

WHOSE VIEWS MADE THE NEWS? MEDIA COVERAGE AND THE MARCH TO WAR IN IRAQ

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Abstract: Criticism of the news media's performance in the months before the Iraq war has been profuse. Scholars, commentators, and journalists themselves have argued the media aided the Bush administration in its march to war by failing to air a wide-ranging debate that offered analysis and commentary from diverse perspectives. As a result, critics say, the public was denied the opportunity to weigh the claims of those arguing both for and against military action in Iraq. In this paper, we report the results of a systematic analysis of ABC and CBS nightly news coverage in the eight months before the invasion (Aug. 1, 2002 through March 19, 2003). We find news coverage conformed in some ways to the conventional wisdom: Bush administration officials were the most frequently quoted sources, the voices of anti-war groups and opposition Democrats were barely audible, and the overall thrust of coverage favored a pro-war perspective. But while domestic dissent on the war was minimal, opposition from abroad—in particular, from Iraq and officials from countries such as France, who argued for a diplomatic solution to the standoff—was commonly reported on the networks. While we surmise the opinions of foreign leaders would probably have been accorded less credibility by many Americans than the views of U.S. officials, the public was not entirely deprived of an alternative viewpoint. Our findings suggest that media researchers should further examine the inclusion of non-U.S. views on high-profile foreign policy debates, and they also raise normative questions about how the news filters the communications of political actors and refracts—rather than merely reflects—the contours of debate.

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For nearly five years now, controversy has swirled around the performance of American mass media in the run-up to the war in Iraq. Especially after it became clear in the months following the invasion that coalition forces had failed to uncover credible evidence of weapons of mass destruction, or recent programs to develop them, critics and many news practitioners themselves began a period of intense scrutiny, fueled by the perception that mainstream media failed in their responsibilities to democracy. According to these critiques, news outlets before the invasion did not air a wide-ranging and honest debate grounded in carefully vetted facts, and they failed to offer citizens analysis and commentary from diverse policy perspectives.

Watchdog groups have published extensive reports arguing that media failures aided the Bush administration's march toward a disastrous and costly war based on flimsy evidence, superficial analysis, and unwarranted assumptions regarding Iraq's weapons capabilities and ties to international Islamist terrorist organizations, post-invasion political, economic and security arrangements, and other issues. For example, the nonpartisan Center for Public Integrity recently documented 935 false statements (in addition to hundreds more questionable claims) by top administration officials before the war regarding the threat from Iraq (Lewis and Reading-Smith 2008). The bulk of these assertions, critics have charged, were broadcast widely by U.S. media with little or no investigation of their credibility, and few rebuttals from war skeptics or dissenters. The growing consternation even prompted *The New York Times* (whose Judith Miller has taken much flack for a series of pre-war stories on Iraq's alleged weapons capabilities) and *The Washington Post* to publish self-reflective statements that, while falling short of apologies for reporting failures, acknowledged that their performances could have been better (New York Times 2004; Kurtz 2004). Some critics have begun to question the mainstream media's most cherished modern conventions, arguing that norms calling for "balance" and "objectivity" tend paradoxically to give the upper hand to official sources trumpeting dubious claims (e.g. Cunningham 2003). And a slew of popular books and

documentaries—including a recently released film narrated by actor Sean Penn, who traveled to Iraq in December 2002 as the administration ramped up its pre-war rhetoric—have argued that the media failed dismally in the run-up to the invasion.¹

While the elite newspapers—because of their reputation as paragons of journalistic excellence—have taken much of the heat over pre-war coverage (e.g., Massing 2004), the major television networks have not escaped unscathed. In fact, scholars have suggested that TV coverage was more uncritical of Bush administration claims and perspectives on Iraq than were print outlets (Bennett et al. 2007, Feldman et al. 2007), and there is evidence that citizens who relied on network news were significantly more likely to hold incorrect views about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (Kull et al. 2003).²

Despite the near universal condemnation of media reporting, there has been little systematic and comprehensive research into the content of U.S. television news in the crucial period before the start of the war. The existing critiques have relied primarily on anecdotal or impressionistic evidence that may or may not accurately describe the actual content of pre-war Iraq news. If, as has been asserted, the media helped lead the country into war, then better empirical evidence that details the content of the news is required to verify that claim. Especially in light of the fact that network TV remains the dominant source for Americans' news about politics and public policy (see Graber 2005), a careful account of pre-Iraq war coverage in this medium is essential for furthering our understanding of the run-up to the invasion, as well as the mass media's role in foreign policy debates and the shaping of public opinion more generally.

¹ But see Media Research Center (2008) for an alternative view of news coverage from a right-of-center perspective.

² These perceptions have been fueled by comments such as those by then-CBS Evening News anchor Dan Rather, who told late-night talk show host David Letterman shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks: “George Bush is the president. He makes the decisions. This is just one American. Wherever he wants me to line up, just tell me where. And he’ll make the call.”

Our content analysis finds that network news coverage in the eight months before the invasion of Iraq conforms in some ways to the conventional wisdom. Bush administration officials were the most frequently quoted sources in the news, the voices of anti-war groups and opposition Democrats were barely audible, and the overall thrust of coverage supported a pro-war perspective. But the findings also suggest that the news was less “lopsided” than often claimed. While domestic dissent on the war was minimal, opposition from abroad—in particular, from Iraq—was commonly reported on the broadcast networks. Iraqi officials and the leaders of foreign countries, such as France, who preferred a diplomatic solution to the standoff, were given considerable air time. While we surmise that their opinions would probably have been accorded less credibility by many Americans than the views of U.S. officials, the mass media did not ignore the anti-war perspective. Ultimately, our findings suggest that while the content of television news indeed was more favorable to the Bush administration’s rationale for war than not, the public was not deprived of an alternative viewpoint. The results also suggest that media theories, which focus predominantly on journalists’ reporting of the views of domestic actors, need to account for coverage that carries the views of officials outside the United States during foreign policy debates. Even as domestic political elites did not mount a strong challenge to the Bush administration, the case was made—and reported on the news—by foreign officials.

Mass Media Content and Public Opinion

Two major theories of media content during foreign policy debates have characterized recent work in political science and communications studies. Bennett’s (1990, 1996, 2007 [1983]; see also Bennett et al. 2006, 2007; Zaller and Chiu 1996) indexing hypothesis suggests that news outlets tend to mirror the range of ideological and policy perspectives held by actors in institutional politics, most prominently the president, key administration officials, and congressional representatives of

the two major political parties. Thus, if members of the opposition party in Congress fail to widely and vociferously question or dissent from administration policy, major media usually will disseminate an essentially one-sided policy discussion. Indexing also suggests that when partisan elites fail to divide, this apparent consensus will be reinforced in major media by analyses from sympathetic policy experts, interest groups, and other sources. More recently, Entman (2003, 2004) has proposed the cascading-activation model as a theory that builds on indexing but allows more room for journalistic independence and the raising of critical perspectives in a post-Cold War context, even in the absence of prominent debate among institutional elites. Both these theoretical frameworks are built in part on the tendency, supported by literature on professional news media norms and practices, to rely heavily on official sources for information and policy perspectives, particularly political elites with institutional decision-making authority (e.g. Gans 1979, Bennett 2007 [1983]).

Beyond the scholarship on indexing and the extent of reliance on official sources in the news, research on news content has examined patterns of inclusion and depiction of nongovernmental sources, such as interest groups and social movement organizations (SMOs). For example, one recent study shows that mainstream mass media coverage of interest groups in the United States is dominated by the largest and wealthiest organizations, with the size of a group's budget being the single best predictor of its ability to attract coverage (Thrall 2006). "The most resource-poor groups, in particular, are not only almost invisible in the national news but when they do appear, the coverage they receive tends to undermine their cause" (ibid: 408-9). Similarly, a substantial body of literature contends that SMOs that practice "non-institutional" forms of politics—such as marches and street demonstrations—usually are covered in ways that give little voice to their substantive policy positions or political values. Instead, more attention is drawn to eccentric leader personalities and to features of apparent cultural and social deviance—especially

non-conformist styles of dress and personal appearance, property damage or confrontations with police, and disapproving statements from citizen bystanders and authorities (Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker 1991; McLeod and Hertog 1992).³

Study of the extent and range of policy debate by political actors in mass media is important because of the role news coverage has been shown to play in shaping public opinion. While focused most closely on micro-level processes of attitude formation, Zaller's (1992) prominent model reserves a key role for mass communications—especially debate by partisan leaders—in shaping responses to opinion polls in a dynamic that takes in levels of general political knowledge and media reception, ideological predispositions, and elite messages. Because foreign policy issues are less easily connected to citizens' daily lives and personal experiences (Gamson 1992, Page 1996), relatively more susceptible to state control of information (see Page and Shapiro 1992, esp. Ch. 9), and typically characterized by calls for national unity (e.g. Mueller 1973), the extent and magnitude of media coverage of elite debate in this domain is arguably of even greater importance to mass opinion formation. For instance, in his case study of the Vietnam War, Zaller (1992) shows that it was only after elites—especially Democratic leaders—began questioning and criticizing the war did extensive mass polarization on the issue occur. In a study of World War II and Vietnam that builds on but qualifies Zaller's (1992) model, Berinsky (2007) argues that elite cues are the dominant mover of public opinion—even in the absence of widespread partisan debate in the mass media, he argues, a few prominent elite opposition voices can be sufficient to induce dissent from foreign policy adventures among ordinary citizens.

