benefits, the FERC notifies the public of the intended construction and it also begins researching environmental impact through the proposal of an Environmental Impact Statement or an EIS (Tierney, 2017: 11).

This public notice released is a crucial point in the pipeline policy process because it creates a forum for crude oil pipeline viewpoints to introduce and discuss their beliefs regarding pipelines. Since this dialogue is noted and followed by the FERC, it allows for a diversified public response that offers important feedback concerning potential pipelines. In recent years, regarding the opportunity for feedback from the public, the FERC has witnessed, “an acceleration of pipeline siting and certification challenges ... by affected landowners, neighboring homeowners, municipalities, environmental groups, and other interested parties” (Tierney, 2017: 2). This is significant because it is likewise that only recently crude oil pipelines have become a significant part of the media’s political agenda, potentially displaying that when the public’s attention is brought to relevant issues, the issue is likely to become a source of attention in the political sphere. In terms of pipeline construction and media coverage, the public has only become increasingly aware of how to interact and incite a governmental response.

Previously mentioned issues concerning the conflicting presence of crude oil pipelines represent the possible large-scale environmental effects such as increased greenhouse gas emissions. However, the most common interests present at these FERC public forums and discussed online involve those that are smaller-scale and affect the very people voicing these interests. The first interest at risk is the environment of local communities, which differs from previously mentioned large-scale environmental concerns because generally when a smaller population is being affected, its smaller-scale concerns will receive less media attention. On a local scale, the construction and presence of crude oil pipelines can erode and contaminate surrounding soils with chemicals and toxic substances (*Oil Pipelines and Spills*, n.d.). This acidification of soil can catalyze various reactions such as the creation of acid rain when water is mixed with these soils and also the endangerment and extinction of local vegetation because it no

longer receives the same soil nutrients or air quality (*Oil Pipelines and Spills*, n.d.). Similarly, nearby existing wildlife is put at risk because the pipeline may displace animals from their natural habitats through removal by direct pipeline presence, or alteration due to pipeline construction barriers. This concern becomes even more crucial when there are known unique, fragile ecosystems or even a history of endangered species existing on the land.

Another issue of conflict is the threat to the economic welfare of those who would live nearby to the proposed pipelines. While the companies who support pipelines tout they will make the energy from crude oil more accessible to Americans and aid in supporting energy consumption, this only further develops a crippling dependency on fossil fuels. Instead of local communities having the opportunity to invest in new sources of energy such as solar or wind power, they are often left big corporations without choice or representation and comply with the growing demand for pipelines. Additionally, the upsurge in pipelines around the country results in a more rapid depletion of nonrenewable resources such as crude oil, consequently causing the general price per barrel of oil to increase (*Oil Pipelines and Spills*, n.d.). Ultimately, this profits the oil companies and hurts the average American that will be obligated to pay more money for daily necessary resources related to this transportation of oil such as gasoline, diesel, and petroleum products. Since smaller or poorer communities receive no media coverage of their plight, there is great difficulty in stopping the implementation of pipelines in their locality.

The last main conflict of interest present at the FERC opportunities for public input is the threat to liberty. During the process of crude oil pipeline construction, the controlling company is required to obtain the necessary surrounding land before the structure can officially be made. This affects the public because should pipeline construction plans be approved by the FERC, the backlash from landowners not seeking to give up their land will fall inaudible if companies

choose to exercise the right of eminent domain. Exercising this action allows for the acquisition of, “privately held land for the purpose of constructing and operating” a pipeline facility (Tierney, 2017: 1). From the threat of companies being able to exercise this action, the liberty and rights belonging to the property of landowners are significantly impacted. Though landowners are supposed to have the right to their own estate, these rights become at risk of being infringed upon by large corporations not seeking to redirect the pipeline construction. These main public concerns being voiced to the FERC overall represent significant aspects of the lives of average Americans at risk of endangerment by pipelines and signify the greatest barriers existing today to the pipeline policy process.

#### *Media Coverage of the Oil Pipeline Policy Processes*

From these looming environmental concerns by the public that warn of the probable and known consequences of crude oil pipelines, the media focus on the misfortunes of the environment or rights of the local people only after a pipeline has been implemented. Most notably, these events of environmental disaster covered by the media include oil spills and ruptures. It was reported that from 2010 to 2016 that approximately 1,300 pipeline oil spills have occurred within the United States, which amounts to about one crude oil spill every other day (*Oil Pipelines and Spills*, n.d.). The total amount of crude oil that has consequentially been spilled from these various pipelines across the country amounts to 9 million gallons, or, “enough oil to fill a square pool 10 feet deep and 950 feet wide” and largely even these spills go unreported in the media unless they are of an “impactful” amount (Harrington, 2016). It is likely this stems from the same theory that the media focus on what it knows the public will find interesting, but additionally, it highlights that the public majority is not interested in coverage about oil spills because these spills generally only affect a local population. A notable recent

instance of media coverage and agenda-setting regarding a pipeline spill occurred in November of 2017. This large-scale spillage of crude oil occurred from the Keystone Pipeline in South Dakota, which drew extensive attention because of the widely contentious Keystone XL expansion project it is related to (Harrington, 2016). Additionally, this pipeline spill released approximately 210,000 gallons of oil onto farmland that is adjacent to the nearby Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe reservation (Harrington, 2016). These combined aspects led to a fair amount of overall media coverage and interest from the public inferring this is a renewed political issue due to past historical clashes between American corporations, government and Native Americans.

From within this recent period of escalating political tension regarding pipeline implementation and potential spills emerged coverage of the contentious protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The media coverage garnered sizable public attention and quickly became a central issue on the political agenda regarding the infringement of Native American rights. The members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal members aimed to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline because a portion of its overall path overlapped with, “burial grounds and other sacred and historically significant sites of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe” as well as Lake Oahe, a main water source for the Standing Rock Reservation (Penn-Roco, 2016). Importantly, media coverage of this controversy highlighted the previously stated issue of local Americans facing corporations looking to seize their land, fulfilling its role to keep Americans informed of relevant political issues. Also, as the media added this political controversy to the agenda, coverage of the ensuing DAPL events endured multiple frames outlining protestors and the companies seeking to construct the pipeline in both positive and negative lights in some relation to the ideology of the news source.

It is not until environmental political issues come to a boiling point, such as oil spills or protests, that the media lend coverage to the area of environmental justice where change can be brought about. There is a democratic need for both environmental literature and environmental issues to receive media coverage and have a strong presence in the political agenda because, “the rapid growth of environmental issues in recent decades is demanding the need for a better informed society” (Burchett, 2015: 3). As part of media’s role as the fourth branch, it must consistently be watching for important issues such as the environment and related literature to bring to the attention of the public in order for the public to play a well-informed role in government (Burchett, 2015: 12). If members of the public are to remain informed of relevant, imperative issues and consequently make significant voting choices, they must be able to have access to fair, equal coverage of these topics.

