

## The Influence of Foreign Voices on U.S. Public Opinion

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**Abstract:** The dominant model of attitude formation posits that when domestic elites are united on an issue, public opinion will coalesce behind that position. Public opinion in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, however, presents a puzzle. Despite the fact that domestic political elites publicly voiced very little opposition to the Iraq War, large numbers of Americans—especially Democrats—remained opposed to military action throughout the pre-war period. We argue that some rank-and-file Democrats and independents expressed these negative sentiments because of the widely reported anti-war positions staked out by foreign, not domestic, elites. Merging a large-scale content analysis of news coverage with a series of public opinion surveys from August 2002 through March 2003, we show that Democrats and independents—especially those with high levels of general political awareness—responded to dissenting arguments articulated in the mass media by foreign officials. Our results, which constitute the first empirical demonstration of foreign elite effects on U.S. public opinion, show that scholars need to account for the role played by non-U.S. officials in prominent foreign policy debates. To do so, researchers must examine individual-level data to specify how partisan-ideological predispositions and political awareness mediate the effects of news discourse. Our findings also raise important normative questions about the operation of the media as a mechanism of political accountability and democratic policy responsiveness.

Most theorizing and empirical research on American mass communications and public opinion concludes that citizens construct their foreign policy attitudes according to the messages transmitted by domestic elite actors. When these elites—especially prominent Republican and Democratic party officials, such as the president and high-profile members of Congress—communicate opposing positions through news media, citizens express opinions that conform to those articulated by leaders who seem to share their basic political predispositions. This produces a “polarization effect” (Zaller 1992), as public opinion diverges along partisan or ideological lines. But when major institutional elites express a policy consensus, the bulk of the mass public follows along and coalesces behind this dominant position in a dynamic that Zaller (1992) terms a “mainstream effect.” The logic here is straightforward: because most citizens lack relevant information and access to independent sources of analysis and commentary, and because the pressures of nationalism and patriotism generate tendencies to defer to government, the mass public typically adheres to the cues transmitted by credible institutional elites.

However, the case of perhaps the most important U.S. foreign policy episode of the last decade—the 2002-2003 Iraq War debate—presents a striking challenge to this dominant perspective. In the run-up to the war, American mass media outlets communicated very little domestic opposition to the Bush administration’s plans for the pre-emptive invasion and occupation of Iraq (Bennett et al. 2007; Calabrese 2005; [citation omitted]; Massing 2004). Few skeptical or dissenting messages from Democratic elites made their way to the public, producing an essentially one-sided domestic information flow in favor of military action. Nevertheless, many citizens who identified with the Democratic Party—and even significant percentages of political independents—rejected the widespread pro-invasion rhetoric emanating from domestic sources in the news, and proceeded to articulate a high degree of skepticism of and opposition to the war plans (Feldman et al. 2007; Jacobson 2007). In a mass communications environment nearly bereft of criticism from

Democratic elites, foreign policy experts, and other domestic sources that citizens typically rely on, large numbers of Americans stood opposed to the Bush administration's Iraq policy throughout late 2002 and early 2003. What might explain this puzzle?

We argue that Democrats and independents in the mass public responded to the widely reported opposition from foreign elites, including the leaders of France and Germany, and prominent officials from the United Nations. These messages served as a catalyst for the expression of war opposition among rank-and-file Democrats and independents, who were generally predisposed to reject a pre-emptive and unilateral invasion. Employing a dynamic analysis that merges an extensive content analysis of more than 1,400 television news stories and a series of nine public opinion surveys between August 2002 and March 2003, we show that foreign opposition reported in the media suppressed support for the Iraq War. And, consistent with existing theory on the effects of elite cues on mass opinion, we find that self-identified Democrats and independents with high levels of general political awareness responded most strongly to these anti-war statements.

We make several contributions. First, in offering a solution to the puzzle of public opinion in the pre-Iraq War period, our research suggests that scholars should devote considerably more theoretical and empirical attention to the inclusion of international voices in U.S. foreign policy news, and to the potential effects of those voices on citizen attitudes in the post-Cold War context. These findings constitute the first empirical demonstration that foreign elites can affect mass domestic attitudes, a phenomenon that has been explicitly ruled out by decades of research on U.S. public opinion. Contrary to that view, we suggest that general individual-level partisan-ideological predispositions can trigger mass reception of non-domestic arguments on foreign policy issues when significant U.S. elite opposition is absent from the news.

Second, our analysis has important normative implications for the operation of mass media as a mechanism of democratic policy responsiveness and political accountability. We do not depict

an autonomous public able to articulate its interests entirely independently of elite messages reported in the news. But we show that the sources of those messages sometimes may reside outside the Beltway, and even across the water's edge. While this suggests that citizens are not as chronically dependent on domestic institutional elites for foreign policy guidance as is often supposed, it is not at all clear that opposition discourse from foreign leaders, no matter how widely reported in the media, can—or should—fill the democratic role that is typically reserved for the communications of U.S. elites. In addition, our findings of significant media reliance on foreign officials for critical perspectives—rather than on domestic nongovernmental sources, or perhaps less well-known Democratic elites—implicate the role of mainstream news as a gatekeeper of political discourse.

Finally, our empirical analysis represents what we think should be the standard for similar work on media coverage and public opinion. Studies of policy debates too often assume a particular information environment rather than actually measuring it. And rarely do scholars merge detailed content analysis with multiple opinion surveys to explore the dynamic, and heterogeneous, relationships among individual predispositions, discourse from a range of political actors, and policy preferences, over the course of a debate. Our approach can serve as a model for how to study media content and mass opinion formation in other policy contexts.

### **Elites and Public Opinion**

The dominant model of opinion formation, articulated most thoroughly by Zaller (1992), is founded on the fact that most people pay relatively little attention to politics and know even less (see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1987, 2002; Prior and Lupia 2008). As a result, most people's policy attitudes are marked by ambivalence and some measure of malleability (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992), and can be affected by the substance of news reporting about an issue. This is especially likely in the realm of foreign and national security policy, where government—especially executive branch—control of information and powerful nationalistic tides

tend to generate deference to presidential prerogatives (Mueller 1973), unless alternative views from credible sources make their way into media discourse in sufficient magnitudes.

Thus, when the mass communications flow about an issue is “one-sided”—reflecting partisan institutional elite consensus—public opinion tends to coalesce behind the dominant position. When the flow is more balanced, or “two-sided,” opinion tends to polarize in response to polarized elites. This uniformity or divergence in mass policy attitudes is typically driven by the most politically aware citizens—those who habitually attend to public affairs, and thus possess relatively more factual information and have at their cognitive disposal relatively more numerous policy-relevant considerations. It is these people who are most likely to be exposed to—and to comprehend—political arguments. This dynamic constitutes what Bennett (1994, 32) calls an “iron law of opinion and foreign policy.”

In most of the empirical work employing variants of this model, scholars have focused almost exclusively on the influence of persuasive arguments made by domestic political elites (e.g., Berinsky 2007; Feldman et al. 2007; Groeling and Baum 2008; Zaller 1992). The typical framework posits that Republicans in the electorate take cues from Republican elites, and Democratic identifiers respond to signals from Democratic elites. Though the information sources potentially available to citizens are myriad, on most issues—especially in the realm of foreign policy—this is a reasonable theoretical simplification: voices outside the centers of U.S. government power only rarely make their way into mainstream news reports (Bennett 1990; Bennett et al. 2007; Lawrence 2000; Mermin 1999). Even when non-official domestic voices do appear in mass media coverage—which remains the dominant source of political information for the vast majority of Americans (Graber 2006)—it is usually only when their views are sanctioned by institutional elites, or when their perspectives are summarily denigrated as outside the bounds of acceptable political opinion and engagement (Entman and Rojecki 1993; Gitlin 1980; Hallin 1994; Shoemaker 1991; McLeod and Hertog 1992).

One implication of this perspective is that foreign voices—leaders of other countries or officials from international organizations, for instance—show up infrequently in mainstream U.S. media coverage of foreign policy, except when they are depicted as hostile to American interests. Moreover, most scholars suggest that even if non-U.S. sources did appear with regularity, they would be irrelevant for explaining mass opinion because they lack credibility with American audiences (Entman 2004; Mermin 1999). Mermin’s (1999, 13) explanation of his decision to exclude foreign voices from most of his empirical analysis of news coverage during eight cases of U.S. military action is representative: “Foreign critics, as a rule, do not phrase arguments in terms that speak to American interests or concerns and often argue in ways that are bound to strike Americans as outrageous, irrational, or simply bizarre.” Similarly, Entman (2004) argues that even in cases where foreign voices appear in U.S. media with some frequency—as in coverage surrounding the attacks on Grenada, Libya, and Panama—ordinary Americans are unlikely to take them seriously, except as stock villains bound to provoke negative reactions: Foreign sources are “people whom Americans might well discount, mistrust, or ignore entirely... The political culture encourages Americans to disregard foreign criticism of the United States,” Entman (2004, 55) writes. As indirect evidence for the irrelevance of foreign critiques in the news, Entman (2004) offers polling results showing strong support for U.S. policy in the three 1980s interventions referenced above.<sup>1</sup>

These assumptions appear to be validated by the little research that has examined the possibility of foreign influence on U.S. public opinion, all of which finds weak or nonexistent