³ As Entman (2004: 141) wrote of coverage on the 1982 nuclear freeze rally, which up to that point was the largest mass political demonstration in modern U.S. history: "In its key article on the event, nearly seventeen hundred words long, (*The New York Times*) made only two brief references to the speeches given at the rally in Central Park. The greater part of the article—replete with references to the frivolous and radical 1960s—focused on the logistics of moving the crowd and descriptions of the participants."

Pre-War Coverage and Public Opinion on Iraq

There has been a substantial volume of research on U.S. public opinion toward the Iraq War, but surprisingly, very little has involved comprehensive and systematic analyses of mass media content, especially television coverage in the pre-war period. Althaus and LARGIO (2004) argue that rather than being led or manipulated into supporting the war, the American public had long been predisposed to believe that Iraq was responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks and was connected to international terrorism. Based on extensive poll results and a content analysis of Associated Press stories and Bush administration public statements, searching for mentions of “Osama bin Laden,” “Saddam Hussein” and “War on Terror” or “War on Terrorism,” they find no evidence that the rhetorical and media switch from bin Laden to Hussein was causally prior to public beliefs in Iraqi responsibility for Sept. 11. Similarly, Foyle (2004) argues—based on polling data and a process-tracing narrative—that administration communications efforts appeared to have little or no impact on increasing public support for the war, although these initiatives may have fostered substantial factual misperceptions. However, he does not conduct detailed or sophisticated analyses of elite discourse or media coverage on Iraq. Other research on public opinion regarding the war has examined the impact on the expression of dissent of social-psychological mechanisms such as the “spiral of silence” and “fear of isolation” (Neuwirth et al. 2007), and the overall determinants of mass opinion on war, such as tolerance for casualties, belief in success, elite discourse and core values (Berinsky and Druckman 2007).

In their compelling argument linking political knowledge, patterns of media use and citizen predispositions as determinants of mass opinion on Iraq, Feldman et al. (2007) show that consumers of print news were substantially more likely than those who relied on TV to hold dissenting opinions. Without a systematic study of media content, however, it is impossible to say whether media consumption habits can explain the divergence in public opinion between newspaper readers

and TV viewers. Our extensive search of several major—and many minor—political science and communications journals yielded very little sustained empirical research on U.S. media coverage in months before the war. Coe et al. (2004) analyze presidential speeches for “good vs. evil” themes construed as part of a “binary discourse” about Iraq and the war on terrorism, finding a substantial echoing of these themes in editorials from major national and metropolitan newspapers. Many interpretive essays and qualitative articles have argued that mainstream U.S. media closely followed Bush administration perspectives and failed to offer sustained attention to critical and dissenting voices (e.g. Calabrese 2005).⁴ Other scholars have systematically examined media coverage of the war in other nations, finding, for example, that major Scottish newspapers have greatly de-emphasized civilian casualties, damage to Iraqi infrastructure, and voices of Iraqis and other Arab or Islamic groups (Robertson 2004), and that major British papers provided increasingly sparse and unfavorable coverage of the substantial anti-war movement in that country after the invasion (Murray et al. 2008).

Thus, there is a need for a systematic and comprehensive analysis of U.S. network TV coverage in the period before the Iraq War. What issues and topics did the evening news focus on in the months before the invasion? How favorable or unfavorable toward the Bush administration’s positions was this coverage? And perhaps most importantly in light of major theories of media content, how many of what kinds of sources were quoted, and what were they telling American television viewers about the Iraq issue? In short, whose views made the news? Few questions are more important for research on media content, or for the health of American democracy.

⁴ In addition, a study by the left-of-center media watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting found a heavy pro-administration tilt in U.S. TV coverage in the three weeks immediately following the invasion (Rendall and Broughel 2003).

Data and Research Design

In order to answer these questions, we conducted a comprehensive content analysis of network TV coverage in the months before the start of the Iraq War. We chose to analyze coverage on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news programs from Aug. 1, 2002, through March 19, 2003, which was when the invasion began. Because we have not finished coding the NBC reports, in this paper we present the results of our examination of the first two networks.

First, we used the LexisNexis database to select every story that appeared on these programs and contained the keyword “Iraq.” We then dropped from the sample any of these reports whose main focus was not the Iraq War—for example, stories about national economic conditions that mentioned the looming war briefly and in passing. This left us with 908 stories from ABC World News Tonight (411) and the CBS Evening News (497). Thus, we have analyzed the entire plausible universe of stories on Iraq that appeared on both these programs for a period of approximately seven-and-a-half months. While reports on a possible war with Iraq certainly appeared in the mass media before August 2002, we chose to begin our study at this point because it coincides roughly with the start of the Bush administration’s concerted strategic communications campaign promoting the war. In addition, because one of the main justifications for undertaking the project was to provide a foundation for further research into possible media effects on public opinion regarding the invasion, it was sensible to begin at a time when widespread public attention was first being directed toward the possibility of war with Iraq.

For each report, we coded for seven major elements: 1) story length, 2) primary topical focus, 3) secondary topical focus,⁵ 4) identity of each source,⁶ 5) source category, such as Bush administration official, United Nations official, military source, policy expert, and so on, 6)

⁵ We initially coded for a tertiary focus as well, but abandoned it after finding that few stories had three identifiable foci and that inter-coder reliability ratings for the variable were poor.

⁶ We coded both named and anonymous sources who were quoted directly and indirectly.

directional thrust of each source's statement in relation to the Bush administration's position on Iraq, and 7) directional thrust of the story as a whole. We will address the major coding procedures and criteria here. Lists of story focus and source designation codes are provided in the Appendix.

For the directional thrust of source statements, we used one of three possible codes: supportive of the Bush administration's policy, neutral or opposed to the Bush administration's policy. A statement was coded "supportive" if it expressed a position or perspective, or communicated a piece of information, that favored the Bush administration's Iraq policy. A statement was coded "opposed" if it expressed any skepticism, criticism or opposition to administration policy. A statement was coded "neutral" if it had no identifiable directional thrust. Two points should be stressed here. First, our main criterion for directional thrust was to attempt to identify the intent of the source or the likely implication of the statement regarding the Iraq War debate. Thus, a statement asserting or suggesting that Iraq possessed biological weapons was coded as supportive, even if it did not explicitly advocate going to war. At the same time, any statement that cast doubt on the Bush administration's Iraq positions was coded as opposed, even if it did not either directly or indirectly question the idea of war per se. For instance, if a source said that the Bush administration had not yet secured an adequate coalition of allies to attack Iraq, the statement was coded as opposed. Or, if a source said that the administration was rushing toward war precipitously, and should first seek the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq under UN auspices, it was coded as opposed. Thus, the coding scheme for directional thrust of source statements was deliberately designed to be liberal, in the sense that the procedure was constructed to capture even faint signals of dissent regarding Bush administration policy on Iraq.

In determining the directional thrust of each story, we selected from one of five possible codes, ranging from very favorable to very unfavorable. This code was designed to capture the likely overall effect on the opinion toward war with Iraq of the typical American viewing the news report.

We combined three main factors in identifying the directional thrust of each story, using neutral as the presumed starting point: 1) The overall balance of directional thrusts of the source statements included in the story. Thus, if a report contained more statements positive toward Bush administration policy than statements that were negative, this would tend to push the story's directional thrust in the favorable direction. 2) The likely effects of essentially neutral information contained in the news report. In other words, aside from the direction of statements from sources, we asked in what direction the information or events contained in the report would likely push the typical American news viewer's opinion toward a possible war. Thus, if a story was based largely on intelligence reports alleging Iraqi nuclear weapons capabilities, this would push the story's directional thrust in the favorable direction. 3) The overall "tone" of the report. This criterion was intended to capture more nuanced elements of the story—beyond the balance of favorable and unfavorable sources, and beyond the presumably factual information provided—that might influence viewers' opinions. These elements included the implicit assumptions upon which the story appeared to be based and the tone of the language used by anchors and reporters. Thus, when journalists themselves suggested that Iraqi officials were attempting to deceive the United States or the international community about their weapons programs, or when Dan Rather asked if it was time yet to "drop the hammer on Saddam," this would tend to push the directional thrust of the story in the favorable direction.