Wholly, successes in bringing environmental issues to the forefront of public attention can potentially result in the enactment of legislation, federal programs, and other significant governmental responses. On a smaller scale, the addressing of these environmental issues through media coverage can also potentially aid in increasing environmental literacy, aggregating public participation, and continuing to hold the government accountable to the needs of the people. Therefore, how the current political issue of crude oil pipelines is addressed in the political agenda and how it is framed are noteworthy because currently there is only media coverage after problems such as environmental damage or the infringement of environmental, economic, and personal liberties. Though as previously discussed there is an immense debate within the public input opportunities of pipeline policy process, these concerns never receive substantial media coverage and therefore are never brought to the larger attention of the public. It is the public that infers the importance of these issues and brings it to the attention of the

government seeking justice in regards to the issue at hand. The responses to media coverage, agenda-setting, and issue framing are worth exploring in regards to crude oil pipelines because they have the possibility to substantively impact public knowledge, opinion and awareness, and ultimately governmental actions. As previously understood, oil pipeline approval is a complex political process with not a large amount of research into how media coverage can affect it. Therefore, I decided it would be both interesting and informative to assess this idea by applying it to the Dakota Access Pipeline approval process and following events. Specifically, this research seeks to address the following research questions:

- To what extent is there evidence that framing did happen in the media coverage of the Dakota Access Pipeline?
- Is there a relationship between media ideological bias and the resulting framing of the Dakota Access Pipeline?
- To what extent did media coverage of the Dakota Access Pipeline affect governmental response?

## Methodology

### How Does Media Coverage of Oil Pipelines Affect Governmental Response?

This research intends to address the previously presented questions regarding media coverage of the oil pipeline policy process. In this chapter, I will review key variables, data collection, and my data analysis method. To reiterate, the essential case to be examined in terms of media coverage and the subsequent governmental response is the Dakota Access Pipeline. This case is significant because it is a landmark incident in recent years regarding the mounting tensions between those who oppose and those who support crude oil pipeline construction, and was consequently amplified to a national level of coverage. After the pipeline was proposed in June 2014, a sequence of events witnessed the reversal of a presidential administration's decision regarding the pipeline, followed by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe filing to sue the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, leading to a massive protest receiving countless positive and negative stories from national media outlets.

Analyzing the significant events and occurrences along the Dakota Access Pipeline timeline along with their consequent media coverage before and after governmental responses will allow for an in-depth assessment of how governmental responses could potentially have been impacted by this specific media coverage. An important source utilized in this process was the study, *Open Fire: A Portrait of Gun Control in U.S. and International Newspaper Articles after the 2011 Arizona Mass Shooting*. It is a similar writing that focuses on the importance and effects of media coverage through media framing theory, and it provided excellent guidance for my own deciding of variables to research as well as the chosen timelines.

For an applicable timeline and data analysis, the notion of 'governmental response' is best defined as a written or oral statement released from a United States federal agency or sitting

president. The chosen federal agencies within this filter are the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of Justice, Department of the Interior, and Department of the Army. To illustrate, responses included the initial written approval of the pipeline by the Federal Energy Regulatory Committee and sequential construction approvals from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

#### *Data Sources*

For the media outlets to be analyzed I assessed a local news source to the Dakota Access Pipeline, *The Bismarck Tribune*, and three national news sources with different political leanings, *The New York Times*, *The Associated Press*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. I chose *The Bismarck Tribune* as the local news source because it consistently covers the Dakota Access Pipeline throughout its entire timeline of approval, to construction and consequential protests. They are rated as “least biased” and leaning slight conservative, but still maintain a high rate of factually based coverage by Ad Fontes Media, a media company whose goal is to create a, “useful taxonomy” of media sources based on their reporting quality and bias (*Media Bias Chart*, 2018). For the national news sources, I chose *The New York Times* because it maintains one of the highest readerships in the United States, and according to Ad Fontes Media’s Media Bias Chart it maintains a mostly neutral news coverage with a tendency to skew left. The next national news outlet I chose was *The Associated Press* because it also has a large readership following, but it is a not-for-profit news corporation with a rating of ‘minimal bias’ in its coverage while maintaining ‘original fact reporting’ from the Ad Fontes Media’s Media Bias Chart. The final national news source I chose was *The Wall Street Journal* because they additionally possess a large readership following with mostly neutral news coverage and a

tendency to skew to the right which will round out the analysis of framing and political leanings in the overall media coverage.

### *Data Collection Methodology*

To collect this data, I used NexisUni, a student research extension of LexisNexis to search for mentions of “North Dakota Public Service Commission” or “Dakota Access Pipeline” between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 and between July 25<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, with each relevant mention being read and recorded for framing and themes. The first time frame from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 was chosen in order to capture all published news articles from previously mentioned news sources that reference the year-long hearing activity of the North Dakota Public Service Commission, or PSD, before deciding to allow construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The next timeline between July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 was chosen because this was the timeframe where the Dakota Access Pipeline became a central part of national news and media coverage. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers granted a federal easement on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to Energy Transfer Partner’s so that the Dakota Access Pipeline may cross under Lake Oahe, a main source of water for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. For each local sample, the location of publication was reduced to North Dakota to analyze all articles released by *The Bismarck Tribune*. For each national sample, the location of publication was changed to New York to analyze all articles released by *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. I then finished by isolating the *Associated Press* under sources to view all national articles released in each time frame. For each article, I recorded language utilized in the title and utilized in the article and coded and categorized this language based on its relevancy to potential framing.

When collecting these data sources, it is important to note that I decided to include both opinion pieces and news reporting. This was a decision I distinctly made when conducting my research because I believe the opinion pieces utilized and published by the relevant publication source, are potentially emblematic of the ideology of said source. For each source to choose to publish the opinion piece assessed can be argued to be a possible indicator or likeness of the views of the publication source itself. I believe including opinion pieces also provided a view of members of the public regarding the Dakota Access Pipeline that would not hypothetically be gained from a direct news source, and it could also potentially provide a reflection of the frames already in use by the media. I also largely utilized news pieces because it can be argued that these sources are directly aiming to provide the latest information regarding the Dakota Access Pipeline and not directly aiming to incorporate a political opinion, as opinion pieces do.

For an analysis of the governmental responses, I went to the official government websites for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Department of Justice to obtain original statements and informational releases. The language utilized in each statement before and after the two timelines were analyzed for potential framing and themes relevant to media coverage. I then analyzed statements made by President Obama's administration for later review.

#### *Data Analysis Methodology*

Once these data sources were collected I compiled them into an Excel spreadsheet categorized by news or governmental source and any evidence of framing. As previously discussed in the literature review, framing is defined as how the, "subtle changes in the wording of the description of a situation might affect how the audience members interpret" the story being presented to them (Scheufele, 2009: 309). For instance, from analyzing two different

articles covering the same issue such as protest activity that took place during the Dakota Access Pipeline timeline, the reader can potentially view how the author interpreted the activity based on how the activity is linguistically framed. While one author may highlight to the reader that the protestors are brave citizens standing up for the rights of others, another author may choose to highlight to the reader that the protestors are criminals continuously being arrested for trespassing pipeline construction sites. This evidence can, therefore, support the existence of a frame utilized by authors across the selected sources to present protestors positively or negatively to the public.