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<sup>1</sup> Both Mermin (1999) and Entman (2004, 153), however, acknowledge the possibility that *journalists* might in some cases view official foreign criticism—especially from NATO allies—as credible, and then be prompted to offer alternative perspectives and attribute them to non-official U.S. sources. Or, columnists may simply parrot these foreign critiques in editorial commentaries or op-ed pieces. Mermin (1999, 101-7) suggests that this dynamic characterized the Libya episode. In this case, he argues, Western European governments’ opposition to Reagan administration policy—which enjoyed widespread elite support in the United States—prompted *New York Times* columnists to communicate these critical perspectives without attributing them to foreigners, and led producers of the *MacNeil Lehrer Newshour* to feature a substantial number of non-official American guests who opposed U.S. attacks on the north African nation. However, Mermin (1999) presents no empirical evidence that would allow him to explicate the mechanisms through which this dynamic might have played out. In a discussion of reliability in media content analyses, Groeling and Kernell (1998, 1066) caution against treating all sources alike in terms of their potential effects on public opinion. Still, their brief comments seem to assume that all foreign voices are by definition non-credible to American news audiences.

effects. Page et al.'s (1987; see also Page and Shapiro 1992) landmark study, for example, examined the influence of news messages from various sources on a variety of domestic and foreign policy issues. While the views of U.S. actors, including media commentators, policy experts, and presidents themselves, moved opinion, the perspectives of foreign officials had no effect (Page et al. 1987, 32). Similarly, in an analysis of 32 foreign policy cases from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, Jordan and Page (1992) found no significant direct effects on aggregate public opinion that could be traced to either “friendly” or “unfriendly” non-U.S. sources that were included on network TV news. And in a study of the lead-up to the 1991 Gulf War, Brody (1994) argued that rising criticism of administration policy from foreign elites on TV news—coupled with falling criticism from domestic leaders—led to increased job approval ratings for President George H.W. Bush. Brody (1994, 219) interpreted this as evidence of a backlash dynamic in which the mass public becomes reluctant to express negative opinions of the American commander-in-chief when doing so appears to “symbolically make common cause with our enemies.”

### **Why Foreign Elites May Matter for U.S. Public Opinion**

The view that foreign voices are irrelevant for understanding American opinion on foreign policy, however, is in part outdated, and in part fundamentally flawed. Our argument draws on political communication scholarship regarding the increasing frequency with which foreign voices make their way into the news, and on research on the individual-level mediators of attitude formation and change. We suggest that non-Americans play a more prominent role in foreign policy debates today than political scientists have so far acknowledged, and that these voices in the media can influence public opinion. The Iraq War debate provides an opportunity to explore these claims.

A growing literature argues that in the context of contemporary post-Cold War foreign policy, it is unrealistic to assume that foreign discourse reported in U.S. mass media is irrelevant for public opinion formation. The few scholars who have empirically examined the prevalence of

foreign sources in American news coverage have found impressive evidence. For example, in his exhaustive study of Gulf War television coverage, Althaus (2003, 390) found that foreign officials and citizens comprised more than one-quarter of the voices quoted in the news. Similarly, Althaus et al. (1996) and Entman (2004) showed that journalists frequently relied on foreign sources for oppositional perspectives in covering the U.S.-Libya episode. And Entman's (2004, 50-75) analyses of *New York Times* and network TV coverage of the U.S. invasions of Grenada and Panama demonstrate a heavy reliance on foreign sources for oppositional discourse absent significant congressional dissent from administration policies, even in the context of the late Cold War.<sup>2</sup> These findings have been accompanied by a call to reexamine the role of non-domestic actors in U.S. foreign policy debates in a post-Cold War era. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of a bi-polar global power structure, U.S. media outlets—continually in search of the journalistic holy grails of balance and conflict—will likely incorporate the perspectives of external actors into American foreign policy debates (Althaus et al. 1996; Livingston and Eachus 1996).

Furthermore, the conventional wisdom that foreign elites are reflexively viewed by the entire American public as hostile or non-credible requires revision. The few empirical studies of attitude formation that examine the possible impact of international voices in the media treat American opinion as an undifferentiated mass. Perhaps in part because of limited data availability, researchers in this area typically analyze aggregate-level opinion only, rather than breaking down survey results by demographic characteristics and other individual-level factors. This is a serious shortcoming in

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<sup>2</sup> In contrast, Hallin (1994) found that non-U.S. voices constituted an extremely small portion of political actors who appeared in network TV news stories about Vietnam between 1965 and 1973. For example, South Vietnamese and other allied officials, on the one hand, and North Vietnamese and Communist guerilla leaders, on the other, each comprised less than 5 percent of total sources. Hallin does not elaborate on this finding, but it is plausible that the Cold War backdrop of this conflict was a significant factor.

While Jordan and Page (1992) found no evidence of direct effects on public opinion, they, too, documented a substantial volume of foreign sources on network news, amounting to nearly 22 percent of the total number of distinct story segments they coded as attributable to a source across their 32 policy cases. And while he assumes their virtual irrelevance for public opinion formation—and thus chooses not to include them in most of his empirical analyses—Mermin (1999, 31) found that foreign sources constituted a substantial presence on the *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour* during the eight policy cases he examined: they comprised 11 percent of the total guests on this PBS program (ranking behind U.S. government and former government officials, and journalists themselves).

light of dominant theories of attitude formation and change, which posit that citizens' social, ideological or value predispositions—as well as their levels of general public affairs knowledge—play important mediating roles in shaping their responsiveness to political arguments carried in the media (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman 2001; Sniderman and Theriault 2004; Zaller 1992). Citizens, chronically uncertain about politics and policy proposals, regularly delegate judgment to elites they believe are trustworthy (Lupia 1994; Popkin 1994; Lau and Redlawsk 2001), and they are most responsive to credible voices (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Petty et al., 2002) who send messages that resonate with their general predispositions.

By predispositions, we mean the general, relatively enduring orientations toward the political world that people form over time through socialization experiences involving family, peers, school, the workplace, longer-term mass media exposure and other mechanisms (e.g., Feldman 1988). Whether characterized as partisan attachments, ideological orientations or basic social values, these predispositions mediate people's responsiveness to the political information and discourse they encounter in the news (Zaller 1992, 23-24). While predispositions point citizens in general directions during public policy debates, they rarely provide an adequate guide for people to articulate preferences on specific issues. Unless they encounter information and arguments that connect these policy debates to their more general (and often inchoate) predispositional orientations, most people are unlikely to express preferences that square with their predispositions, or even to articulate policy opinions at all. And this topical, policy-relevant discourse must come from actors—in the U.S. system, typically institutional elites who communicate through the mainstream media—that citizens consider credible. In short, most people lack the political and public affairs knowledge—and the

exposure to alternative sources of information and analysis—that could enable them to confidently articulate policy preferences in the absence of elite cues transmitted through mass media.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the vast majority of people do not experience public issues and events—especially in the realm of foreign policy—on a first-hand basis. Thus, for the purposes of understanding mass opinion, political phenomena never stand on their own, but are always experienced—and interpreted—through some form of media. This means that the elites messages that citizens typically rely on to connect their general predispositions to particular public policy issues almost always are relayed through news outlets of one kind or other. For instance, what the vast majority of citizens knew and understood about pre-Iraq War street demonstrations or Colin Powell’s historic speech to the United Nations in February 2003 flowed mostly from what they read, heard or saw in (generally mainstream) news outlets (or what they gleaned from members of their social networks, who most likely were themselves following media coverage of these events). In sum, news coverage constitutes a crucial link in the chain of contemporary mass opinion formation, especially in the realm of foreign policy.

Previous theory and research suggests that citizens with different predispositions toward the political world—and to foreign policy in particular—and with different levels of exposure to and understanding of public affairs, should not respond alike to the messages offered by non-U.S. voices in the news. Thus, if we think of the American people as composed of many different “publics” with different predispositions, it stands to reason that particular segments may deem non-domestic voices in the media worth listening to, at least in certain political contexts. Indeed, international relations scholars have recently begun to explore the influence that cues from international

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<sup>3</sup> To be sure, some people hold weaker and less fully formed predispositions than others, and are thus more open to the effects of media messages than others. In the U.S. political context, it is those citizens who identify themselves as independents—unaffiliated with either of the major parties—who are most likely to be ambivalent, confused or simply ignorant about public policy. And it is among independents that our empirical analysis below finds the strongest effects on policy opinion of foreign dissent against the Iraq War reported in the news.

organizations, such as the United Nations, may have on U.S. public support for both the president and military action (Chapman and Reiter 2004; Grieco et al. 2009). At the very least, the conclusion that all individuals—regardless of their predispositions—view all foreign elites as hostile sources should be based on empirical verification, not a priori assumption.

While foreign officials quoted in the media are not likely to be viewed as fully aligned with American interests, in some cases certain segments of the mass public may perceive these elites to be reasonably credible in debates over questions of war and international conflict, especially in an increasingly interconnected world marked by global flows of people, information and commerce. In addition, in a geopolitical environment that lacks the strong unifying thread of anti-communism, episodes in which consensus elite opinion in the United States differs considerably from that expressed by leaders of traditional allies (such as France and Germany), not to mention erstwhile enemies and now uneasy strategic partners (like Russia), may become more frequent (Althaus et al. 1996). While there is little doubt that the Sept. 11-inspired “war on terrorism” has to some extent filled the U.S.-led strategic-ideological vacuum once taken up by the Cold War, key aspects of this vision as articulated by the Bush administration met serious resistance from officials in Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere in 2002 and 2003. In part because of a particularly high level of elite dissensus between the United States, on the one hand, and other major nations, on the other, the pre-Iraq War debate is perhaps the paradigm case for examining the possible role of official foreign opposition in U.S. media coverage and public opinion in the context of the new anti-terrorism framework.