While many of these criteria unavoidably involve elements of human interpretation, we chose this kind of coding scheme in order to capture a large number of distinct and potentially important elements contained in news stories that are not likely reachable through computerized content analysis programs. We do not claim to be comprehensive in our approach to analyzing the content of TV news coverage before the Iraq War, only more comprehensive and more systematic than any previous studies we are aware of. We note that despite the various levels of coder judgment

involved in this effort, we have achieved acceptable levels of inter-coder reliability on all our key variables.⁷

Volume of Coverage

Before presenting data on the focus of Iraq coverage, the sources quoted and the nature of their quotes, and the direction of that coverage, it is useful first to document the increase in the amount of news the American public had at its disposal over the course of the debate over military action. As noted, our coding begins Aug. 1, 2002, the month the Bush administration began its public push for a confrontation with Saddam Hussein over his alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. Figure 1 displays the number of stories aired on ABC and CBS during each of the eight months in the lead-up to the war.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The debate over Iraq garnered considerable attention from the outset. In August, a story appeared roughly every other night on CBS, and even more frequently on ABC. The number of Iraq stories grew steadily over the coming months, as the focus of the news turned from the debate over giving Bush the authority to use military force, to the debate over a UN resolution, to the ongoing

⁷ Before beginning the coding, we conducted preliminary analyses to make sure our coding scheme could be reliably put into practice. In that process, we resolved any discrepancies or problems with the coding instructions. As the coding proceeded, we conducted two rounds of inter-coder reliability tests, double-coding 5% of all stories. Our inter-coder reliability ratings were generally within the accepted range for content analysis (Neuendorf 2002). In the table below, we present Cohen's *kappa*, which adjusts for chance agreement, as a measure of reliability for each of our key variables. We achieved high reliability for all variables except the secondary focus of the story. The lower reliability on that measure stemmed from disagreement about whether stories did, or did not have, a secondary focus. As a result, we limit most of our analysis of the focus of coverage to the primary codes. But it should be noted that even when primary and secondary foci are aggregated together, the patterns of the media's attention to particular aspects of the war debate is substantively similar to when we use only the primary issue focus.

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Cohen's <i>kappa</i></u>
Primary focus	0.76
Secondary focus	0.50
Source category	0.85
Directional thrust of quote	0.71
Directional thrust of story	0.72

saga of UN weapons inspections, and finally the planning for the war itself. In February 2003, the month before the war began, CBS aired 106 Iraq-related stories on the nightly news, an average of nearly four per night. ABC aired about three per night.

The substantial attention to the issue is notable. The Iraq debate represents the rare case in which television news was actively involved in covering a policy debate. For the most part, debates over public policy largely go unreported by the broadcast media, for reasons of perceived audience taste, journalistic standards of newsworthiness, and the constraints of an inherently visual medium. In the case of Iraq, TV news was intensely interested, perhaps as a reflection of the heightened concern over terrorism less than a year after the September 11 attacks, the prospect of another military conflict at a time when the U.S. was involved in attempting to build a democratic government in Afghanistan, the first major test of the “doctrine of preemption” laid out by the Bush administration, and a policy debate whose outcome was correctly seen as having high-stakes consequences. The news is nothing if not responsive to controversial, dramatic political developments addressing questions of war and peace.

The amount of coverage is also important because it suggests television news had the potential to influence public opinion about the wisdom of an invasion. Media content can affect public support for policy proposals (e.g., Page et al. 1987), but only to the extent that the volume of coverage is sufficiently high. And since TV news only occasionally devotes sustained attention to policy debates, its ability to shape public opinion is necessarily attenuated. Here, that is not true: Americans likely learned much about the debate over Iraq from TV news, which makes it possible that what they saw and heard influenced support for and opposition to an invasion.

Focus of Coverage

We turn now to the content of those TV news reports. Figure 2 displays the distribution of the focus of stories, presented as the proportion of all Iraq coverage on ABC and CBS. Both

primary and secondary foci are reflected in the figure. In other words, we have aggregated both foci together.⁸

[Insert Figure 2 here]

The first thing to note is the similarity between the focus of the networks' coverage, a tendency toward homogeneity that is well-documented elsewhere (see Graber 2005). Stories about weapons inspections and weapons of mass destruction (WMD), military planning, levels of international support for the U.S., and the debate over the invasion were the top topics in the news. The visual evidence is confirmed by a strong positive correlation ($r=0.79$) between the foci on the two networks.

Over the eight months of coverage, stories about the UN weapons inspection efforts and Iraq's alleged possession of, or attempts to acquire, weapons of mass destruction were the most prominent themes. One in five CBS stories focused on weapons inspections or WMD, and on ABC the figure was nearly 24%. Stories about the prospects and planning for the war—the likelihood of an American victory and the build-up of troops in Kuwait, for example—grew more common after the end of 2002, and made those topics the second and third most common themes. The debate over the invasion itself was certainly a part of the coverage, but it is important to point out that stories focused on the arguments for and against an invasion—either as primary or secondary foci—were much less common than stories about military planning or the allegations about weapons in Iraq. To be sure, about 12% of the stories focused primarily on WMD included a secondary focus on the debate. But the overall lower level of attention to the debate reveals that the arguments made by political actors on either side were in fact less prominent in the news than other topics.

The overall distribution of the media's attention, however, obscures the dynamics of coverage of the Iraq debate. When we examine the data over time, we find that the networks'

⁸ For presentation purposes, we have omitted categories that did not receive at least 1% of coverage. The entire list of focus categories appears in the Appendix.

interest in different aspects of the Iraq question evolved during the pre-war period. Figure 3 shows the proportion of stories on both networks that had a primary focus on the debate, weapons, and military planning for each month of coding. In the initial phase of coverage—in August and September—stories about the debate were the dominant topic. More than 60% of stories in August and 39% in September were focused primarily on the arguments among the Bush administration, foreign officials, and some Democrats about how Iraq should be dealt with. In October and beyond, however, the debate over the invasion faded into the background, as weapons inspections and WMD became the objects of journalistic attention. During the month of December, 61% of all Iraq news was focused on the inspections, with both ABC and CBS airing 30 stories about WMD—nearly one every night. As the war grew closer, the networks—and particularly CBS, as seen in Figure 2—turned their attention to the military maneuvering in the Middle East, focusing on the deployment of troops, the build-up of military equipment, and other stories about military operations. By March, stories about weapons of mass destruction and any debate over the war had disappeared from the news. The war was about to begin, and preparations for battle became the focus of TV journalists.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

The ebb and flow of attention can be understood by the journalistic definition of newsworthiness. In August and September, the Bush administration was spending most of its time making the case to the American public, foreign leaders, and members of Congress that Iraq was, as Bush put it, a “grave threat” to the United States. While domestic opposition to an invasion, as we show in the next section, received little attention, disagreement was prominent enough to make for a good story. But when the House and Senate passed a resolution in the second week of October authorizing Bush to use force in Iraq, debate stories ceased to be newsworthy. Even as protestors continued to rally in opposition to the war, and even as some critics of the Bush administration,

such as West Virginia Democratic Sen. Robert Byrd, continued to argue for a non-military solution to the impasse with Iraq, the debate over an invasion largely receded from public view. From the perspective of story selection, the debate, at least domestically, was settled.

As a result, the preponderance of news then turned to the question of weapons inspections: would they proceed and avert the war, or would Iraq's obstinacy force the Bush administration to act on its congressionally sanctioned threats of military action? As the inspections wore on, and it became increasingly clear that the U.S. would not provide additional time for UN investigation of alleged Iraqi weapons programs, the media turned its attention to the war planning stories. As American troops began to mass in the Middle East, weapons inspections and debate over the invasion were relegated to old news, and the coming conflict had become the new story line.

News is news because it is new, so it should be no surprise that there were “media attention eras”—debate, weapons inspection, military build-up—across the course of the Iraq debate. Just as the attention to policy issues in the news rises and falls with the occurrence of dramatic, and sometimes idiosyncratic, events (Bosso 1989; Downs 1972), so can attention to different aspects of the same ongoing policy debate (Lawrence 2000). The pattern also fits with Zaller's (1999) suggestion that reporters use a “rule of anticipated importance” in deciding what stories to cover, the frame of those stories, and the sources to quote. Since journalists are primarily interested in “shedding light on future developments” (Zaller 1999: 61), they train their attention on the events and political actors expected to have the most impact on future outcomes. From that perspective, debate stories were relevant until Congress assented to the president's wishes, at which point the argument over whether an invasion should occur was less relevant. The question, then, became whether the UN's weapons inspection process would unfold in a way that would avert a war. Thus, the inspections had high “anticipated importance,” as they appeared at the time to have a significant bearing on the outcome of the stand-off between Iraq and the U.S. Finally, when it became clear

that the Bush administration had lost patience with the process, the inspections were no longer relevant to future developments. What mattered then was the build-up of American troops and prospects for success in the impending war, producing the uptick in military planning stories in Figure 3.