I then compared the found evidence of framing to the language used in the chosen governmental responses to gauge whether there are similarities in the language or themes addressed. This indicated that the frames utilized in the analyzed media coverage surrounding the Dakota Access Pipeline potentially impacted and influenced the governmental responses such as comments expressed in interviews, and official orders to halt construction and demand for further testing.

## Case Study Context and Timeline

The Dakota Access Pipeline holds great significance to the topic of media coverage and its impact on governmental response. As previously stated, this is first because it was a momentous and unique event that amassed a large amount of attention from the media and consequently the public in just a matter of months. Throughout this time that the Dakota Access Pipeline received sizable media coverage, it endured multiple political frames within positive and negative stances taken by media outlets.

The Dakota Access Pipeline was first proposed to the Federal Energy Regulatory Committee or FERC on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The main private limited companies proposing this pipeline were Dakota Access, LLC and Energy Transfer Crude Oil Company, LLC. Dakota Access, LLC was formed earlier in 2014 for the purpose of, “safely and reliably transporting American crude oil” in order to further the goal of energy independence in the United States (*Who is Dakota Access, LLC*, n.d.). Likewise, Energy Transfer Crude Oil Company, LLC, or ETCO was formed in 2012 to own and operate the relevant natural gas pipelines in the United States (*Energy Transfer Company Overview*, n.d.). The proposal between these two private companies included the initial seeking of approval of pipeline structure, terms of service, and methodology for both the DAPL and the ETCO pipeline project. This was altogether known as the Bakken Oil Project (LaFleur, et al., 2014: 1). The private companies propositioned that these Bakken Oil Projects would establish greatly needed crude oil transportation from the North Dakota Bakken oil fields to various areas within the United States, lessening dependency on outside oil importation (LaFleur, et al., 2014: 1).

Simultaneously during this same month of September, Energy Transfer Partners, the parent company of both Dakota Access, LLC and Energy Transfer Crude Oil Company, LLC

met with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council (Gill, 2016). The Council had expressed concerns to Energy Transfer Partners that the proposed pipeline route would interfere with established boundaries under the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty that, “guarantees the undisturbed occupation of the homelands of the Standing Rock Reservation” and also suggested potential route alterations (Gill, 2016). In later November, Kelcy Warren, the CEO of Energy Transfer Partners lamented that she wished the, “Standing Rock Sioux had engaged in discussions” earlier than the September meeting and that Energy Transfer Partners, could have potentially altered the pipeline’s route (Gill, 2016). There is a contrast in the released statements from the involved parties because from the meeting with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, Energy Transfer Partners had roughly three months before approval to make any potential pipeline route changes.

The Dakota Access Pipeline’s proposal by Dakota Access, LLC and Energy Transfer Crude Oil Company, LLC was later approved and released to the public by the Federal Energy Regulatory Committee on December 24, 2014. This initial approval from the FERC signified that the Commission granted the rulings requested by Energy Transfer Partners which included provisions of, “regulatory certainty for a significant infrastructure project” as well as initial validation of the proposed route, and proposed tariff rate structures on the crude oil being transported (LaFleur, et al., 2014: 11). Upon receiving this initial approval, Energy Transfer Partners had formally passed necessary initial requirements to continue seeking developmental permits. They then submitted an application for review to the North Dakota Public Service Commission, or PSC, whose ranking pipeline jurisdiction in North Dakota centers on establishing and enforcing the safety standards for construction and operation of intrastate pipelines (*North Dakota PSC...*, n.d.). To investigate the safety and public opinion of the Dakota Access Pipeline this public service commission spent the entirety of 2015 conducting public

hearings in North Dakota, largely traveling to towns along the proposed pipeline route to receive feedback (*The Dakota Access Pipeline's Long Journey*, 2016).

In January of 2016, *The Bismarck Tribune* reported that the North Dakota Public Service Commission members had, “approved the siting permit for the Dakota Access Pipeline” after the year of public hearings and absorption of feedback (Smith, 2016). The chairwoman of the North Dakota Public Service Commission recounted to *The Bismarck Tribune* that during this review process, towns such as Mandan, Killdeer, and Williston’s largest concerns were from landowners regarding potential pipeline leaks on land given to Energy Transfer Partners. This importantly led to at least 40 new safety requirements to ensure the well-being of these local citizens (Smith, 2016).

Following this approval for the 358 miles of pipeline by the North Dakota Public Service Commission, was the next step of authorization in the Dakota Access Pipeline certification process (Humes, 2018). The succeeding authorization that Energy Transfer Partners required was from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers because pipeline developers must obtain federal authorization before constructing certain pipeline segments. (*Role of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*, 2017). In this case, the federal approval was directly related to the construction of pipeline segments on federal land adjacent to the Standing Rock Sioux land, that had been acquired from the Standing Rock Sioux decades before. This role of granting pipeline construction authorization is lent to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from the Clean Water Act, “under which the Corps sanctions activities that may discharge dredge or fill material into waters of the United States” (*Role of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*, 2017). In relation to the proposed route of the Dakota Access Pipeline, there were approximately, “202 jurisdictional water crossings” that the Army Corps of Engineers would have to review and thoroughly,

“complete each as a single project” in order to ensure crossings received a full evaluation for potential environmental impact (*Headquarters – USACE Dakota Access Pipeline*, n.d.).

It is these evaluations performed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding the overall environmental impact of each water crossing of the DAPL route that incited the following extremely media-covered events. When it became publicly known that a portion of the Dakota Access Pipeline’s proposed route would be comprised of a river crossing underneath Lake Oahe, media coverage began to increase along with pipeline opponents. This notable increase is because if the pipeline crossed underneath Lake Oahe, a Missouri River Reservoir in North Dakota that is the drinking water source for the Standing Rock Sioux Native American Tribe, it could be potentially threatened if the pipeline ruptured or leaked (Worland, 2016). Other roots of frustration and disappointment within the argument made by the Standing Rock Sioux were that despite the hearing tour performed by the North Dakota Public Service Commission, tribal members felt that, “the federal government did not adequately engage the Standing Rock Sioux during the permitting process” in relation to the Fort Laramie treaty (Worland, 2016). Additionally, the current pipeline route crossed a burial ground that possessed deep significance and respect among the Sioux tribe (Worland, 2016). Shortly after these grievances of the Sioux became public in early April 2016, the first protesters of the Dakota Access Pipeline began to arrive in Cannon Ball, North Dakota.

News coverage ensued. In a report by *The Bismarck Tribune* on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the informally established Sacred Stone Spirit Camp, resting half a mile from the potential construction site, had already been occupied for two weeks with the goal to protest pipeline construction and obtain a full environmental impact statement from the USACE (Donovan, 2016). Small, preliminary groups of protestors began arriving, supporting previously stated

grievances and more, and declared that it was important to, “support the indigenous people... all people deserve clean water” (Donovan, 2016). Moreover, they felt the construction of the pipeline would also contribute more heavily to current anthropogenic climate change. Initial summer months carried on and these protestors continued to draw small-scale media attention with some notable coverage from well-known outlets such as *The Guardian*. Through slowly growing coverage of these protestors, the Sacred Stone Spirit Camp and the vivid imagery of fellow Native Americans arriving to help protest the oil pipeline, the media could no longer overlook the events unfolding in North Dakota.