### **Foreign Voices and Citizen Predispositions in the Iraq War Debate**

Indeed, empirical research confirms the prominence of foreign elites in American media coverage of the Iraq War debate. In a detailed, full-text content analysis of every ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news story about Iraq from August 1, 2002, through March 19, 2003, the eve of the

U.S. invasion, we found that officials of foreign governments, the United Nations and Iraq itself accounted for nearly one-third of all reported statements ([citation omitted]). Our unusually comprehensive media analysis showed that while the Bush Administration was the dominant voice of the pro-war position, Saddam Hussein, Jacques Chirac, Gerard Schroeder, United Nations officials, and others were the primary carriers of the anti-war argument.

Of course, most Americans will view international figures as authoritative only to the extent that they are not systematically portrayed in the mass media as misguided or hostile to U.S. interests. Actors depicted as inhabiting the journalistically and politically defined “sphere of deviance” are unlikely to have their views taken into serious consideration by the large majority of TV news viewers (e.g., Hallin, 1994). Thus, we doubt that many Americans would have regarded Saddam Hussein and other officials of the Baghdad regime as credible sources. Not only had Saddam already been (erroneously) fingered by the American public for involvement in the 2001 terrorist attacks (Althaus and Largio, 2004), but his villainous reputation stemming from the first Gulf War and other events would have made the Iraqi leader’s statements about military action against his country especially non-credible (Dorman and Livingston, 1994).

Just as not all foreign elites will carry credibility, they will not be seen as legitimate sources at all times. But we suggest that Americans are likely to be receptive to the views of foreign officials when those leaders articulate perspectives that resonate with citizens’ general predispositions—especially in instances when similar cues from domestic political elites are either faint or absent. Mermin (1999, 14, emphasis in original) may have captured an important aspect of the situation when he wrote that “offered a choice of an *American* position and a *foreign* position, most Americans prefer to be on the American side.” But what happens when Americans who are skeptical of military

action abroad are *not* “offered a choice” of critical perspectives voiced by U.S. and non-U.S. sources?<sup>4</sup>

When the communications flow from domestic elites is at odds with a strongly held predisposition—and we would characterize views about the wisdom of an essentially unilateral, pre-emptive war as precisely that kind of attitude—people are more likely to respond to alternative cue-givers. Americans who were generally uneasy with the prospect of unilateral, pre-emptive military force may have been receptive to foreign elite discourse that articulated such anti-war perspectives and connected them to the proposed invasion of Iraq. For Democrats and perhaps some independents in the mass public, non-domestic elites may have become relevant cue-givers, as foreign officials consistently raised skepticism about the administration’s rationales for war and the wisdom of a pre-emptive strike.

While the longitudinal survey data we use in our empirical analyses do not allow us to directly examine the connection between general foreign policy predispositions and attitudes toward a potential invasion of Iraq, we employ party identification as a proxy for these relevant political values and orientations. This is a reasonable strategy, as extant research has shown that Republicans, Democrats, and independents typically hold different perspectives on international institutions, multilateral foreign policy decision-making, and the use of force, and exhibit divergent levels of ethnocentrism. These general “postures” and values have long been viewed as important antecedents of specific foreign policy opinions (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987).

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<sup>4</sup> In the months before the Iraq invasion, Democratic congressional leaders spent very little time talking publicly about the possibility of war because they believed that opposing President Bush would hurt them politically (Rich 2006, 63). This is not to say that Democrats were completely silent. Several members of Congress, including Sen. Robert Byrd of West Virginia and Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio, regularly made floor speeches denouncing the prospect of military action. But this opposition was largely overshadowed by the October 2002 congressional vote to give Bush the authority to launch military action, a resolution supported by a number of prominent Democrats, including the party’s eventual 2004 presidential and vice presidential nominees, John Kerry and John Edwards. And there is strong empirical evidence that, in any case, mass media coverage did not amplify (and, perhaps, actively marginalized) the skeptical or opposing positions that some Democrats and other domestic sources—such as anti-war groups—did express ([citation omitted]).

Democrats and independents are significantly more likely to endorse collaborative decision making between the United States and the European Union and more willing to support giving up U.S. autonomy in some foreign policy contexts (Page and Bouton 2006, 142-143; Holsti 2004, 170-171). In addition, in surveys conducted in 2002 by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR), Democrats and independents were considerably more likely—by margins of 21 and 17 percentage points, respectively—to say that they supported the European Union becoming a superpower like the United States. Democrats were also more likely than their GOP counterparts to prioritize the goals of strengthening the United Nations and of the U.S. paying its U.N. dues in full (Page and Bouton 2006, 70, 158; see also Holsti 2004, 170-171), which are findings that fit with recent polling data discussed by Kohut and Stokes (2006) revealing that Democrats hold views on the United Nations that are closer to European citizens' attitudes than are Republicans' views (Drezner 2007).<sup>5</sup> Finally, Democrats and independents expressed greater reluctance to use military force than did Republicans in a variety of hypothetical scenarios (Page and Bouton 2006, 69).

Additionally, in a study of attitudes toward the war on terrorism, Kam and Kinder (2007) found that ethnocentrism—defined as a cognitive and affective predisposition of generalized prejudice against outgroups and in favor of one's own group—was a significant predictor of support for the ongoing Iraq War in 2004.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, according to Kam and Kinder's data, Republicans were on average more ethnocentric than Democrats.<sup>7</sup> We suspect this would make Democrats less likely

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<sup>5</sup> Our analysis of the 2002 CCFR data also reveals that such cleavages in attitudes extended to other international organizations as well. Eighty-six percent of Democrats and 74% of independents said the International Monetary Fund needed to be strengthened, while just 59% of Republicans agreed. The divide was narrower on the World Bank—55% of Democrats, 46% of independents, and 44% of Republicans wanted to strengthen it—but the overall pattern indicates greater Democratic and independent support for these international institutions.

<sup>6</sup> However, ethnocentrism seemed to play a somewhat weaker role in support for the Iraq War than it did in other terrorism-related opinions, such as endorsement of increased spending on homeland security and border control.

<sup>7</sup> While the partisan breakdown on ethnocentrism is not reported in Kam and Kinder (2007), Cindy Kam graciously provided us those data. On the -1 to +1 ethnocentrism scale, the average level of ethnocentrism in the 2000-2002 National Election Studies panel, broken down by the 7-point party identification measure, was: Strong Republicans = 0.099; Weak Republicans = 0.088; Leaning Republicans = 0.062; Independents = .089; Leaning Democrats = 0.056; Weak Democrats = 0.059; Strong Democrats = 0.070. While independents did not have substantially lower levels of

to support the Iraq War—as long as they were exposed to information or arguments that helped them forge the connection between this particular proposed military action and their basic openness to cooperating with other countries and cultures. It should also serve to make them more open to news discourse from foreign sources. Kam and Kinder (2007) argue that political context—which includes most centrally the messages from institutional elites and other news media voices—plays a crucial role in either activating or dampening the influence of ethnocentrism on policy opinion. This implies that officials from foreign nations and international organizations, who appeared on the news to counter the pre-emptive war rhetoric of the Bush administration and its supporters with arguments for diplomacy and continued weapons inspections, might have been effective in persuading some Americans, at least those who were willing to consider the views of non-U.S. sources.<sup>8</sup> These significant differences among partisans undergird our expectations that Democrats and independents would have been more receptive to news discourse challenging the Bush administration’s push for a unilateral, pre-emptive military conflict with Iraq.

The conditioning role of predispositions in shaping receptivity to opposition messages is one piece of the puzzle of public opinion on the Iraq War. Consistent with existing theory, we also

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ethnocentrism than Republicans, we suspect that this may be partially a function of lower levels of education among independents.

<sup>8</sup> To be sure, some of these foreign leaders—especially members of an Iraqi regime accused of posing a grave threat to U.S. national security—probably carried little credibility for many Americans, and certainly less than the U.S. president and members of Congress. But there are strong reasons to believe that their views were not irrelevant. Survey data suggest that, at least in the initial months of the lead-up to the war, foreign opponents of an invasion in France, Germany, and Russia likely met a minimal threshold of believability for a large number of citizens. In December 2002, a Gallup Poll asked respondents if they had gained or lost respect for various countries during the debate over Iraq. About France, 26% of respondents said they had lost respect, but 19% said they had gained respect during the course of the debate. Thirty-five percent said their opinions had not changed. The pattern was similar for Germany and Russia, whose leaders were also critical of the Bush administration. The same proportion—20%—said they had gained and lost respect for the Germans, and about Russia, 25% said they had gained respect, while just 14% said they had lost respect. (These figures come from the Roper Center’s iPoll database.) These data are not evidence that anti-war Americans took cues from foreign elites. But they belie a picture of a public monolithically and automatically disposed to ignore or reject statements from the leaders of these countries. Moreover, officials from the United Nations, such as chief arms inspector Hans Blix, International Atomic Energy Agency head Mohammed El-Baradei, and other technocrats would likely have been perceived as possessing relevant information about the dangers posed by Iraq and its alleged weapons capabilities. In particular, because the Iraq episode touched not only on political and moral considerations, but also on technical aspects of arms inspections programs and complex standards of evidence for the existence of weapons of mass destruction, many citizens might have perceived foreign officials—with access to sensitive intelligence information—and expert-staffed multinational institutions like the U.N., to be knowledgeable about the situation.

expect that individuals with higher levels of general political awareness will be more responsive to increased opposition carried in media coverage, since people who are not exposed and attentive to political news simply will not notice these changes (McGuire 1968; Zaller 1992). These citizens are most likely to be exposed to political messages, and they tend to possess the background information and cognitive capacity to connect the arguments they hear to their values and interests. Thus, we expect to find that highly politically aware Democrats and independents—but not their less aware counterparts—are responsive to foreign opposition in the news.