Sources and Quotes in Coverage

One of the most common criticisms of media coverage in the months before the war is that reporters were overly willing to accept the Bush administration's rationale for an invasion. Not only were journalists rarely skeptical of claims about WMD and Iraq's terrorist connections, critics have stated, but they simply gave more attention to pro-war than anti-war perspectives. "In the period before the war, US journalists were far too reliant on sources sympathetic to the administration," Michael Massing (2004) wrote in the *New York Review of Books*. "Those with dissenting views—and there were more than a few—were shut out." As a result, the argument goes, the American public was repeatedly told why an invasion was needed or why Saddam Hussein was a threat but was much more rarely exposed to anti-war arguments. As others have pointed out, part of the reason for this imbalance appears to have been the absence of organized, vocal dissent by prominent Democrats in Congress (Berinsky 2007; Feldman et al. 2007), but the media themselves have also been the target of much criticism.

Our data allow us to examine the question systematically, rather than anecdotally or impressionistically: Did pro-war views dominate anti-war perspectives? Were dissenting voices "shut out"? Were sources from, and sympathetic to, the Bush administration accorded prominence on the air at the expense of those opposed to the administration?

To answer these questions, we coded every attributed quote—either direct or indirect—from every source on ABC and CBS during the pre-war period. In all, we coded 3,255 of these "source quotes." Nearly every story included at least one source quote—just 1% had none—and 20%

included as many as seven. We placed each source into one of 21 different categories, shown in the Appendix, and coded each quote as supportive of the Bush administration’s policy, opposed to it, or neutral.

The top row of Table 1, labeled “All Sources,” presents the proportional distribution of source quotes for the entire coding period. The data flatly contradict the claim that dissenting views were “shut out” of news coverage. While both ABC and CBS aired more quotes supportive of an invasion than opposed (35% vs. 32% for ABC; 34% vs. 30% for CBS), the differences are minimal, small enough to cast doubt on the claim that television coverage was monolithically pro-war. When the two networks are aggregated together, the distribution of source quotes is 34% supportive, 35% neutral, and 30% opposed. It appears that more than giving disproportionate airtime to a single perspective, journalists appeared to be adhering closely to the norm of objectivity, balancing pro-war utterances with anti-war views.⁹

[Insert Table 1 here]

Does this, then, suggest that actors across the entire political spectrum were given equal opportunity to air their diverging views about the war? Not exactly. The first column of Table 1, which presents the proportion of quotes coming from each source category, demonstrates that George W. Bush and his underlings, while not holding full sway over the news, garnered twice as much attention as any competing source. Administration officials comprised 29% of the networks’ sources. Bush himself was the source of more than half (53%) of all the quotes in the category, meaning that the president accounted for 15% of all statements in the pre-war period, more than any other single source.

⁹ For reasons of style and concision, in several passages we use the term “anti-war” to refer to source quotes and stories that expressed skepticism of or dissent from Bush administration policy on Iraq. However, we reiterate that the statements coded this way raised questions about whether an invasion was the proper solution, but did not necessarily reflect direct or outright opposition to war with Iraq.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority—nearly two-thirds—of the quotes attributed to Bush and his underlings were supportive of military action. Other groups aligned on the issue with the administration—retired and active members of the military, Republicans, and conservative groups—comprised an additional 16% of source quotes, and the statements attributed to these groups were more supportive of an invasion than opposed to it, as can be seen in the final column of the table, which presents the percentage point difference between supportive and opposed quotes.

The extent to which the Bush administration was the primary carrier of the pro-war view is thrown into stark relief in Figure 4. Seventy percent of all supportive quotes during the pre-war period were attributed to administration officials. A smattering of positive quotes came from foreign allies friendly with the United States (7%), such as Britain, independent experts (6%),¹⁰ UN officials (4%), and military sources (3%). But when it came to the articulation of the rationale for possible military action, Iraq was truly “Bush’s war.”

[Insert Figure 4 here]

However, given the overall equal distribution of source quotes in Figure 4, it is clear that TV news carried opposition to the Bush administration’s case. It would be natural to assume that this opposition to the White House may have come from the disaffected, and vocal, opponents of the war—people like Byrd and Wisconsin Democratic Sen. Russell Feingold.¹¹ Or, opposition could have come from the anti-war groups that consistently opposed the prospect of military action against Iraq, or the ordinary American citizens who participated in the war protests covered on television.

¹⁰ We use the term “independent experts” to refer to a broad array of nongovernmental actors. These included think tank researchers, former UN or U.S. officials who were not prominent political appointees or elected leaders, academics and others. However, we do not mean to imply that these sources were necessarily “independent” in any deeper sense: in fact, many of them were affiliated with organizations that are commonly considered by scholars, political elites and others to have a liberal (e.g., The Brookings Institution) or conservative (e.g., The Heritage Foundation) orientation. However, we code these sources as experts on the presumption that the typical American news viewer—in the absence of journalistic cues that explicitly identify think tank sources as ideologically aligned—are not likely to have the background information to see these actors as politically valenced.

¹¹ See, for example, <http://www.senate.gov/~feingold/speeches/02/10/2002A10531.html>.

But the first column of Table 1 shows that is not the case at all. Across the entire eight months of our coding, we found just 102 source quotes from representatives of the Democratic Party, a total of 3% of all attributed quotes. A quote from a Democratic official appeared on average in just one of every nine network TV stories. Moreover, the position of Democrats reported in the news was actually more supportive of an invasion than opposed; 40% of the quotes attributed to Democratic elites were supportive of the Bush policy, while 27% were opposed. Though it appears that even some anti-war Democrats, for strategic reasons, muted their public criticism of the White House (Rich 2006), we cannot say whether the low level of dissent from party elites in the news accurately reflects “reality.” Such a claim would require a comparison between news coverage and the extent to which Democrats went on the public record—either in floor speeches or elsewhere—in opposition to the war. An alternative explanation is that Democratic opposition to the war existed and was available to the media but was ignored by television reporters. Regardless, the data confirm that citizens who turned to the broadcast networks for their news were unlikely to hear Democratic dissent (Berinsky 2007; Feldman et al. 2007).

The most common source of dissent within the United States turned out to be ordinary citizens quoted in the news, often protestors at anti-war rallies or subjects of “man-on-the-street” interviews designed to gauge “public opinion” about Iraq. While one-third of citizen quotes were opposed to an invasion and 15% were supportive, the category comprised just 6% of all sources. And while sources identified as part of anti-war groups were, of course, uniformly opposed to an invasion, they comprised just 1% of all quotes, making such dissent a drop in the bucket.

So, given the success of the White House in getting its views carried to the American public through the media and the relative scarcity of dissent from Democrats, liberals, and American anti-war groups, how did the distribution of source quotes end up so balanced? The answer lies abroad.

Opposition to the war was largely carried in the news by Iraqi officials themselves and leaders of foreign countries, who were urging a diplomatic solution to the confrontation.

Table 1 shows that Iraqis were the second most-commonly quoted sources. The category, which accounted for 15% of all source quotes, includes both ordinary Iraqi citizens and Iraqi government officials, but is dominated by the latter. Twenty-seven percent of all Iraqi quotes came from Saddam Hussein himself, making him the source of 4% of all the pre-war TV news quotes. It is no surprise that the potential targets of an American invasion were strong opponents of military action.

Figure 5 shows the proportion of all opposed quotes that came from various sources. Opposition to the war came largely from Iraqi officials, who attempted to make the case that they did not possess WMD, did not have terrorist connections, and did not pose a threat to the U.S. or its allies. As a result, forty percent of all anti-war quotes were attributed to Saddam Hussein and his underlings. An additional 17% were attributed to foreign sources, including leaders in France, who became the administration's most prominent international critics. And UN officials, who urged the White House to allow the weapons inspections a chance to proceed, were the source of 8% of anti-war quotes.

[Insert Figure 5 here]

This juxtaposition of the Bush administration's arguments in favor of military action, and the arguments of foreign leaders, including Saddam Hussein, against, created an "us vs. them" narrative. Theories of media behavior often argue that the mainstream American media choose sources and points of view to reflect the dominant opinions within U.S. elite circles (e.g., Bennett 1990). But while on its face, "indexing" theory appears to explain the relative balance between pro and con statements about the war, the fact that anti-war views came not from opposition in Congress but

from officials outside the United States does not fully square with the theory's framework, a matter we take up in the Conclusion below.