Media coverage intensified as late July arrived. After months of anxious waiting by protestors and Energy Transfer Partners, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finally completed its 202 jurisdictional water crossing evaluations, including Lake Oahe, with the ultimate determination that the Dakota Access Pipeline would not have any significant impact on the surrounding environment (*Dakota Access Pipeline Environmental Assessment*, n.d.). This decision permitted the proposed pipeline route, and granted permission to Energy Transfers Partners’ Dakota Access Pipeline to cross the Lake Oahe federal flowage easement, and begin construction of the pipeline that would soon transport at least a half million barrels of crude oil per day (*Dakota Access Pipeline Environmental Assessment*, n.d.).

Following this highly publicized and controversial decision by the government’s own U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Standing Rock Sioux filed a lawsuit with the USACE citing that, “The Corps puts our water and the lives and livelihoods of many in jeopardy” (*Indian Country Today*, 2016). This was argued to directly negate the assigned role of federal agencies to consider the importance of protecting and preserving historic Native American worship sites (*Indian Country Today*, 2016). Amidst the growing amount of media coverage regarding the

Sioux lawsuit, an Earthjustice attorney representing the Sioux made a statement saying, “There have been shopping malls that have received more environmental review and tribal consultation than this massive crude oil pipeline” (Indian Country Today, 2016). This striking declaration further highlighted in the media sphere a root issue of the potential infringement of Native American rights by the American government. Contributing to this, the Yankton Sioux, another tribe, alluded to the fact that there was a lack of consultation between the USACE and surrounding tribes. Most importantly, this regarded the sites of, “burials and cultural sites, many of which have not been identified due to Dakota Access’ failure to utilize Tribal experts in its cultural survey process” (Indian Country Today, 2016).

These protestors began camping out indefinitely at the Sacred Stone Spirit Camp to increase the size of pipeline construction resistance, as well as to slow down the early construction phases. Native leaders in one publication reported that they were caught off guard by the immense support receiver because what began in April as a handful of tribal members at the spirit camp had quickly garnered national and international attention from environmental groups and celebrities (Yardley, n.d.). Significantly, national media such as *The New York Times* began directing attention towards these protestors and the growing movement, in addition to increased local media who captured that within days following the decision hundreds of people arrived at Standing Rock to lend their voices and support to the Standing Rock Sioux (Wilson, 2016).

The increased presence of protestors and demonstrations surrounding the initial construction of the pipeline added to the legal crossfire by continuing to obstruct and delay the Dakota Access Pipeline construction process. Subsequently, this led to Dakota Access LLC, the previously mentioned subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners, countersuing leaders of the

Standing Rock Sioux (Hersher, 2017). They alleged that the protesters in Cannon Ball and near the Lake Oahe river crossing had intentionally halted construction that had been scheduled to begin just days earlier by blocking machinery and construction crews (Hersher, 2017).

Within this constantly growing cycle of media coverage, a D.C. District Court Judge initially denied on September 9<sup>th</sup> the initial attempt by the Standing Rock Sioux to pipeline construction (*A Timeline of the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline*, 2017). It was only hours later that the U.S. Army, the Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior declared that the Dakota Access Pipeline construction bordering or under Lake Oahe would not proceed any further pending additional review (*A Timeline of the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline*, 2017).

However, following this significant decision by the governmental executive offices to halt authorization of construction until further analysis could be performed, Energy Transfer Partners announced it would be preparing for tunneling at Lake Oahe, “even as federal regulators had not given a go-ahead” that the construction may proceed (Hampton, 2016). This sparked a forceful dialogue between the U.S. Army and Energy Transfer Partners, where Energy Transfer Partners maintained that it had not voluntarily agreed to halt all construction, citing its responsibility to uphold deals with financial institutions funding the pipeline (Hampton, 2016). While construction could be prohibited if it was occurring on the border or under Lake Oahe, Energy Transfer Partners could still technically carry on with areas that had been approved such as surrounding corridors that led the water crossing in question (Juhasz, 2016).

As tensions mounted in regards to the construction of the pipeline surrounding Lake Oahe, protestors became more emboldened to stop these efforts by engaging in ‘peaceful protesting’ such as establishing the Front Line Camp positioned directly in the pipeline’s path, effectively blocking the nearby Highway 1806. This could effectually halt construction because

it prevented any construction equipment from entering (Juhasz, 2016). In retaliation, Energy Transfer Partners warned that, “if the land was not immediately vacated, trespassers would be prosecuted to the fullest extent... and removed from the land” in hopes of intimidating the protestors to end efforts (Juhasz, 2016). The resulting event of this tense conflict between the opposing sides was the eventual arrest and removal of multiple protestors from the Front Line Camp involved in blocking construction over the course of November, with at times as many as 141 people being arrested concurrently (Hersher, 2017). Despite these conflict-induced setbacks, demonstrators who remained at Sacred Stone Spirit Camp received news on November 14<sup>th</sup> that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had ceased construction of the pipeline under Lake Oahe by denying a necessary permit to Energy Transfer Partners. They cited that construction should officially be halted until they could release an, “Environmental Impact Statement with full public input and analysis” which also would finally allow the Standing Rock Sioux to contribute information to the government regarding how the pipeline could affect their drinking water and burial grounds (*Statement Regarding the Dakota Access Pipeline*, 2016).

Notably, during this time period, the country was undergoing a transition of presidential administrations, and the incoming Trump administration held views regarding the environment that widely contrasted the Obama administration. This was shown by after four days in office when President Trump signed an, “executive memorandum instructing the Army to expedite the review and approval process” for construction of the pipeline through the controversial river crossing under Lake Oahe (Hersher, 2017). On February 7<sup>th</sup>, just days after the issued executive memorandum, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers granted easement to Energy Transfer Partners allowing them to begin construction under Lake Oahe, as well as a statement announcing its intention to, “terminate the public comment period and rescind its notice of intent to prepare an

environmental impact statement” (Hersher, 2017). While the Standing Rock Sioux and other Sioux tribes attempted to take legal action, their motions were denied as they were predicted likely to fail in any further halting of the pipeline’s construction. Consequently, all remaining protestors were commanded to leave by the deadline of February 22<sup>nd</sup>, as issued by the Governor of North Dakota, Doug Burgum (Caplan, 2017).