The empirical disjuncture between the predominant theoretical model of American foreign policy opinion formation—which is based on leadership by domestic political elites, and the interaction of these messages with general political orientations and predispositions—and the Iraq War has been pointed out by Feldman et al. (2007) and Berinsky (2007). And a number of studies have explored public opinion toward the war (e.g., Althaus and Largio 2004; Berinsky and Druckman 2007; Foyle 2004; Gadarian 2009; Neuwirth et al. 2007). The topic has also received considerable attention in the international relations literature (e.g., Kaufmann 2004; Thrall and Cramer 2009). But no work has offered an explanation that grapples with the substantial volume of communications from overseas flowing through the mass media to the U.S. public—and the potential influence of these voices on public opinion—nor combined systematic media analysis with nationally representative survey data. We think that such an investigation is long past due, and that the debate over the Iraq War presents a prime case for exploring the incorporation of foreign elite discourse into existing conceptual frameworks on news content and attitude formation.

### **Public Opinion and Media Coverage before the Iraq War**

We begin our empirical investigation by illustrating the puzzle laid out in the introduction. Figure 1 displays the level of support for military action in Iraq between April 2002 and March 2003

among Republicans, Democrats, and independents.<sup>9</sup> The data come from 10 surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. The final poll was fielded in the week before the invasion of Iraq began. The question was “Would you favor or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein’s rule?”<sup>10</sup>

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Despite the minimal criticism voiced by Democratic elites and other domestic sources in news media during the pre-war period (Rich 2006; Jacobson 2007; Feldman et al. 2007; Berinsky 2007; [citation omitted]; Massing 2004), rank-and-file Democratic opposition to an invasion was relatively high. In the first two surveys, taken in April and August, roughly two-thirds of Democrats said they supported military action. But over the course of the next seven months, Democratic support declined substantially, bottoming out at 44% in March of 2003. Days before the first bombs fell on Baghdad, a majority of Democrats opposed the war.

Meanwhile, Republican support for the invasion was overwhelming; no less than 78% of GOP identifiers endorsed the war at any point in the time series. By March 2003, that figure had risen to 90%, 46 percentage points higher than Democratic support. The opinions of independents fell, predictably, between the partisans, ranging from 74% to 57% in favor of military action. In sum, Republicans were monolithically pro-war, Democrats grew more anti-war over time, and independents fluctuated significantly as the debate over, and preparation for, a conflict proceeded. Such partisan polarization is typically associated with high levels of domestic elite disagreement. Yet

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<sup>9</sup> The partisan categories include “leaners,” self-identified independents who said they leaned toward one party. We collapse this group into the Democratic and Republican categories because of the well-known fact that leaners tend to behave like avowed partisans (e.g., Keith et al. 1992). As a result, the category for independents contains only individuals who express no preference for one of the two major parties.

<sup>10</sup> In the April 2002 survey, the question was “As part of the war on terrorism, would you favor or oppose the US and its allies taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein’s rule?” By invoking terrorism and making reference to “allies,” the question probably produced higher levels of support for war than would have emerged without that language. However, since we do not use the April survey in the subsequent analyses, and since opinion in August—when the more neutral question wording was used—is very similar to the April results, the difference in question wording does not confuse the overall picture of public opinion toward military action in Iraq.

by all accounts, high-decibel official conflict was rare in the months before the invasion. Why, then, did public opinion fail to unite behind the Iraq War?<sup>11</sup>

We have suggested that the content of media coverage—and in particular, the significant numbers of foreign officials in the news voicing criticism of the war—may help explain the persistence of significant public opposition. To test this idea, we conducted a detailed content analysis accounting for every pro- and anti-war statement in every story about Iraq aired on the three broadcast network nightly news programs from August 1, 2002, through March 19, 2003. In all, we analyzed 1,434 stories.

We focus on TV news because it remains the number one source of political and public affairs content for the American mass public (Graber 2006; see also Gurevitch, Coleman, and Blumler 2009, Table 1). While audiences for the three major evening news shows have declined substantially in recent decades, no other single media source rivals the Big Three networks, and their dominance was even more pronounced in 2002 and 2003, when cable news and online sources garnered substantially less attention. According to a Pew survey conducted in June of 2002, 36% of Americans said they watched nightly network news “yesterday,” 57% watched local news, and 41% read the newspaper. These are all information sources whose content was likely to be very similar to what we found on the TV networks, given the well-documented homogeneity in coverage among mass media organizations (Graber 2006). At the same time, the survey showed that just 23% of respondents met the following conditions: said they (1) used the Internet, (2) went online for news at least three days per week, and (3) at least occasionally sought out political or international news online. Moreover, the vast majority of these online users were getting news from mainstream media organizations. A 2002 FCC survey found that the most popular online news venues were sources such as MSN.com and Yahoo.com, whose content was produced by major news organizations like

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<sup>11</sup> While we focus on the Pew data, identical patterns appear in polls from other survey firms (Jacobson 2007, 98).

NBC, the Associated Press, and Reuters (Freedman 2006). These data also imply that the audience for political blogs at this time was very small, but data from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study gives us a sense of just how tiny. Lawrence, Sides, and Farrell (forthcoming) report that just 14% of respondents in that survey claimed they read a blog that the authors could independently characterize as political. Four years earlier, political blog readers would have constituted a tiny fraction of the public.

Our decision to examine network news does not imply that alternative information sources, such as cable channels, news and talk radio, and non-mainstream websites and blogs, were unimportant in generating and sustaining anti-war sentiment in the United States. However, given the low levels of audience exposure, it is very unlikely that these alternative sources could account for the powerful effects on mass opinion that we report below. In addition, we find independents—who are as a rule unlikely to monitor progressive online sites, foreign news outlets and other alternative forums that almost surely carried more war skepticism and dissent—to be the group among whom the anti-war tide in response to non-U.S. views in the media was strongest. Thus, we believe our content analysis serves as a good proxy for the pre-Iraq War information environment the vast majority of Americans would have been exposed to.

In our network TV analysis, for each ABC, CBS, and NBC report about Iraq, we coded every attributed statement as supportive, opposed, or neutral toward the possibility of an invasion. We also identified the source of each statement and created a set of broad source categories. Across the eight months of coding, we analyzed 6,059 of these source statements, which included both direct and indirect quotes attributed to named and unnamed sources. A detailed description of the coding scheme appears in the Appendix. Figure 2 displays the number of statements attributed to various sources, as well as the share of each category's statements coded as supportive, opposed, or neutral toward military action.

For the present purposes, two findings are important. First, more than a third (34%) of all statements on the network news in the eight months before the war came from foreign voices. This is a remarkably large proportion for a group whose views are generally thought to be irrelevant in American foreign policy debates. Thirteen percent of all statements about the war were attributed to Iraqi sources, almost all of whom were Saddam Hussein or other regime officials. An additional 11% of source quotes came from non-Iraqi foreign officials, such as French President Jacques Chirac, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin, and German Chancellor Gerard Schroeder. About 8% came from United Nations officials, including chief weapons inspector Hans Blix and spokespeople from the U.N.-affiliated International Atomic Energy Agency. An additional 2% were attributed to foreign citizens interviewed in various capacities.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Second, not only were foreign voices prominent in the mass media, they were the most frequent source of opposition to the Iraq War. Foreign elites made up 65% of all anti-war statements aired on television news in the lead-up to the war. In combination with the minimal domestic dissent—Democrats were rarely quoted (4% of all quotes), and other critical sources, such as American anti-war groups (less than 1%), were largely marginalized—it is clear that the case against an invasion of Iraq as reported in the mass media was made primarily by non-Americans. If U.S. citizens took their cues from opposition to the war reported in the news (Berinsky 2007; Zaller 1992), most of those signals probably originated overseas.

If the dynamics of public opinion are to be understood as a function of media coverage, then there must also have been variation in the amount of pro- and anti-war content. If the volume of opposition reported in the news did not change over time, then it cannot explain the over-time shifts in opposition among Democrats and independents. Figure 3 presents the percentage of statements reported on network television coded as supportive of military action, opposed to

military action, and neutral toward military action. The data points correspond to the weeks between each Pew survey, which we refer to as “news periods.” Clearly, the valence of the information flow was not static. In the earliest part of the time series—which covers the two weeks before the August Pew poll was fielded—a majority of quotes were neutral, 35% were supportive, and 14% were opposed. From that point on, the proportion in each category fluctuated significantly. As the debate over the war proceeded, Americans were exposed to pro- and anti-war views in the mass media at varying levels. Thus, there was sufficient variation to potentially implicate the content of news coverage in the dynamics of public opinion.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

### **The Aggregate-Level Relationship between News Content and Public Opinion**

To explore whether media content and public opinion are related at the aggregate level, we relied on the Pew Research Center polls from which the data in Figure 1 are drawn. For each survey, we calculated the percentage of Democrats, independents, and Republicans who supported military action. We then divided the content analysis data into news periods, corresponding to the polling data, as shown in Figure 3.