One final point about the sources: If we place each into two broader categories—official and non-official—we find that official sources comprised 80% of the quoted sources during the pre-war period.¹² Non-official sources, such as ordinary citizens, conservative or liberal interest groups, and religious leaders, were much less prominent on television news. Even the largest non-official source—independent experts—were often individuals affiliated with major Washington think-tanks, and an argument can be made that these organizations work in parallel with the government itself. The views of non-official actors were, in a word, marginalized. This is consistent with decades of work that shows reporters turn to governmental sources with far more frequency than non-governmental actors (e.g., Sigal 1973; see Graber 2005). This pattern is particularly important in an environment in which there was relatively little domestic dissent within the government about the possibility of a war with Iraq.

Directional Thrust of Coverage

We use the term “directional thrust” (Page et al. 1987) to describe the positivity or negativity of a news story toward a proposed invasion. As described above, the coding is designed to capture not merely a measure of the story “tone,” but also the perspective that is emphasized by the theme of the report and the various source quotes in the piece.

Table 2 presents the distribution of the directional thrust measure. The second and third columns present the percentage of reports on each network coded as very favorable, somewhat

¹² Official sources are Bush Administration sources, Iraqi sources, military sources, foreign sources, UN officials, Democratic Party elites, Republican Party elites, bureaucratic sources, IAEA officials, and NATO sources. The remaining sources are considered non-official.

favorable, neutral, somewhat unfavorable, and very unfavorable toward the possibility of an invasion. The third column presents the same measure with ABC and CBS aggregated together.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Looking first at ABC, the network's coverage does not stray far from the journalistic norm of objectivity. We coded two-thirds of ABC's coverage as neutral, and just 5% as very favorable or very unfavorable. Of the coverage we coded as somewhat directional, more than two-thirds fell into the favorable category, bolstering critics who saw the media's coverage of the Iraq debate as favoring the Bush administration's pro-war views. In general, however, ABC's coverage tended more toward neutrality than anything.

The same, however, is not true of CBS. We coded less than half (43%) of the network's coverage as neutral. Of the remaining 57%, 40% was favorable toward the war, and 17% was unfavorable. Our reading of the transcripts of the news stories reveals that CBS' reporters and anchors were more inclined to use language that cast the Iraqis, and Saddam Hussein in particular, in a negative light.¹³ CBS' coverage also exhibited a "march to war" tone, in which the war was portrayed as inevitable, illustrated by Rather's "drop the hammer" comment referenced above.

¹³ For example, consider the transcript of a report focused on the possible return of UN weapons inspectors, which aired Sept. 17, 2002. (Emphasis added by the authors.)

DAN RATHER, anchor: After meeting with chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix, Iraqi officials said tonight Blix has agreed to meet again later this month in Vienna to arrange for the eventual inspection team's return to Iraq. CBS' Mark Phillips has more now from Baghdad, where today Saddam's top spokesman was also his top salesman.

Unidentified Man: (Foreign language spoken)

MARK PHILLIPS reporting: *Like a Mississippi gambler who's just played his best card*, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz lit up a fat cigar today after explaining why Iraq decided to allow arms inspectors back in.

Mr. TARIQ AZIZ (Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister): Iraq really wants transparency.

PHILLIPS: But *truth is a moving target here*. When inspectors were last in Iraq, they were repeatedly denied access to locations and documents showing the extent of Saddam's illicit weapons programs. They left knowing they hadn't found them all. After a three-and-a-half-year gap, with sites spread around the country, it could be even harder this time.

The finding suggests that although media outlets tend to behave as a pack in their choice of newsworthy stories, the same is not always true for the directional thrust of coverage. Shaw and Sparrow (1999) uncovered a similar pattern in their study of print coverage during the 1992 presidential campaign—local news outlets reflected the issue focus of elite newspapers, but not the tone of coverage—and our data illustrate the same (see Figure 2). Interestingly, we find more pro-war coverage on the very network that is traditionally accused by conservatives of being more liberal than its competitors (e.g., Goldberg 2001).¹⁴ At least where pre-war Iraq coverage is concerned, the opposite seems to be true. CBS News viewers were exposed to a heavier dose of pro-war coverage than ABC viewers.

Though the overall thrust of news coverage was somewhat pro-war, the nature of coverage was not static—that is, it was not consistently pro-war throughout. To examine the dynamics of the direction of coverage, we created a scale, assigning a value of -2 to stories coded very unfavorable, -1 to stories that were somewhat unfavorable, 0 to stories that were neutral, 1 to somewhat favorable stories, and 2 to very favorable stories. We then averaged the directional thrust of all stories aired on

Mr. CHARLES DUELFER (Former UN Weapons Inspector): It's going to be very difficult for the new team and--you know, not the least of which is because we've given them--when we were operating in Iraq, we gave them a lot of practice in hiding things.

PHILLIPS: Since the inspectors left, Iraqi dissidents say this construction engineer has built hidden, underground bunkers for weapons development.

Unidentified Man: ...concentrated works, and they're working day and night.

PHILLIPS: The Iraqis have admitted expanding some facilities, but insist the work here is now civilian. The trick this time will be to make the threat of punishment for non-cooperation real.

Mr. DUELFER: Oh, they treated these resolutions and statements and complaints from the Security Council like--you know, like parking tickets in New York City.

PHILLIPS: The last time UN inspectors were based here, the result was a *seven-and-a-half-year-long Iraqi shell game*. *Whenever the inspectors manage to get back here, this crisis won't end; it'll likely just take a familiar form*. Mark Phillips, CBS News, Baghdad.

¹⁴ And of course, Rather and CBS took much heat in 2004 for reporting questionable allegations regarding President Bush's Vietnam-era service in the National Guard, behavior that was—according to some critics—driven by partisan bias.

each day of our coding period (aggregating ABC and CBS together), and calculated a three-day moving average of directional thrust. The trend is presented in Figure 6.

[Insert Figure 6 here]

Data points at the zero-line represent neutral coverage. Data points above or below, represent coverage that was tilted pro- or anti-war, respectively. The directional thrust of coverage was not static throughout the pre-war period. In the early months of the debate—in August and September—coverage was not at all favorable toward a proposed invasion. Coverage was mostly negative during August, became more favorable in the middle of September, and again tilted against military force later in the month. What accounts for the general skepticism in the news? We suspect it reflects the fact that this was the moment of the pre-war period during which congressional debate was most prominent (see Figure 3). In this period, Democratic opposition to the war was most likely to be heard, whereas in the later months, it was virtually absent from the news. To wit: more than half (53%) of all Democratic source quotes were aired in August and September, meaning that in the remaining six months before the war, Democrats hardly appeared on TV news at all. As a result, coverage in August and September, because it was primarily focused on the debate over the war, was less favorable to an invasion than it would be in the rest of the pre-war period. The congressional debate ended in early October, with the passage of the resolution authorizing the president to use force against Iraq. The House passed the measure on October 10, the Senate followed suit the next day, and Bush signed it on October 16.

Coverage remained fairly favorable toward the war through November and about half of December, before beginning a slow return to neutral as the actual invasion grew nearer. These changes can be explained by the shift in the focus of coverage to the UN weapons inspections during the last months of 2002. With the focus on Saddam Hussein's alleged violations of international sanctions and UN resolutions, and the discussions of his possible use of chemical,

biological and nuclear weapons, coverage increasingly reflected the views of those concerned about Iraq as a danger to American national security.

As 2002 became 2003, inspections stories were replaced by reports about the Department of Defense's preparations for an invasion. Most of the military planning stories were not directional—most were coded as neutral—as journalists focused on the mechanics of the mobilization. As a result, coverage remained slightly favorable toward the invasion, but the overall content began to drift toward neutral, as can be seen in Figure 6. By the time the invasion actually began, coverage appears to have become as balanced as in any period of our coding.

Though a precise explanation of the dynamics of directional thrust would require a detailed analysis beyond the scope of this paper, we can add some support to our supposition that the change in the focus of the news media helps explain these patterns. Figure 7 presents the average directional thrust score for stories with a primary focus on each of the 16 topics for which we found at least 10 stories.

[Insert Figure 7]

In almost every category, the mean is above the zero-line, which represents neutral coverage. Only on stories about war protests and the economic costs of war did coverage fall into the unfavorable region. But focusing on the three categories that comprised the majority of coverage—the debate over the invasion, military planning, and weapons inspections/WMD—we can see the data are consistent with our suspicions. Of the three, coverage of the debate was the least favorable (a deviation from neutral of 0.11), although its average directional thrust score is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Military planning stories were slightly more favorable (deviation of 0.16, $p < .01$). Weapons inspections/WMD stories, as expected, were more favorable, with a fairly substantial deviation from neutral of 0.43 ($p < .01$). At the moments when news was focused on topics that were inherently about the pros and cons of going to war, coverage was least favorable

toward an invasion. When attention turned to Iraq's alleged misdeeds and its potential threat, coverage became more favorable, and when coverage then turned to a procedural narrative—the build-up of troops and the preparations for military action—coverage moved back toward neutral.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that the general outlines of the criticism of the media in the run-up to the Iraq war are justified: News coverage, at least as exemplified by the network broadcasts, was more favorable toward the Bush administration's rationale for war than its opponents' arguments against. A plurality of news stories focused on Iraq's alleged weapons programs, administration officials were quoted more frequently than any other source, and our directional thrust analysis shows that TV news reports cast a possible invasion in a more positive than negative light. Only in the earliest months of the debate did domestic opposition to the war receive much attention, and the focus on military planning beginning in January 2003 implied an inexorable march toward war. In sum, these findings support the conclusion that the media's performance did not live up to the standards most journalists hold themselves to, much less those expected by their critics.