## Findings Analysis

To conduct this research, I used Nexis Uni to obtain relevant articles from the first time frame of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016. I performed this process in order to capture all relevant published news articles published by previously mentioned news sources referencing the year-long hearing activity of the North Dakota Public Service Commission, or PSD, before deciding to allow construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. This was done by first narrowing the results of publications that mention, “North Dakota Public Service Commission” and “Dakota Access Pipeline”, to those originating from North Dakota to specifically analyze *The Bismarck Tribune* writings that mention both. This search resulted in twelve publications by *The Bismarck Tribune*. After reading each publication I noted the language and terminology utilized in the article titles as well as in the textual body of the pieces in order to discern any emerging themes in coverage or focus. I repeated this process for *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* by narrowing publication results to New York, but there were no released pieces by either source with “North Dakota Public Service Commission” and “Dakota Access Pipeline” between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016. I then repeated this process for *The Associated Press* by limiting publication results to “newswires and press releases”, and found three publications. As expected from the information provided by the Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart, these publications from *The Associated Press* included no evidence of framing and remained strictly brief, and factual updates regarding the Dakota Access Pipeline hearings.

Among the twelve publications from *The Bismarck Tribune* between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, the coverage of the Dakota Access Pipeline and the North Dakota PSC remained largely neutral in both title and text with some evidence of framing that portrayed the pipeline in a favorable light. The neutral media coverage involved highlights of the North Dakota

PSC hearings throughout North Dakota such as landowners testifying that the pipeline could potentially pose a threat to their property if incorrectly built, seen in *Landowners Wary of Huge Pipeline* by Amy Dalrymple. Additional coverage included a focus on the Laborers International Union of America at PSC hearings planning, “to testify and serve lunch” in order to, “sweeten the deal with food” that they can convincingly build the pipeline right (Donovan, 2015). The publications from *The Bismarck Tribune* that can be seen to portray the Dakota Access Pipeline in a favorable light were prominently, *Pipelines have Many Benefits*, and *Pipeline Outlook Favorable*. In *Pipelines have Many Benefits*, an opinion piece, authors Ryan Wanzek and Levi Taylor write that, “There is no question our state needs the pipeline... Pipelines are the safest, most cost-effective means of transporting crude... Pipelines are vital for the success of our state” (Wanzek, Taylor, 2015). In this article, they utilize frame that is favorable towards the Dakota Access Pipeline by focusing on how it is “vital” to the success of North Dakota financially, as it can operate with little environmental impact and create economic stimulation with the increased oil transportation. Though it is an opinion piece, it is significant that the *Bismarck Tribune* chose to publish it for public consumption. In *Pipeline Outlook Favorable*, author James MacPherson writes that the Dakota Access Pipeline majority-owning company, Energy Transfer Partners, has, “adequately addressed some of the biggest environmental issues” facing the pipeline (MacPherson, 2015). He continues that this is because the Public Service Commission approved of Energy Transfer Partners’ plans to address public worries about river crossing like Lake Oahe through, “safeguards such as leak detection equipment” (MacPherson, 2015). This article presented as a favorable frame for the Dakota Access Pipeline, though admittedly less observable than *Pipelines have Many Benefits*. This is because the author was arguably conveying to the

reader that the pipeline's construction seemed favorable due to the fact that it had an initial proposal of plans to handle public concern approved by the Public Service Commission:

“Though the three-member regulatory panel took no action Monday, it signaled approval of the company's plans to address worries about the river crossings and returning the land to normal after the pipeline has been placed” (MacPherson, 2015).

This frame similarly focused on the Dakota Access Pipeline's favorability because of its proposed safe construction and benefits to North Dakota.

The relevant government response utilized for this first analysis of media coverage is a declaratory order from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission or FERC. This statement was released December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and essentially grants the rulings requested by Dakota Access, LLC and Energy Transfer Crude Oil Company, LLC. These rulings include approval of, “the proposed rate structure, terms of service, and prorationing methodology for the proposed Dakota Access pipeline project” by the FERC (FERC, 2014). This initial approval signified that the initial plans for the Dakota Access pipeline had been given, “regulatory certainty” and they may transition into the next phase of planning and development which includes the public hearings performed by the North Dakota PSC (FERC, 2014). The language in this governmental response is technical and stark, generally allowing for no ambiguity as to why the pipeline has initially been approved.

The next timeline that I researched through NexisUni was between July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 because this was the timeframe where the Dakota Access Pipeline became a central part of national media coverage and the political agenda. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers granted a federal easement on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to Energy Transfer Partners so that the Dakota Access Pipeline may cross under Lake Oahe, a main source of water for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. This was the second governmental response analyzed because the U.S. Army

Corps of Engineers is a federal agency within the Department of Defense. In this governmental response they communicate that the, “Corps has independently evaluated and verified the information and analysis undertaken” and additionally, “take full responsibility for the scope and content” of their findings (*Environmental Assessment: Dakota Access Pipeline Project*, 2016). Following this acceptance of responsibility, they convey in the environmental assessment that there was a, “mitigated finding of no significant impact” that would be imposed by the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline underneath Lake Oahe (*Environmental Assessment: Dakota Access Pipeline Project*, 2016). As previously stated, this governmental response granted Energy Transfer Partners the federal easement and ability to continue construction. The language in this governmental document, similarly to the FERC response, largely technical with the difference that it does recognize the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ responsibility in the findings of no significant impact.

I utilized similar research methods from the first timeline and found that *The Bismarck Tribune* had 99 relevant publications between July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 that mentioned the Dakota Access pipeline. I similarly noted the language and terminology utilized in the article titles, whether it was an opinion or news piece, as well as in the textual body of the pieces in order to discern any emerging themes in coverage or focus. Overall, I found that the majority of coverage provided was unbiased and focused on delivering factual recounting of events and figures relevant to the Dakota Access pipeline timeline. This included coverage of important events at the height of protesting at the construction sites, including decisions made by the North Dakota Public Service Commission, and decisions made by governmental agencies and courts. The minority of coverage that I found to have evidence of framing consisted of approximately 23 articles. These articles were initially isolated as having evidence of framing

because they showed subtle, yet noticeable, wording changes and situational descriptions that differed from the majority of coverage deemed unbiased. This suggested to me that the authors had at least some intent on conveying to the reader how the situation *should* be potentially interpreted or viewed, rather than technically reporting the event and theoretically leaving interpretation to the reader. Among these 23 articles, the first frame that was generally utilized surrounded the protestors of the pipeline. Protestors were largely portrayed in a negative or positive light, with each category having its own common characteristics.

For instances where Dakota Access Pipeline protestors were portrayed in a negative light, this framing involved wording that mostly established them as unlawful, or at least engaging in illegal behavior. These articles included titles such as *7 Protestors Charged with Felonies*, *Protest Arrest Count Hits 95*, *Charges Filed Against Protestors*, and *Protest Costing \$100K Weekly*. Within each of these specific articles, it further details that protestors were being arrested for, “resisting arrest, criminal trespass on private property and possession of stolen property” (Emerson, 2016). For instance, in *7 Protestors Charged with Felonies*, author Caroline Grueskin writes:

“Seven protesters accused this week of attaching themselves to Dakota Access Pipeline equipment, or helping others do so, were charged with felonies on Thursday. These are the first protesters to draw charges that could land them more than a year in prison... Law enforcement officers are put in a dangerous situation when freeing these individuals. There is also a danger posed to DAPL, their workers and equipment, along with the protester putting themselves also in a dangerous circumstance...Donnell Preskey, spokeswoman for the Morton County Sheriff's Department, said authorities are reviewing the North Dakota Century Code for charge options, that have "more teeth" and "discourage people from doing that sort of thing.” (Grueskin, 2016)

This framing was extremely interesting because the articles provided a strong focus on the number of protestors arrested, what they were arrested for, and how it was typically affecting the surrounding community in an adverse way. This frame portrays protestors in a negative light and

conveys to the reader that the protestors are engaging in criminal activity. It also usually excluded direct information regarding what or why they are protesting, which can be argued to further depict protestors in a one-dimensional way.