As a first cut at probing the relationship between media content and public opinion, we followed the approach of Page et al. (1987). We focused on the change in opinion from one survey (T1) to the next (T2) and the change in news coverage in the period from before the first survey (T1) to the period before the second survey (T2).<sup>12</sup> Our first step was to eliminate the April 2002

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<sup>12</sup> This approach acknowledges that, at the aggregate level, support for a policy position at T2 is constrained by its T1 value, and that the effect of media coverage should emerge from the change in its direction—the level of support for or opposition to a policy position—from one period to the next. For example, we expected that the change in support among Democrats for military action in Iraq between the August survey (T1) and the September survey (T2) was related to the change in the level of opposition reported in the news from the period before the August survey (T1) to the period before the September survey (T2).

poll, since we have no media data from before it was fielded.<sup>13</sup> For the remaining polls, the dependent variable was the shift, up or down, in public support for military action between T1 and T2. The first data point was the change between the August and September polls. (For simplicity, this change is referred to in the figures as the “September” result.) The second data point was the change between the September and early October polls, and so on. Positive values indicated increases in support for military action.

We created a media variable that measures opposition in the news during the period before each survey. For example, the August poll was put into the field on August 14, and the September poll was put into the field on September 12. Thus, the relevant periods of media analysis were August 1 through August 13, and August 14 through September 11. The opposition content variable was the change, from T1 to T2, in the proportion of statements on the news that were opposed to military action.<sup>14</sup> Positive values indicated increases in opposition. We made the same calculations for each subsequent period. If media coverage moved public opinion, we would expect to find a relationship between the two variables. As opposition in the news increased, public support for an invasion should have decreased. In Figure 4, we present scatterplots of opinion change (y-axis) and

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<sup>13</sup> We lose little by excluding the April poll. While a few reports on a possible war with Iraq certainly appeared in the mass media before August 2002, it was late summer when the Bush administration began its concerted strategic communications campaign promoting the war. It is sensible to begin at a time when widespread public attention was first directed toward the possibility of military action.

<sup>14</sup> Specifically,  $\text{opposition content} = \frac{\text{Number of opposition quotes}}{\text{Number of opposition quotes} + \text{number of supportive quotes}}$ .

We choose to measure news content in this way because it facilitates our preliminary investigation of the relationship between opinion and media coverage at the aggregate level. The proportional measure of opposition to/support for the war effectively and efficiently captures changes in the *direction* of the messages about Iraq. It facilitates the analysis because it is a single measure that simultaneously captures changes in opposition and support. An alternative operationalization is the proportion of opposition quotes out of all quotes, including neutral statements. But that measure does not simultaneously capture increases in opposition and support. Thus, we based the measure on the proportion of all directional quotes. This choice, however, is inconsequential for the analysis, since the two measures are correlated at 0.87. The results in Figure 4 were no different when the other measure was used. The more significant drawback of our operationalization, however, is that it does not measure changes in message *intensity*. Given that media effects are contingent on content being sufficiently high in volume to reach a minimally attentive news audience, intensity is a critical feature of the relationship between information flows and public opinion. For that reason, the individual-level models presented below employ a measurement strategy that accounts for changes in intensity. For the aggregate-level analyses here, which are primarily designed to demonstrate that changes in the direction of media content are correlated with changes in opinion, we are less concerned about a properly detailed specification.

media coverage (x-axis). Higher scores on the y-axis indicate increases in support for military action, while higher scores on the x-axis represent increases in opposition news content. Because we expected opposition in the news to have significant effects on Democratic and independent opinion, but not on Republican attitudes, we examined the relationship between opinion and media coverage for each group separately.

The top of Figure 4 shows the relationship between Democratic opinion change and media coverage. The expected correlation appears: The downward slope of the fitted line indicates that as opposition in the news increased, support for military action declined. As the percentage of critical source statements in the media rose from T1 to T2, fewer Democrats were inclined to support military action. The relationship is fairly strong ( $r=-0.56$ ). The middle panel presents the same plots for independents. Just as with Democrats, independent opinion moved against the war as opposition in the news increased ( $r=-0.54$ ). Finally, the bottom panel presents the same relationship for Republicans. The plot for all GOP identifiers reveals a flat line—that is, a minimal correlation between media coverage and support for military action ( $r=0.10$ ). There is even some, albeit weak, evidence for a backlash effect, with Republican opinion becoming more supportive of military action as the level of opposition in the news increased. But overall, GOP opinion about a potential Iraq War was unmoved.<sup>15</sup>

[Insert Figure 4 here]

As noted, these relationships are not conclusive, since the analysis does not account for changes in the amount of coverage or other features of the political environment (such as attitudes toward President Bush). But they are tantalizingly suggestive. Public opinion among Democrats and independents fluctuated significantly in the eight months before the Iraq invasion. Opposition in the

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<sup>15</sup> Because the September result appears to be an outlier, especially for Democrats, we reran the analysis without that data point. The correlations between opinion and opposition news change were -0.17 for Democrats, -0.47 for independents, and 0.10 for Republicans. Thus, while the relationships were slightly weaker, the same pattern persisted.

news—which was carried primarily by foreign voices—shifted over the course of the pre-war period. Those movements were significantly correlated with one another. And the fact that Republican opinion did not move in response to news coverage lends support to the notion that predispositions were significant mediators of responsiveness to dissent in the Iraq debate. However, an individual-level analysis is necessary to determine whether these aggregate patterns are robust to full model specification and whether the effects vary with respondents' levels of political awareness, as well as to determine which opposition sources were most responsible for shaping public opinion.

### **Measuring Support and Opposition in the News**

As we have noted, the prime suspect in similar research on mass foreign policy opinion is normally the valence from domestic elites (e.g., Berinsky 2007; Groeling and Baum 2008). We, however, aimed to be more comprehensive. Not only were we interested in the effects of domestic discourse on opinion, but we also wanted to examine whether non-American sources—Iraqis and non-Iraqi foreign voices, specifically—played a role in shaping Americans' attitudes. (In the interest of concision, from this point on we refer to non-Iraqi foreign sources only as “foreign sources.”)

For both Iraqi and domestic sources, we created a pair of variables—the number of opposition statements and the number of supportive statements in the period between each survey. For instance, during the period of October 2-16, network television reported 50 anti-war statements and 94 pro-war statements from domestic sources. In that same period, there were 23 critical statements from Iraqi sources, and three statements of support for war.<sup>16</sup> For other foreign sources, we include only the number of opposition quotes (28, in the October 2-16 period). This is because the numbers of critical and supportive quotes from foreign sources are nearly perfectly correlated ( $r=0.97$ ), meaning severe multicollinearity would result if both variables were included in the models.

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<sup>16</sup> As should be expected, almost all the Iraqi statements in support of war came from dissidents such as Ahmad Chalabi, not regime officials.

We have run a number of diagnostic tests, and it is clear that the opposition measure is the appropriate variable to leave in.<sup>17</sup> The models thus include five media content variables: Iraqi Opposition, Iraqi Support, Domestic Opposition, Domestic Support, and Foreign Opposition.<sup>18</sup>

Our measures are preferable to a simple measure of the percentage of a source category's statements that are pro- or anti-war, because they capture both the intensity and direction of the information flow in the news. By intensity, we mean the *volume* of supportive or opposed statements from each source. By direction, we mean the *balance* of pro- and anti-war messages. Our measurement strategy mimics the one used in work on campaign advertising, where the effects on vote choice or candidate evaluation, for example, are typically modeled as a function of both the intensity of ads and their directional content (e.g., Huber and Arceneaux 2007).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In the regression models, the coefficient on foreign opposition is consistently negative, as would be expected—when foreign opposition goes up, support for military action declines. But when foreign support is also included in the models, the coefficient for support is negative, and the coefficient for opposition becomes positive. If we reflexively accepted these estimates as true, we would conclude that as reported foreign opposition increased, domestic support went up, and as foreign support increased, domestic support went down. The first part—a backlash effect—has been the subject of much speculation, and it is indeed plausible; perhaps many Americans resented foreign leaders' meddling in U.S. affairs, and thus reacted in opposition to whatever they said. But the second part of the result—that American support for the Iraq War decreased when foreigners expressed support for the Bush administration—would require us to conclude that when “friendly” foreign leaders, such as Tony Blair, and other American allies endorsed military action, the U.S. public became significantly less supportive of the war, *ceteris paribus*. As such a conclusion is unrealistic and has no theoretical foundation, we are hesitant to accept the result. The more likely explanation is that because foreign opposition and support are so strongly correlated— $r=0.97$ —the collinearity in the model is inaccurately “reversing” the signs on the coefficients when both variables are included. This is one potential outcome of multicollinearity (Gujarati 1995; Mahajan, Jain, and Bergier 1977). Our solution is to include only the variable that theoretically has the most predictive power. In this case, we expected that foreign opposition would have been more likely to influence public opinion than foreign support. The Americans with attitudes most malleable in this period were probably Democrats and independents generally skeptical of military action, who were being exposed to heavy doses of domestic support for the war. We suspect that additional support from overseas would have been unlikely to affect them, but that opposition from abroad may have provided cues with which to articulate their own, predisposition-consistent opposition. It is also worth noting that when we ran the models with only support from foreigners, having omitted foreign opposition, the coefficient remained negative and significant—again, indicating that as support for the war from foreign officials increased, Americans became more opposed. This is further evidence that overseas opposition, not support, was driving opinion change among some Americans. Thus, we are confident that our inclusion of the opposition measure, but not the support variable, does not leave the model underspecified.