But it is too facile to claim that dissenting opinion was “shut out” of the news. As we have shown, opposition to the Bush administration's policies was regularly reported, and those source quotes were aired nearly as frequently as statements supportive of the White House. Instead of emanating from Democratic elites, leaders of the anti-war movement within the United States, or other sources of domestic dissent, however, the campaign against a war—at least according to network TV news—was spearheaded by Saddam Hussein and other foreign leaders.

In addition to producing the first systematic analysis of pre-Iraq War news coverage in the United States, our findings raise questions about existing theories of media behavior. In broad terms, Bennett's indexing (1990) and Entman's (2003, 2004) cascading activation models predict that media coverage of a policy debate is likely to reflect the points of view articulated by political elites (though

their models differ somewhat in the mechanisms by which this occurs). To be sure, the Bush administration's view was heavily reflected in the news. And since a majority of House Democrats voted against the resolution authorizing the president to use force against Iraq (the Democratic vote was 126-81 against), and a substantial minority in the Senate did so (29-21 for), we would expect the media to have "indexed" their coverage to reflect that opposition. However, this is not what we found.

The standard explanation for this disjuncture is that even anti-war Democrats muted their criticism in the hopes of "changing the subject" to issues on which they felt they had an advantage as the 2002 midterm elections approached. But if indexing predicts that media coverage reflects the views articulated in mainstream debate—with debate implying regular, public discourse over the proper policy solution—then we would expect anti-war views to have essentially disappeared from the news following the passage of the Iraq war resolution. If domestic opposition to the president falls silent, then that perspective is unlikely to make its way into the news.

But that is not what we discovered. Because elites in the U.S. were not publicly sparring, journalists turned to foreign officials, and especially the Iraqis themselves, for the anti-war perspective. As a result, the overall distribution of quoted support for and opposition to the possibility of an invasion was essentially equal. Thus, coverage was indeed indexed to the prevailing *views* in the U.S. government—Bush and the Republicans supportive, and many Democrats opposed—even if it was not indexed to the actual *debate* taking place.

On one hand, we might view this as a case of the media playing its watchdog role more effectively than the indexing argument suggests. Even in the absence of domestic elite dissent, the news media sought out sources with divergent views, giving the public access to a broader debate than was occurring inside the Beltway. But by going overseas for that perspective—to France, Germany, Iraq, and elsewhere—the anti-war view was accorded a difficult position, from the

perspective of domestic public opinion. It is well known that source credibility is central to the persuasiveness of communication, political or otherwise. And while many Americans were skeptical of the Bush administration's motivations for a confrontation with Iraq (Feldman et al. 2007), we would surmise that even greater skepticism infused Americans' perceptions of Saddam Hussein's arguments about why war was a bad idea. To the extent that the anti-war view was carried largely by "public enemy no. 1" (Althaus and Largio 2004)—and sometimes surrounded by journalists' suggestions that viewers would do well not to trust this view—it is likely to have had little influence in dampening public support for war. Indeed, it is plausible that such anti-war sentiment expressed by Iraqi officials may have triggered a backlash effect among some viewers, thus increasing support for Bush administration policy on Iraq. This pattern of sourcing not only suggests that media researchers should further examine the inclusion of non-U.S. views on high-profile foreign policy issues, but it also raises normative questions about how the news filters the communications of political actors and refracts—rather than merely reflects—the contours of debate.

Appendix

Primary and Secondary Focus Codes

1=debate over invasion	17=cost/economics
2=UN resolution	18=impact on allies
3=weapons inspections	19=legal debate
4=military action	20=Iraqi dissidents
5=protests/rallies	21=military planning
6=casualties	22=domestic politics
7=government formation	23=impact on soldiers
8=political developments (in Iraq)	24=impact on Iraqis
9=reconstruction	25=civil liberties/domestic security
10=speech by official (American or Iraqi)	26=terrorism/al-Qaeda
11=military strategy	27=prospects for war
12=insurgent activity	28=aftermath
13=violence in Iraq	29=first gulf war
14=Iraq-related election news	30=Saddam war crimes/human rights
15=other	31=US-Iraq history
16=international support	

Source Category Codes

1=Republican Party	12=Retired military
2=Conservative group	13=UN official
3=Pro-war group	14=Ordinary citizen
4=Not aligned/independent source/expert	15=Veteran
5=Anti-war group	16=IAEA official
6=Liberal group	17=Bureaucratic source
7=Democratic Party	18=Celebrity/prominent citizen
8=Foreign official/leader	19=NATO source
9=Iraqi source	20=Foreign citizen/group
10=Military source	21=Religious leader
11=Bush administration	

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Table 1. Direction of Source Quotes in Pre-war Network News Stories

	% of Source Quotes	Direction of Quotes (in %)			
		Supportive	Neutral	Opposed	Diff (Supp-Opp.)
All Sources	100	34	35	30	4
Bush Administration	29	66	22	12	44
Iraqi source	15	13	16	70	-57
Military source	11	7	91	2	5
Foreign leader/official	10	31	29	39	-8
Independent/expert	9	29	44	27	2
UN official	7	28	40	32	-4
Ordinary citizen	6	15	52	33	-18
Democratic Party	3	40	32	27	13
Retired military	2	18	75	7	11
Republican party	2	35	34	31	4
Bureaucratic source	2	27	58	15	12
IAEA official	1	23	36	41	-18
Anti-war group	1	6	3	91	-85
Foreign citizen/group	1	14	50	36	-22
Celebrity/prominent citizen	1	6	28	67	-61
Veteran	<1	0	81	19	-19
Religious leader	<1	0	9	91	-91
Other interest group	<1	0	83	17	-17
NATO source	<1	60	0	40	20
Conservative group	<1	0	100	0	0
Liberal group	<1	0	0	100	-100

Table 2. Directional Thrust of Pre-war Network News Stories

	ABC	CBS	Both networks
Very favorable	4% (15)	7% (35)	6% (50)
Somewhat favorable	21% (86)	33% (164)	28% (250)
Neutral	67% (276)	43% (214)	54% (490)
Somewhat unfavorable	7% (30)	16% (81)	12% (111)
Very unfavorable	1% (4)	1% (3)	1% (7)
	100% (411)	100% (497)	100% (908)

Note: N of stories is in parentheses. Pearson χ^2 for ABC and CBS coverage = 56.11, $p < .01$

Figure 1. Pre-war Network News Coverage of Iraq, Aug. 1, 2002 through March 19, 2003