For instances where Dakota Access pipeline protestors were portrayed in a positive light, this framing involved wording and depictions that established them as activists, usually engaging in activities that support the rights of the Standing Rock Sioux. These articles included titles such as *Activists Disrupt Worksite*, *Settling into Camp Life*, *Hundreds Walk in Solidarity of Standing Rock*, and *Carrying Unified Spirit*. Within each of these specific articles, it further detailed that protestors were, “standing up for the environment” and urging governmental agencies and leaders to, “honor treaties between the U.S. government and tribes” (Johnson, 2016). For instance, in *Hundreds Walk in Solidarity of Standing Rock*, author Ryan Johnson writes:

“Karl Jensen said it's about protecting the Missouri River. Lois Leben wanted to show her three young granddaughters the importance of standing up for the environment, while Birgit Pruess hoped to make a point about the need for alternatives to oil. They didn't all share the same motivations, but hundreds of people turned out Saturday, Aug. 27, for a walk along the Red River that started in Fargo's Oak Grove Park and ended on the Veterans Memorial Bridge to show their solidarity with Dakota Access Pipeline protesters near Standing Rock Sioux Reservation... For Leben, it's important that federal officials and pipeline builders honor treaties between the U.S. government and tribes, and she said the wishes of the tribe must be respected.” (Johnson, 2016).

This framing was also extremely interesting because of how it conversely portrayed the protestors to the previous frame. The usage of positive framing focused on how the protestors were aiming to stand up for the rights of the Standing Rock Sioux and detailed the atmosphere of “camp life” for those who were remaining at the Standing Rock site. This frame portrays protestors in a positive light and conveys to the reader that the protestors are engaging in ‘activist’ endeavors, supporting the rights of the Standing Rock Sioux, and it usually excluded information regarding protestors being arrested or causing adverse effects.

The second frame that was largely utilized surrounded the Dakota Access pipeline itself, portraying it in either a negative or positive light, with each category having its own common characteristics. For the two opinion articles from *The Bismarck Tribune* that focused on this negative framing, they used language and wording that established the pipeline as a threat to the rights of the Standing Rock Sioux. This was done in *Dakota Access Pipeline Location a Problem*, by conveying explicitly to the reader that the pipeline is set to be built at river crossings therefore posing, “a major pollution threat just upriver from two impoverished areas” (Thompson, 2016). Likewise, in *Dakota Access Should Be Stopped*, the author writes that the construction of the pipeline, “crosses through treaty land granted to the Great Sioux Nation in the violated Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868” (Riggin, 2016). These writings interestingly created a frame centered on the idea that the Dakota Access pipeline is bad because it infringes on the rights and quality of life of the Standing Rock Sioux who use Lake Oahe. It also usually excluded direct information regarding actual pipeline construction and proposed safety implementations.

For instances where the Dakota Access pipeline itself was portrayed in a positive light, this frame focused on how it was beneficial to the North Dakota community. For example, in publications such as *Careers Built on Jobs Like Pipeline*, an opinion piece written by a member of the labor union constructing the pipeline, it is conveyed that the pipeline is, “a source of many thousands of jobs” and that it, “will move product for North Dakota’s oil industry, creating jobs within it” and supporting society. In *Dakota Access is Source of Funds*, author Wyatt Black writes:

“The pipeline will become one of the state's major taxpayers. It will pay more than \$13 million in property taxes annually, lowering the burden on property owners across its route, \$1.7 million in local sales taxes, giving a onetime boost to many local project, and the pipeline project will pay \$32.9 million in sales taxes this year. That means Dakota

Access is an important source of funds for the state during its budget crunch.” (Black, 2016).

This frame interestingly works to establish that the Dakota Access pipeline has many important positive aspects that will benefit the North Dakota economy such as through providing jobs and tax money. It also builds a foundation on the idea that the pipeline is constructed with the safest technology available, ensuring minimal leaks and maximum safety to the surrounding areas. This frame often excluded direct information pertaining to the protesting of the pipeline or any potential safety hazards.

For the *Wall Street Journal*, I found that it had six publications between July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 that mentioned the Dakota Access pipeline. I similarly noted the language and terminology utilized in the article titles as well as in the textual body of the pieces in order to discern any emerging themes in coverage or focus. Overall, I found that beginning with the headlines of the four relevant publications, there was some evidence of potential framing. This framing specifically aligned itself with the previously seen frame of portraying protestors in a negative light by focusing on criminal activity. For example, the titles of three of these stories were *Oil-Pipeline Protest Turns Violent in North Dakota*, *Clashes Halt Work on North Dakota Pipeline*, and *Tribal Protest Spurs Halt to Pipeline in North Dakota*. These titles center around the idea that the events of protesting are violent or involve clashing, as well as halt the construction of the pipeline. In *Oil-Pipeline Protest Turns Violent in North Dakota*, this article emphasizes that, “four private security guards and two guard dogs were injured after several hundred protestors confronted construction crews” outside of the Standing Rock reservation (*Oil-Pipeline Protest Turns Violent in North Dakota*, 2016). It continues including quotes from law enforcement representative Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier, who stated regarding the protesters:

“individuals crossed onto private property and accosted private security officers with

wooden posts and flagpoles... Any suggestion that today's event was a peaceful protest, is false," (*Oil-Pipeline Protest Turns Violent in North Dakota*, 2016).

In *Tribal Protest Spurs Halt to Pipeline in North Dakota*, this theme is further embellished by highlighting that, "Protests led by the tribe and others have grown more aggressive in recent weeks, with some protestors chaining themselves to equipment and several police officers getting injured over the weekend" (Maher, 2016). It is important to note that there was not a heavy presence of framing within these articles, rather, the slight usage in the titles and body of the publications to portray protestors as aggressive and engaging in criminal activity is significant. This frame generally excludes direct information regarding if they were also injured in the "clashes" occurring and focuses on how law enforcement and the pipeline are negatively affected, which can be argued to further depict protestors in a one-dimensional way.

For the Associated Press, I found no evidence of bias or opinion present in the publications between July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, which, again, reinforced their rating from the Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart. Similarly, for the majority of the publications made by *The New York Times* between July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 the coverage was also largely unbiased. It focused on reporting the major events occurring along the timeline including the arrest of the presidential candidate Jill Stein, the halt in construction ordered by the Department of the Army, Department of Justice, and Department of the Interior, as well as generally covering the situation in articles such as *North Dakota Oil Pipeline Battle: Who's Fighting and Why*. Interestingly, of the 11 publications between the previously mentioned dates, I found two that showed some evidence of framing. Additionally, *The New York Times* published an opinion article authored by Dave Archambault II, the tribal chairman of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.