<sup>18</sup> Ideally, we would be able to slice our source categories more finely. This would allow us to examine whether particular groups—U.N. officials, foreign heads of state, Democratic senators, anti-war protestors, and others—have different effects on public opinion. However, this is infeasible for technical reasons; in some survey periods there are very few statements from these smaller source categories, depriving us of the ability to make any kind of valid statistical inferences. Thus, we are limited to aggregating sources together into the three groups we focus on here—domestic, foreign and Iraqi sources.

<sup>19</sup> Our strategy also makes unnecessary the inclusion of a control for the total volume of coverage. Because the specific source content variables sum to the total, that control variable would explain no additional variance and simply add

These measures are complicated by the fact that the news periods are of unequal length. For example, one period runs from September 12 through October 1—20 days—while the second-to-last period runs January 8 through February 11—34 days. Thus, we corrected for the fact that the volume of statements in some periods will be higher than others, simply as a function of there being more days between surveys, by dividing the number of support and opposition statements by the number of days in the news period. This created a per-day estimate of the support and opposition from each source.<sup>20</sup> Table A-1 presents the scaled measures for each source in each news period.

### **Individual-Level Model of Support for Military Action in Iraq**

We began the individual-level analysis with a logistic regression model, pooling respondents from all the surveys. The dependent variable is coded 1 if a respondent favored military action in Iraq, 0 if he opposed it. The key covariates are the news content support and opposition measures. The models also include controls for approval/disapproval of George W. Bush’s job performance, level of education, ideology, gender, age, race, and party identification.<sup>21</sup> In all, we include 5,755 respondents.<sup>22</sup> Our question initially is simply whether U.S. public opinion moved in response to reported support and opposition from various sources in the news.

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collinearity to the model. We do include a control for the total number of days in a news period, which accounts for the fact that surveys spaced farther apart may show more (or less) change, simply as a result of more time having elapsed.

<sup>20</sup> For example, in the October 2-16 period, there were 28 opposition statements from foreign sources, during a period that was 15 days long. Thus, the scaled measure of foreign opposition for that period was 1.87 (28 quotes/15 days).

<sup>21</sup> Bush approval, ideology and party identification are necessary as controls for attitudes that are likely to influence support for the Iraq War. We controlled for race and gender because we expected that whites and males generally would be more likely to favor military force than minorities and women (e.g., Nincic and Nincic 2002). Our specific expectations for education were not completely clear, but we included it as a proxy for chronic political awareness, a strategy we discuss later. Other individual-level characteristics—religiosity, for example—could also have been included, but the Pew surveys do not have consistent measures of these relevant characteristics.

<sup>22</sup> We were forced to drop the August and November surveys from the analysis, because respondents were not asked about President Bush’s job performance. To determine whether this affects our substantive conclusions, we have run all of the models with the August and November surveys, but without a control for Bush approval. [Those analyses are presented in Table S-4 in the Supplemental Materials for the reviewers.] The results were nearly identical to those in Table 1—foreign opposition drove opinion against the war, while Iraqi opposition and domestic support increased support. As a result, we are comfortable with the models that included Bush approval as a control, even at the expense of 423 cases. One final note: The elimination of the August and November surveys means that our media content variables for the September and December surveys “bridge” the periods without survey data. For example, the media variables for December survey respondents were based on the content analysis from October 17 through December 3.

The results are presented in Table 1.<sup>23</sup> Movements in public opinion about a military confrontation with Iraq were strongly related to changes in the level of support and opposition reported in the news. The coefficients for three of the five news content variables are statistically significant and signed in the expected directions. Most important, given our focus, is the negative and significant effect of the foreign opposition variable. To our knowledge, this is the first empirical demonstration that criticism from foreign sources carried in American mass media can move U.S. public opinion. As leaders from foreign countries and the United Nations raised concerns about the Bush administration’s push for war, Americans became significantly less likely to support an invasion. The finding is especially notable because we simultaneously controlled for every other statement of support and opposition that was aired on U.S. network television news, and a host of individual-level variables, including views of President Bush.<sup>24</sup>

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This has no effect on the results, which, as noted, were virtually identical when the August and November surveys were included. But it explains why the news periods in Table A-1 cover slightly different spans of time than the news periods in Figure 3, where the August and November polls are included.

<sup>23</sup> The structure of the data presented some potential estimation challenges. We had observations at different levels of aggregation—the individual level (ideology, education, Bush approval, etc.) and the survey level (the support and opposition news variables). If the observations within each survey are correlated with one another—as they could potentially be, since each survey was conducted at a specific point in time during the Iraq debate—then the standard errors (SEs) on the coefficients are likely to be too small, perhaps making some estimates appear statistically significant when they should not be. Fortunately, the level of “intraclass” correlation is very low, just 0.008. But to make sure that we were not drawing inaccurate inferences, we ran a series of additional analyses to determine whether alternative models lead to different conclusions. First, we ran the same model as in Table 1, with the SEs clustered on the survey. This is a common technique used to account for dependence among the observations, and tends to inflate the SEs. But because we have a small number of clusters (just seven surveys), this actually produced *smaller* SEs than without the clustering. Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009) note that overly optimistic SEs are common when a model has fewer clusters than parameters, as is the case here, and report that Donner and Klar (2000) make the same argument based on work in the medical literature. The results from the alternative model were virtually identical to those in Table 1, except that *Domestic Opposition* in this the clustered model was significant. Our key finding—that foreign sources in the news moved public opinion—was unchanged. As a second check, we ran a random effects model that is similar in structure to clustering the standard errors and found, as do Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009), similar results. Again, foreign opposition had a negative and significant effect on support for military action. The results of these analyses [provided in Table S-3 of the Supplemental Materials for the reviewers] leave us with the view that the original plain-vanilla regression is the most appropriate, since it did not produce overly optimistic standard errors, as the clustered model did. Moreover, since the levels of intraclass correlation are very low, there is relatively little danger of drawing false inferences because of the hierarchical data structure. In fact, the model in Table 1 presents a more conservative test of our key hypotheses, which strikes us as the appropriately cautious approach.

<sup>24</sup> The control variables move in unmysterious ways. Respondents who approved of Bush’s job performance, had less formal education, were more conservative, were male, older, and white were more likely to support military action against Iraq. Democratic and independent respondents were less supportive of war than Republicans. In addition, we are confident that no single survey result is driving the statistical significance of our key variables, as might be a concern given the relatively small number of news periods in our analysis. To reach this conclusion, we ran the models after

[Insert Table 1 and Figure 5 here]

Figure 5 displays the substantive effects of changes in the news variables on support for war. The estimates show the simulated change in the probability that a respondent favored military action, based on a shift from the minimum to maximum level of support/opposition from each source in the news. The minimum-maximum shifts are based on the observed values presented in Table A-1.<sup>25</sup> Estimates above the zero-line indicate increases in support for war; estimates below the zero-line indicate decreases in support.<sup>26</sup> The first data point shows the effect for foreign opposition, along with the associated 90% confidence interval. A shift from a minimum to maximum level of foreign opposition (from 0.66 to 5.82 quotes per day) leads to a decrease of about 0.09 in the probability that a respondent favored military action. This is roughly equivalent to a 9-percentage point drop in public support for the Iraq invasion.

At the same time, consistent with existing theory, Americans were also responsive to domestic communications about the war. As the number of supportive statements on the news increased—most of which emanated from the Bush administration and its allies—respondents became more likely to back military action. When the variable for domestic support increased from its lowest to highest level, the probability of a respondent favoring military action increased by about 0.11, roughly the same as the effect for foreign opposition. The same effect, however, does not appear for domestic opposition, as the estimate is not statistically distinguishable from zero. The small amount of reported criticism the war from a handful of congressional Democrats, some GOP dissenters, anti-war protesters, and ordinary citizens did little to affect overall public opinion.

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iteratively dropping one survey at a time from the analysis. The patterns we report in Table 1 were unchanged by eliminating any single survey.

<sup>25</sup> For instance, the effect for *Domestic Support* represents a shift from the minimum level of support (3.89 quotes per day) to the maximum (14.18 quotes per day).

<sup>26</sup> These probabilities reflect a survey respondent who is an independent 45-year-old white, moderate male with an average level of education and average level of Bush approval. The remaining variables were set at their mean values. The simulation and all others in the paper were calculated using CLARIFY (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001) in Stata 10.0.

There is also some evidence for a small “backlash” effect from Iraqi opposition, a phenomenon that has been the source of much speculation (e.g., Entman 2004; Mermin 1999) but little empirical investigation. As the news reported more protests against the war from Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi officials, Americans were more likely to say they favored his forcible ouster. However, the effect of a shift from minimum to maximum Iraqi opposition is 0.05, about half the size of the domestic support and foreign opposition variables, and of a magnitude not likely to be especially consequential.<sup>27</sup>

Overall, the model provides evidence that the news moved public opinion. And critically, the only significant effects of elite opposition to the war came from foreign voices. But the results do not tell us how citizens with different predispositions and levels of political awareness—attributes we have argued are critical for mediating exposure and receptiveness to opposition discourse—responded differently to changes in the news. We expected that Democrats, and perhaps independents, would have been receptive to overseas opposition, but that Republicans would have been unmoved by these messages. We also expected that it was among highly politically aware Democrats and independents that we should see the strongest effects. This requires the specification of a model that allows us to jointly examine the effects of general predispositions, chronic awareness and foreign opposition discourse in the news.