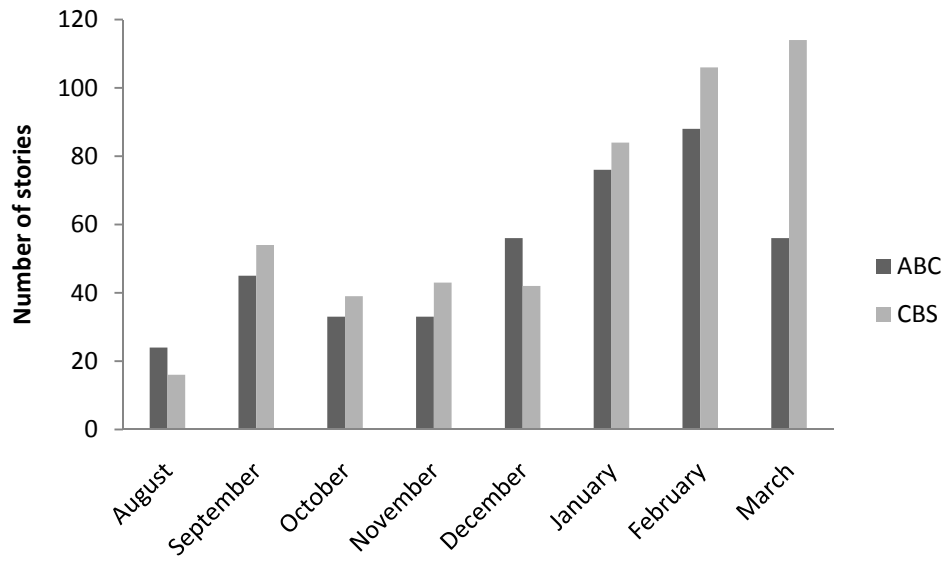


Figure 2. Focus of Pre-war Network News Stories

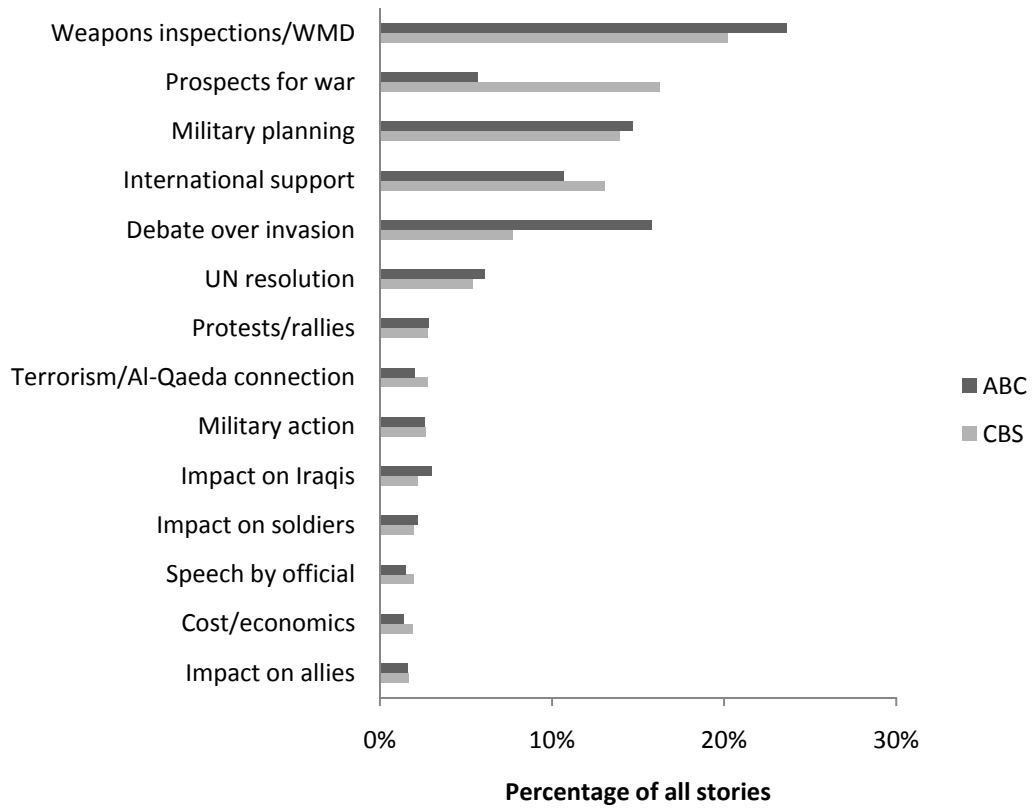


Figure 3. Changing Focus of Pre-war Network News Coverage, Aug. 1, 2002 through March 19, 2003

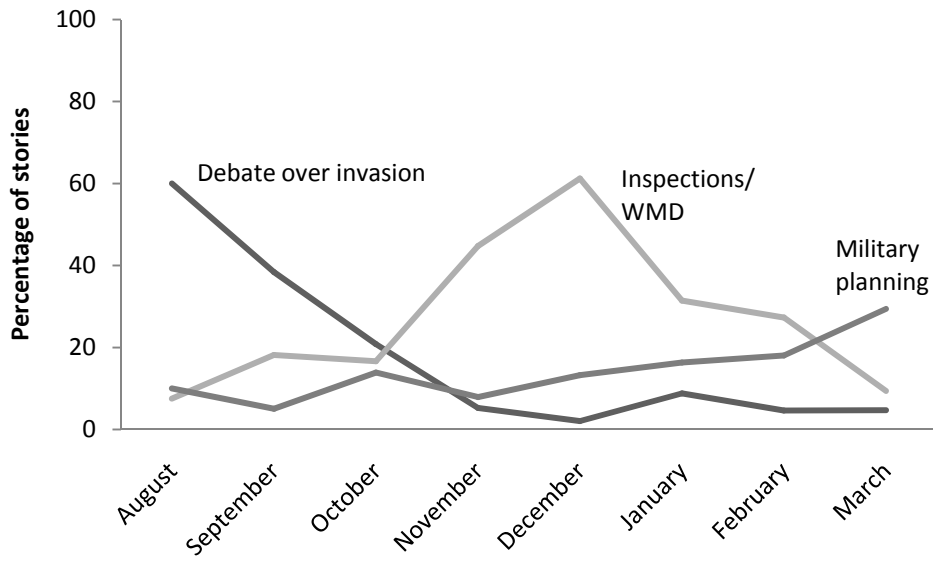


Figure 4. Sources of Quotes Supportive of the Bush Policy in Pre-war Network News Stories

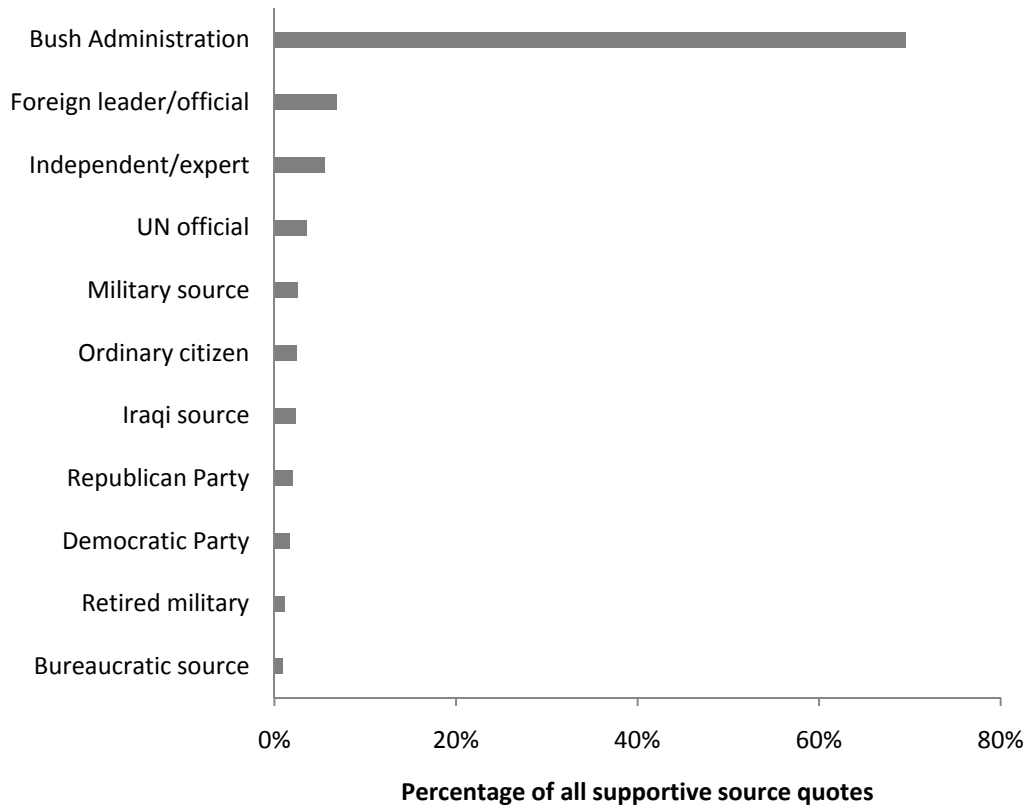


Figure 5. Sources of Quotes Opposed to the Bush Policy in Pre-war Network News Stories