The first article with some potential bias, entitled *Tension on the Plains as Tribes Move to Block a Pipeline*, is filled with vividly descriptive language including:

“Horseback riders, their faces streaked in yellow and black paint, led the procession out of their tepee-dotted camp. Two hundred people followed, making their daily walk a mile up a rural highway to a patch of prairie grass and excavated dirt that has become a new kind of battlefield, between a pipeline and American Indians who say it will threaten water supplies and sacred lands... But the people who stood at the gates of a construction site where crews had been building an access road toward the pipeline viewed the project as a wounding intrusion onto lands where generations of their ancestors hunted bison, gathered water and were born and buried, long before treaties and fences stamped a different order onto the Plains.” (Maher, 2016).

It continues that these protests are peaceful and often, “Children march in the daily demonstrations” and that the campsite is a serene blend of tents, tepees, people who, “cook food in open-air kitchens and share stories”, and even has daycare (Healy, 2016). It reinforces that, “for many, the effort is about reclaiming a stake in ancestral lands that had been whittled down since the 1800s, treaty by broken treaty” (Healy, 2016). These in-depth, even sympathetic, depictions from a national source like *The New York Times* are powerful because they portray to readers the previously seen framing of protestors in a positive way. They convey to the reader that those protesting are passionate, organized people seeking to stand up for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in what is described as a centuries-old broken relationship.

In the next article, *Tribes Gain Supporters in Pipeline Fight*, this theme of positively identifying the protestors is continued and developed. It focuses on the arising situation by writing:

“Over a thousand archaeologists, anthropologists, curators, museum officials and academics have added their names and voices to the protest against an oil pipeline being built in North Dakota. In a letter released on Wednesday, 1,281 people have signed on to an appeal to President Obama, the Department of Justice, the Department of the Interior, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers, asking for further study of land involved in the pipeline project, around the Missouri River near the border of South Dakota. The letter states, “We join the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in denouncing the recent destruction of ancient burial sites, places of prayer and other significant cultural artifacts

sacred to the Lakota and Dakota people.” (Ryzik, 2016)

This effort was put into motion because the article details the construction, “of the pipeline on private land has already wiped out some stones and markers that the Standing Rock Sioux considered valuable” (Ryzik, 2016). In addition to this article highlighting that the growing group of protestors includes a vast amount of scholars and professional academia, it also builds on the previous idea that the pipeline’s construction infringes upon the rights and privacy of the Standing Rock Sioux. This creates an image to *The New York Times* readers where the Dakota Access pipeline is not welcomed or respectful to the views of the Standing Rock Sioux, and those against it now includes highly educated academics.

It was also extremely interesting to me that *The New York Times* allowed for David Archambault II to write an opinion piece entitled *Taking a Stand at Standing Rock*. This opportunity for such an important member of the Standing Rock Sioux, and at the center of the Dakota Access pipeline issue, is significant because he was allowed to write a piece on his strong views against the pipeline’s construction to be distributed to readers across the nation. It further embellishes the idea that the pipeline has negative connotations to be considered in the ongoing situation.

Following the publications of these previously mentioned articles, the Department of Justice, Department of the Army and the Department of the Interior released a joint statement on September 9<sup>th</sup>, and it is the third governmental response to be analyzed. In this statement it is written that in regards to the case *Standing Rock Sioux Tribe v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*, “this case has highlighted the need for a serious discussion on whether there should be nationwide reform with respect to considering tribes’ views on these types of infrastructure projects” (Office of Public Affairs, 2016). It continues that the “demonstrators” who have come

out to protest the pipeline and, “exercise their First Amendment rights and to voice heartfelt concerns about the environment and historic, sacred sites” are welcome and it is now our collective duty to develop a path, “forward that serves the broadest public interest” (Office of Public Affairs, 2016). This language interestingly reflected the trend seen in the analyzed media coverage that the protestors are addressed as “demonstrators” supporting the rights of others. This governmental response also touched on the framing of the pipeline as a potential infringement of the Standing Rock Sioux’ rights and proposed that a “serious discussion” is in order regarding infrastructure projects. It is significant that the statement finally declared that the USACE, “will not authorize constructing the Dakota Access pipeline on ... land bordering or under Lake Oahe until it can determine whether it will need to reconsider any of its previous decisions” (Office of Public Affairs, 2016). This ultimately halted Energy Transfer Partners from continuing any pipeline construction at the Lake Oahe site and acknowledged the concerns voiced by protestors and the Standing Rock Sioux over the previous months.

Data Collection Results from July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016

	Neutral	Protestors		Pipeline	
		+	-	+	-
<i>The New York Times</i>	7	3	1	0	0
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	1	0	3	0	0
<i>The Associated Press</i>	72	0	0	0	0
<i>The Bismarck Tribune</i>	76	7	11	3	2

## **Concluding Thoughts**

### *Framing and Media Bias*

In this section, I will discuss some essential takeaways from my research, and I will also describe three main limitations I experienced during this research. This research provided a means for understanding the complexities underlying the potential interactions between media coverage, public awareness, and communication with governmental agents. This was mainly seen through the specific events that publications chose to report on such as the arrest of Jill Stein, a presidential candidate at the time. Likewise, I consider that it was potentially the framing and highlighting by national news sources like *The New York Times* of the Dakota Access pipeline as a potential infringement of Native American rights that caught the attention of the nation. This framing ignited a centuries-old political issue in America of the often strained and rough relationship between the federal government and the Native American population.

Significantly to research mentioned in the literature review, I believe my findings relate to these previous findings. The accepted theory regarding framing asserted that framing of an issue is largely contingent on the political leanings of the reporting media source, as the coverage will likely present the issue of focus in a way that either displays agreement or disagreement with the political values of the source. From my findings, *The Wall Street Journal*, a publication that possesses a large readership with mostly neutral news coverage and a tendency to skew to the right, tended to predictably skew right in its publications. This was seen in the articles that aligned with the previously seen frame of portraying protestors in a negative light by focusing on criminal activity. Likewise, this was also seen in *The New York Times*, a publication that possesses a large readership with mostly neutral news coverage and a tendency to skew to the left, tended to predictability to skew left in its publications. This was seen in the articles that

aligned with the previously seen frame of portraying protestors in a positive light by focusing on in-depth, sympathetic, depictions of how these protestors were standing up for the rights of others. Wholly, these findings worked to generally confirm the previous theories.

Similarly, previous research regarding the importance of agenda-setting and inference asserts that the media highlight, “events, activities, groups, or personalities” that are felt to be of pertinence or note to the public (Scheufele, 2009: 303). In this case, the media theoretically highlighted the issues surrounding the Dakota Access Pipeline that were most prominently the pipeline itself and the protestors. In the second step, these elements of the pipeline and the protestors were hypothetically incorporated into a general frame and presented to the public through various media channels. This potentially created a loop of interaction between public opinion, the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the governmental agencies involved.