Unfortunately, the Pew surveys lack the factual knowledge questions that are the most effective measures of general political awareness (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Price and Zaller

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<sup>27</sup> None of these results depend on our particular operationalization of media content. As shown in Table S-1 and S-2 in the Supplemental Materials for the reviewers, we also ran the analysis after measuring opposition as the percentage of each source categories’ statements that were opposed to the war. Our findings are consistent: as foreign opposition goes up, U.S. support for military action declines. We also examined whether the total volume of coverage, rather than its directional content, affected public opinion. It did not. When a measure of coverage volume was included in a model with directional content, the total volume had no effect. In addition, we found no interactive relationship between the direction of source statements and the total volume of coverage.

1993).<sup>28</sup> Each poll does, however, include a measure of a respondent's level of formal education, which others (e.g., Zaller 1994) have incorporated into measures of political awareness. This is not an ideal proxy for political awareness, since some people with few years of schooling are highly knowledgeable about and interested in politics, while some with advanced degrees care and know very little. But it seems a reasonable assumption that Americans with high levels of formal education tend to be more knowledgeable about politics than those with lower levels, even if the relationship between those two attributes is not always strong.<sup>29</sup> We expected that more highly educated individuals would, *ceteris paribus*, be more responsive to media content that resonates with their predispositions, because they possess the background knowledge and cognitive acuity that encourage exposure to and comprehension of messages.

To investigate the combined effects of party identification and education, we divided the sample into high- and low-education categories. The high-education category represents respondents who said they possessed a bachelor's or advanced degree. The remaining respondents fell into the low-education category.<sup>30</sup> Using that measure, we then specified an interactive logistic regression model to predict support for military action in Iraq. We included in the model all the controls from

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<sup>28</sup> Nor do the surveys consistently contain measures of media exposure, which are often used as substitute operationalizations for general political awareness.

<sup>29</sup> We scrutinized this assumption by examining the relationship between education and political awareness in the 2002 American National Election Studies, fielded in the fall of that year as the Iraq debate was taking place. The 2002 NES lacks a large battery of political knowledge measures, but does include the interviewer's assessment of each respondent's level of political information, a measure that Zaller (1985, 1992) argues is a serviceable substitute for political knowledge questions. The Pearson correlation between respondents' level of formal education and the interviewer rating of political information is 0.34, not especially strong. This means that education level is not a precise measure of political awareness. While relying on education is not ideal, we believe this makes for a conservative test of our hypotheses. If we find media effects consistent with our theoretical expectations even with a sub-par proxy for chronic political awareness, this suggests that the effects we identify might be even stronger if we had a measure that could better tap political awareness. Our view is that the advantages we gain by using the Pew surveys—which give us the ability to examine public opinion dynamically, over an eight-month period—outweigh the drawbacks of the limited political knowledge measures.

<sup>30</sup> We initially created three education categories. In doing so, high-education respondents were those with a bachelor's or advanced degree, middle-education respondents had attended some college, and low-education respondents were those who have a high school degree or less. After some investigation, we discovered that individuals with less than a college degree—those in the middle- and low-education categories—behaved very similarly to one another. Because of that, we have collapsed those two categories, creating a dichotomous education measure, high and low. We have run all the education analyses with the trichotomized measure, and our substantive conclusions did not change. The results, available from the authors, simply reveal that middle- and low-education respondents reacted to news coverage in similar ways.

Table 1, as well as interactions designed to test for relationships among party identification, education, news coverage and support for military action in Iraq. The key variables were three-way interactions among the dummy for high education, dummies for Democratic or independent identifiers, and the various support and opposition measures. The model also includes all the necessary two-way interactions and constituent terms.

The results, depicted in Table 2, support our expectations. College-educated Democrats and independents were the individuals most likely to oppose the invasion of Iraq as criticism from abroad grew louder in the U.S. news media. The negative and significant coefficient for Democrat X High Education X Foreign Opposition indicates that as the amount of foreign criticism in the mass media increased, highly educated Democrats became significantly more opposed to the war, compared to Republicans and to their less politically aware Democratic counterparts. The same story is told by the significant effect for Independent X High Education X Foreign Opposition. This is precisely the pattern that our argument anticipated: The citizens who were most likely to be exposed to and to comprehend foreign dissent—and who held predispositions making them receptive to those arguments—were those whose opinions appeared to move in response. Even when taking account of the other information that Americans would have been privy to in the mass media—some opposition from domestic sources, and a large amount of support for the war from government officials—a substantial group responded to non-U.S. dissent about the wisdom of a U.S. foreign policy proposal.

[Insert Table 2 here]

The coefficients for the two-way interactions between party identification and foreign opposition show the important role played by political awareness in mediating responses to these overseas voices. The Democrat X Foreign Opposition interaction is negatively signed (-0.02), as expected, but has a standard error of (0.15). Thus, less educated Democrats do not appear to have

been significantly more likely than Republicans to respond to foreign voices in the news. The same is true for less educated independents, as indicated by the coefficient for the Independent X Foreign Opposition interaction. The variable is negative (-0.12) but has a standard error nearly twice its size (0.23). We should not be too hasty in ruling out the possibility of significant movement among less aware Democrats and independents, since these null findings may be the result of sample sizes that lack the statistical power to pick up media effects (Zaller 2002). Nonetheless, the patterns are highly consistent with our theoretical expectations.

The substantive magnitudes of the effects are displayed in Figure 6. We focus first on the effects among low-education respondents. With a minimum-maximum shift in foreign opposition, neither low-education Democrats nor low-education independents moved significantly against the war. The estimates are indeed negative, indicating a lower probability of support. But they are not statistically distinguishable from zero. The estimates for high-education Democrats and independents, however, are large and statistically significant. Politically aware Democrats saw a 0.37 decrease in the probability of supporting an invasion, while highly educated independents saw a decrease of 0.59. Because the estimates for high- and low-education Democrats are statistically different from one another, we can state with confidence that highly educated Democrats were significantly more likely to respond to foreign opposition in the media than their non-college graduate counterparts. And while the confidence intervals for the effects among high- and low-education independents overlap, we think this is likely a product of the sample size—just 473 pure independents are in the data set—given the consistency of these differences in a series of analyses. We include the Republican estimates simply for a point of comparison; GOP identifiers, regardless of education levels, were, as expected, not receptive to news sources from overseas.

[Insert Figure 6 here]

The interactions with domestic opposition indicate the influential role played by foreign elite opposition in suppressing support for the Iraq War. None of the interactions between domestic opposition and the party identification or education variables are statistically significant. Thus, it appears that the prime mover of Democratic and independent opinion was the criticism from foreign leaders and officials of the United Nations that regularly appeared in the news. Had the level of Democratic elite dissent been higher, or had more of what opposition existed been reported in the mainstream news media, we speculate that domestic opposition would have had stronger, and foreign opposition weaker, effects. But the oppositional vacuum within the United States made foreign leaders strikingly influential in the Iraq debate.<sup>31</sup> Their role in shaping domestic opinion during foreign policy debates appears more prominent than previously known.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Our findings point to the relevance of foreign voices in shaping U.S. public opinion in the lead-up to the war in Iraq. Both Democrats and independents—precisely those people who possessed general predispositions that likely made them receptive to these messages—responded to increases in opposition from foreign elites reported in the mass media. As leaders from Europe, the United Nations and elsewhere criticized what they saw as the Bush administration’s hasty push for military action, many Americans became less supportive of the invasion of Iraq. These effects were most pronounced among the most politically aware segments of the electorate—i.e. those who were most exposed to news media discourse, and best equipped with the contextual information and cognitive habits required to process these messages.

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<sup>31</sup> Table 2 also shows that support for military action increased among highly educated Democrats as Iraqi opposition increased, and that support went down among highly educated Democrats and independents as Iraqi support increased. A full investigation of these patterns is beyond the scope of this paper. But our analysis indicates that the effects of these variables are not substantively large. The number of statements of support by Iraqis was so small as to be inconsequential. And the backlash against Iraqi opposition among highly educated Democrats did not result in substantively significant changes in support for military action.

Of course, we cannot be certain that the anti-war sentiments expressed by Democrats and independents were entirely the product of the reception of arguments articulated by foreign officials on network TV news. After all, the potential media outlets for foreign policy perspectives in the contemporary United States are numerous, and becoming more so with the rise in recent decades of cable programming, political talk radio and the Internet. It is likely that those domestic actors who did express opposition to the Iraq invasion in the run-up to the war found other communications forums for their views. For instance, indirect evidence suggests that print outlets more frequently transmitted policy perspectives and concrete information critical of the Bush administration's war plans than did network news (Feldman et al. 2007, Bennett et al. 2007, Kull et al. 2003). And it is surely the case that some highly politically aware citizens who were initially skeptical of the idea of unilateral, pre-emptive war—probably mostly Democrats and independents with progressive ideological orientations—encountered content critical of the Bush administration voiced by domestic sources in independent public affairs journals, on alternative news and social movement websites, and in similar outlets.

However, it is important to keep in mind that even today—much less in 2002 and 2003—the audiences for these alternative information outlets and ideologically inflected new media are quite small compared to the evening network news. It is highly unlikely that the impressive magnitude of Democratic and independent opposition to the looming attack on Iraq and the robust durability of these sentiments as expressed in survey evidence could have been in any large part the direct result of citizen reception of anti-war messages in these alternative outlets. Moreover, it is clear that the major channels of mass communications in the United States—which remain by a large margin the key source of foreign policy content for the majority of Americans—carried very little domestic opposition to the proposed war in Iraq. To the extent that war skepticism and opposition made its way into mainstream news in late 2002 and early 2003, it was largely voiced by officials from foreign

governments and international organizations. Thus, the odds are quite good that the typical American confronting an argument in the media against war in Iraq would hear that perspective attributed to a non-domestic source.