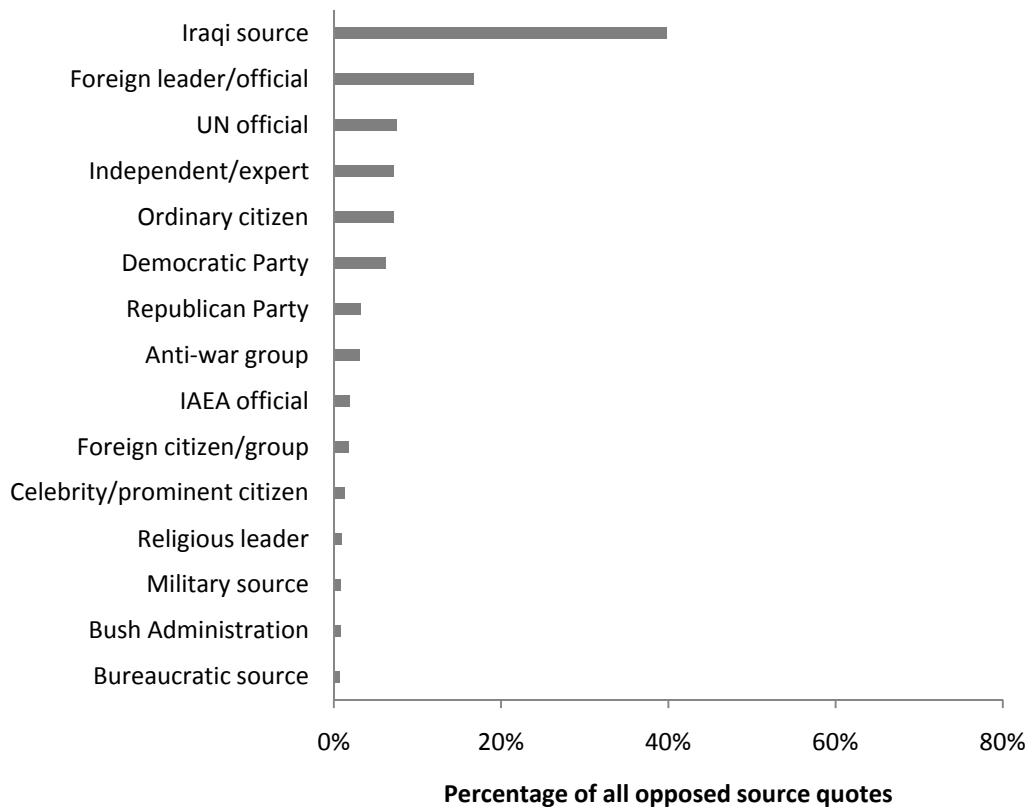
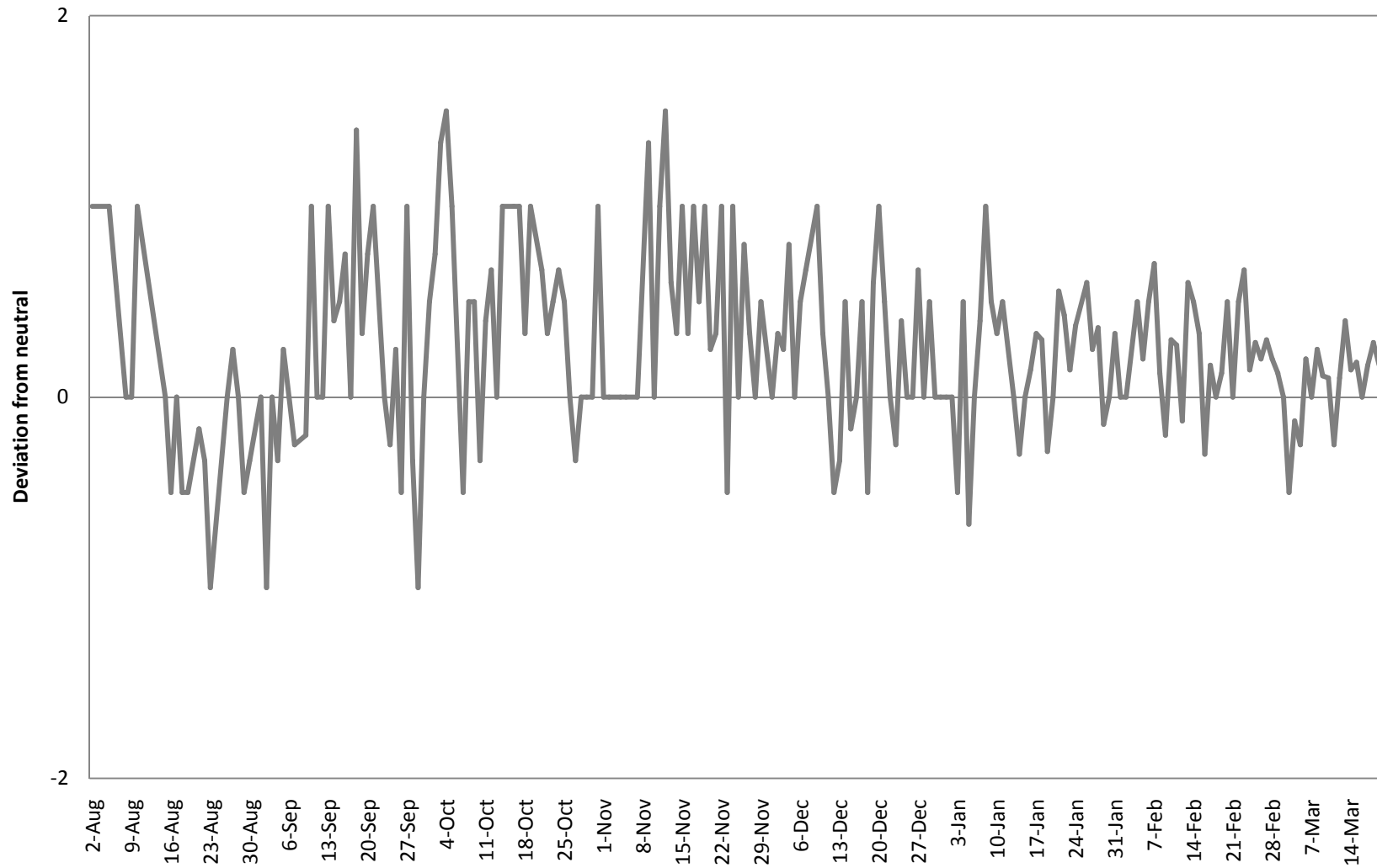
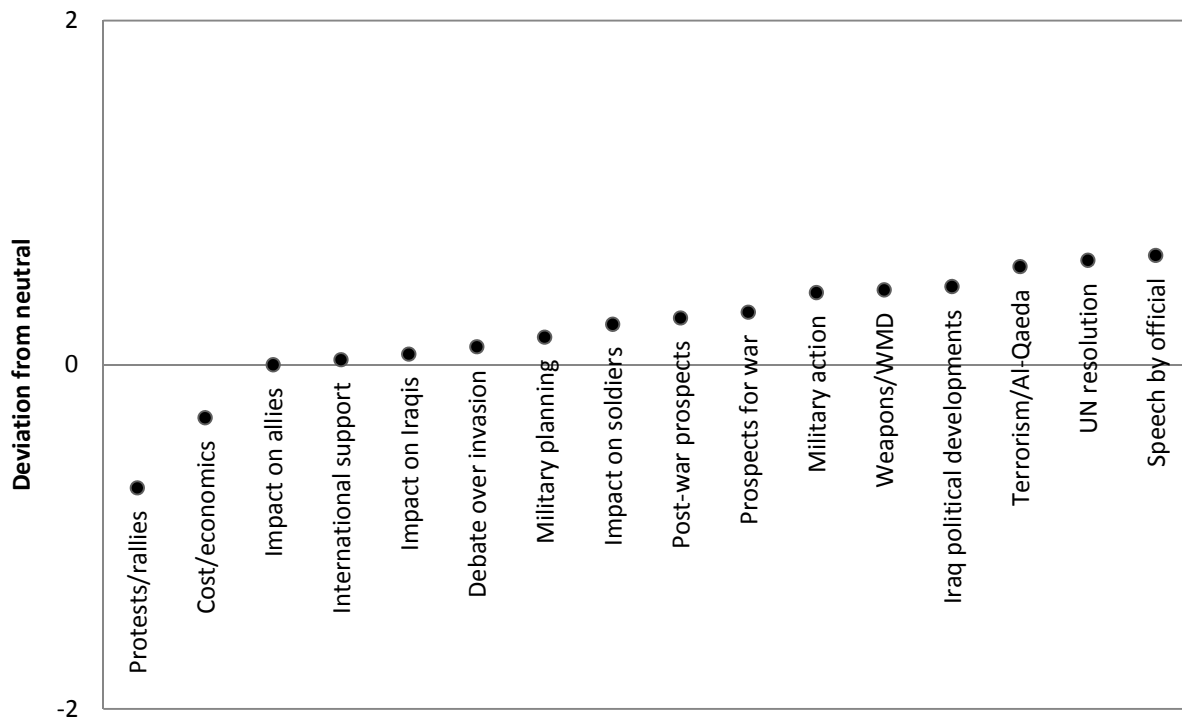


Figure 6. Directional Thrust in Pre-war Network News Stories, Aug. 1, 2002 through March 19, 2003 (3-day Moving Average)



Note: Data points represent the three-day average favorability score for news stories, expressed as a deviation from neutral coverage. Higher scores indicate coverage more favorable toward the possibility of an invasion.

Figure 7. Average Directional Thrust, by Primary Story Focus, in Pre-war Network News Coverage



Note: Data points represent the average favorability of news stories on a topic, expressed as a deviation from neutral coverage. Higher scores indicate coverage more favorable toward the possibility of an invasion.