As formerly stated, the two main frames that emerged throughout my research process were of the protestors and of the pipeline. Regarding the protestors, they were either portrayed in a negative way that focused on them as criminals engaging in illegal activity such as entering construction sites, or a positive way that framed them as activists. In *The Bismarck Tribune*, this negative frame tended to outweigh the positive frame, however, in *The New York Times*, this positive frame tended to outweigh the negative frame. Likewise, the second main frame utilized was of the pipeline itself. The pipeline was either portrayed negatively as an infringement of Native American rights or as an economically beneficial installment in North Dakota that would provide countless jobs and be constructed with the safest, most advanced technology. Again, this focus on Native American rights was more present in publications by *The New York Times* and less present in the local publication, *The Bismarck Tribune*. From the political leanings discussed

in the methodology chapter, these findings were not entirely unexpected as the suspected framing aligned with the general political leanings of each publication source.

Due to this framing of the Dakota Access pipeline as a threat to the rights of the Standing Rock Sioux as well as their drinking water in a national publication like *The New York Times*, I believe this potentially attracted more public interest to this frame. The public became, theoretically, increasingly engaged in the timeline of events, first seen by the growing amount of protestors descending on the protest site to lend their support to the Standing Rock Sioux, and I would consider there was a growing call on federal agencies and people's political representatives to take some sort of action.

On September 9<sup>th</sup> as a D.C. District Court Judge initially denied the Standing Rock Sioux's legal attempts to halt pipeline construction, it was only hours later that the U.S. Army, the Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior declared, "that construction bordering or under Lake Oahe won't go forward pending further review" (*A Timeline of the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline*, 2017). I would argue that because the language and themes utilized in *The New York Times* were repeated in this government response from federal agencies, this potentially shows that media coverage of the Dakota Access pipeline and protests could have had an effect. If more research was conducted I would predict that other national publications also possibly adopted a similar frame that focused on the rights and opinions of Native American tribes towards infrastructure projects or at least covered this issue to an extent. Interestingly, within this released joint statement from the Department of Justice, Department of the Army, and the Department of the Interior there was also a reminder to those involved, "in protest or pipeline activities to adhere to the principles of nonviolence" as it is, "incumbent on all of us to develop a path forward" that safely serves the broad American interest (Office of Public Affairs, 2016).

While this also lends itself to the coverage that framed protestors as potentially violent, this overall governmental response to the protesting executed by Native American tribes and across the nation can be seen as a potentially favoring the positive framing of the protestors.

### *Limitations*

Throughout this process of conducting research, I did experience three important limitations. The first limitation is that while I was able to read over 100 articles pertaining to the chosen dates and subject of the Dakota Access Pipeline, I was obviously not able to read all of the available publications that also related to my chosen dates and subject. This signifies that my findings are a potentially reduced version of what they could be if I was able to read more publications. The second limitation is that though I carefully chose each source for a particular reason, these sources could potentially not have been the most seamless sources to use. This would mean that my results could potentially not be the most effective or demonstrational of my overall findings. Lastly, from my findings and research, it is ultimately extremely difficult to assert that the framing utilized in media coverage directly resulted in the governmental response. As seen in the diagram from the literature review, I was able to assess that framing of some kind occurred, however, beyond the framing used I cannot affirm that this framing is solely what caused the governmental agencies to step in. The diagram utilized represents a highly complex political system and system of interactions in the modern political sphere, and therefore there are countless factors that could also have been seen to impact the overall governmental response.

### *Framing and Its Implications for Presidential Administrations*

As previously mentioned, a variable I did not expect in the Dakota Access pipeline timeline was the election of the presidential candidate, Donald Trump. His governmental response in February that came in retort to the Dakota Access Pipeline differed from the

government response on September 9th in a number of significant ways. As previously stated, both responses came from separate presidential administrations that also arguably have very separate agendas. The outpouring of media coverage in late 2016 regarding the protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline and the overarching issue of Native American rights became a significant matter necessitating an address or governmental response from the Obama administration's federal agencies. The media had a significant role to play at that point in time, which was to act as the hidden branch of government ensuring issues most important to the people are brought to the government providing a well-functioning channel between the government and the governed to communicate and progress politically. However, as 2017 arrived and President Trump took office on January 20<sup>th</sup>, the media role and atmosphere had drastically changed.

During the 2016 presidential election cycle, Donald Trump ran a campaign based on his merits as a successful businessman, celebrity, and most importantly a political outsider. This was a significant tenet he held to as it created an attraction and appeal to American voters, as well as his outspoken and unashamed nature that emerged forth during speeches and rallies. It is this exact unashamed, blunt nature that would often invoke criticism and condemnation from mainstream media outlets with liberal-leaning tendencies, and it can be argued that this disapproval is what caused Trump to begin disregarding and distrusting the media. As this blatant disregard, bordering on contempt, was often very publicly directed towards the media combined with cries of, "fake news", it revived a portion of the conservative party that had long been, "criticizing the media, pointing out bias" (Kruse, et al., 2014). This reinvigorated sweeping trend that emerged in 2016 where, "media loathing became a standard in politics, rather than an anomaly" unknowingly held deep implications for Trump's ultimate ascension to the White

House in January of 2017 (Kruse, et al., 2014). Similarly to media coverage leading to the governmental response from the Obama administration, the expedited decision of the USACE to grant the final construction permit to Energy Transfer Partners had immense media focus on the potentially abridged rights of the Standing Rock Sioux. However, the Trump administration's contrasting relationship with the media no longer was characterized by a well-functioning channel. Rather, it is arguably best defined by an often one-way conversation where governmental responses to immense media coverage supposedly representing the interest of the American public were no longer a necessity. Instead, this new governmental regime could be reasoned to be freely select which aspects of media and media coverage qualify as important, or "real news" and likewise ignore or decry false those that do not qualify.

In terms of these two differing governmental responses to media coverage of the Dakota Access Pipeline, the larger question of how media coverage affects this ultimate governmental response thus far can be answered quite essentially. The extent to which mainstream media coverage can influence governmental response ultimately can be argued to vary by the presidential administration in power. If the administration in power maintains a channel of communication ensuring the needs and issues of the American public are discussed and heard, this media coverage can potentially affect overall response to an extent, whereas if there lacks an available channel for trust and dialogue, the extent to which media coverage can affect this governmental response is potentially to a considerably smaller degree.

Wholly, these findings are significant moving forward in our modern American politics. This is because it shows the importance that the media plays in the public's overall awareness of political issues and their salience to our daily life. While keeping the public informed, it also acts as a hidden fourth branch that communicates these views of the public back to the government,

ultimately resulting in potential relevant governmental responses. Due to this substantial role, we must be able to trust that the media is reporting information accurately and with diminutive amounts of framing. This will ensure that the news reporting is looking out for the best interest of the public, as it has since this role first originated in the early twentieth century.

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