We also cannot be sure that media coverage of foreign voices *caused* public opinion to shift. These are observational, not experimental, data. But our research design, which exploits the longitudinal variation in public opinion and news coverage, gives us a reasonable degree of confidence in the causal interpretation. Because our independent variables are measured in the period *before* each survey is taken, we can be certain that the changes in media coverage we report are not a response to mass opinion. Otherwise, we would not find that public opinion fluctuated in concert with prior changes in media coverage. The ability to rule out reverse causation is one of several virtues of our methodological approach. By marrying detailed content analysis data with multiple surveys conducted across a lengthy time period, we can improve our substantive understanding of the sources of public attitudes while providing a firmer methodological foundation from which to draw causal inferences. Similar analyses could prove fruitful in understanding changing attitudes toward health care reform, immigration, or other policy areas where public debate typically occurs over an extended period.

Our analysis also points to the need to examine public opinion on foreign policy—and on other political issues—in a fine-grained manner that accounts for differences among citizens with different individual-level predispositions. This is one reason our findings diverge from the existing literature on foreign discourse and U.S. public opinion (Brody 1994; Jordan and Page 1992; Page et al. 1987). Not everyone responds to the same media content in the same way, and understanding mass foreign policy opinion requires attention to the factors that condition and mediate communications reception, including but not limited to partisan and ideological predispositions and indicators of political awareness. These characteristics play a strong role in determining how citizens

will react to particular kinds of communications in the mass media—in part because they generate assumptions as to the perceived credibility of news voices (Baum and Groeling 2009; Chong and Druckman 2007; Groeling and Baum 2008)—and even whether they will be exposed to such communications at all. Thus, in this analysis we find that Republicans generally did not respond to war skepticism and dissent expressed by foreign elites (or anyone else) on network TV news, probably because of their strong predispositions at this time in favor of the Bush administration, and their greater openness to militaristic and unilateral foreign policy. At the same time, it is undeniable that generally skeptical or unfavorable views of the Bush administration—which were in abundant supply among Democrats and some independents well before the media discussion about Iraq began in earnest (Jacobson 2007)—played a role in public opposition to the war. While surely these views of the administration—along with basic predispositions in favor of multilateralism and diplomacy—made many Americans more open to anti-war arguments than they otherwise would have been, our empirical tests show strong effects on public opinion for foreign sources of opposition in the mass media even when controlling for presidential approval ratings. Moreover, disapproval of Bush and general skepticism of administration ideas cannot explain the *dynamics* of opinion about the looming war over the pre-invasion period—opposition was quite high among Democrats and independents during late 2002 and early 2003, but it did rise and fall over this period, and we have linked these opinion shifts to the dynamics of opposition messages in the mass media during specific time periods.

In the big picture, further theoretical elaboration and empirical investigation of the role of non-U.S. voices in the news as drivers of mass opinion on foreign policy issues is called for in part because these sources are likely to become more prominent in future cases. As the Cold War recedes into history, it is possible that substantial policy disagreement between American governing elites—Republican and Democratic—on the one hand, and officials from allied countries, other nations and

international organizations, on the other, will be more frequent. With a range of complex issues on the global agenda—and lacking the anti-communist theme that linked the United States with its traditional post-World War II allies and tied these nations together under a framework of perceived shared interests—we might expect that foreign officials may be more willing to offer alternative arguments. We also might expect that U.S. media outlets may be more willing and able to broadcast them—professional reporting norms emphasize balance and conflict, and when prominent American elites are in agreement, journalists are more likely to turn to foreign elites than to non-mainstream domestic sources (such as anti-war groups) for alternative perspectives, since these foreign officials are perceived to hold the kind of formal decision-making authority (at the United Nations, for example) that media workers view as a key signal of newsworthiness. Moreover, improvements in newsgathering and broadcasting technology will probably make it easier and more cost-effective to transmit the views of non-domestic elites to American audiences, although the recent corporate retrenchment that has shuttered foreign news branches may serve as a countervailing influence.

This does not mean that the overall mainstream mass communications environment will necessarily feature a freewheeling foreign policy debate offering wide-ranging ideological and policy perspectives. But it does imply that, as Althaus et al. (1996) suggest, our concept of “official sources” must be expanded to include institutional elites from foreign countries and international organizations, many of whom will likely be perceived by major U.S. news organizations as legitimate voices. In any case, further research designed specifically to identify foreign sources in American media coverage, analyze the discourse they propagate, and investigate their possible impacts on public opinion is needed to determine the extent to which our results are generalizable to other policy cases.

Our findings raise a number of important normative questions about the role of the mass media in foreign policy opinion formation. On the one hand, our results suggest that Americans' attitudes are perhaps not as dependent on domestic institutional elites as is often supposed. Confronting a news environment dominated by American sources favorable to the Bush administration's march to war, many Democrats and independents in the mass public turned instead to the relatively frequent critical assertions that came from foreign elites, including the leaders of nations like Germany and France, and officials from international organizations. Moreover, the fact that network TV news included these non-domestic perspectives may be viewed positively from the standpoint of democracy, in that journalists were not satisfied with the basically bipartisan pro-war narrative that appeared to be coming from U.S. institutional elites, and instead sought to diversify content with alternative arguments from overseas.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, most Americans likely would not consider anti-war cues that came from even the leaders of traditional allies to be as credible as such cues that might have been transmitted through the media by U.S. actors. If news outlets had more frequently broadcast domestic oppositional perspectives, such as those coming from American anti-war groups and Democratic members of Congress (assuming that the latter were willing to offer these critical statements), it seems probable that even more Americans (especially rank-and-file Democrats and independents) would have articulated opposition to the war in public opinion polls. We cannot know what role a more critical mass media environment might have played in averting what is now seen by most observers as a historically disastrous military adventure. But it is plausible that the greater public opposition resulting from this alternative pattern of news coverage could have imposed significant

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<sup>32</sup> However, the extent to which mainstream U.S. media outlets more or less accurately reflected the contours of discussion among American political elites before the Iraq War—as the indexing hypothesis (see, e.g., Bennett 1990) would predict—remains unclear. It is possible that news outlets, instead, understated the extent of official Democratic opposition to the Bush administration (and, perhaps, “oversampled” the presumably more newsworthy Democratic support and GOP opposition, as Groeling and Baum 2008 suggest). We are investigating these questions in another stage of this research project, which examines elite statements about Iraq in the Congressional Record and compares them to news coverage patterns.

political costs on the White House that at least may have delayed the attack, or helped to trigger swifter action by members of Congress to hold the administration accountable for alleged mistakes and misdeeds in Iraq that garnered widespread attention after the invasion.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, regardless of the increasing frequency with which critical statements by foreign officials appear in U.S. media outlets—and their increasing importance in public opinion formation—these voices can never replace domestic institutional elites as a mechanism of democratic accountability and policy responsiveness: In addition to their generally lower credibility among the American mass public, European leaders and U.N. officials have no direct decision-making power in American politics, and they lack the electoral incentives that tie members of Congress to U.S. voters.

Especially if our empirical results prove generalizable to other contemporary foreign policy cases, they also raise troubling questions about the role of mainstream media as a gatekeeper of political discourse. From the perspective of democracy writ-large, a mass communications environment featuring bipartisan support for U.S. policy goals and methods, contrasted with skepticism and opposition from official sources overseas, may be preferable to a truly “one-sided” information flow. But this kind of news environment only replicates in a somewhat less U.S.-centric guise the familiar pattern of mainstream news outlets’ reliance on centers of institutional power, and perhaps their ideological bias in favor of established authorities and top-down policymaking (see Herman and Chomsky 1988; Bennett 1993, 2009). Will the media include oppositional perspectives in cases where major foreign governments and international organizations generally support bipartisan U.S. policy aims? Further research on the forces that seem to draw news organizations to the views of foreign elites, rather than to those propagated by domestic non-governmental actors—many of whom may express more fundamental policy criticisms—should be on the agenda.

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<sup>33</sup> See Entman (2004) on the complex, reciprocal influences of media coverage, public opinion, and elite rhetoric and behavior during foreign policy episodes.

Ultimately, the relationships among larger industry and organizational forces, individual journalists, political elites, and other factors in the complex story of news coverage and public opinion before the Iraq War—which many see as a major breakdown of media performance from the perspective of democratic ideals—remain unclear. But our findings about the effects on mass opinion of official foreign voices in news coverage emphasize the high stakes that are implicated in these processes in an increasingly interconnected world characterized by novel threats to both security and democracy.

## Appendix

### Content Analysis of Network TV News Coverage

We conducted a systematic content analysis of network TV coverage in the months before the start of the Iraq War. We analyzed coverage on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news programs from Aug. 1, 2002, through March 19, 2003, the day the invasion began. We used the LexisNexis database to select every story that appeared on these programs and contained the keyword “Iraq.” We then dropped from the analysis 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 1,434 stories from *ABC World News Tonight* (411), the *CBS Evening News* (498), and *NBC Nightly News* (525).

For each report, we coded for several elements, including the directional thrust of each source’s statement about a possible invasion of Iraq, which constitutes the key independent variables in our analysis here. For each source, we recorded his or her name and affiliation (if reported), and later placed that source into one of 23 source categories (Bush administration, Democratic Party, Iraqi official, foreign leader, etc.). We then collapsed those designations into three broader categories representing domestic, Iraqi, and non-Iraqi foreign sources.

In coding 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 push for a military confrontation with Iraq. 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 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 U.N. auspices, it was coded as opposed. Our coding scheme thus captures both procedural criticisms—those that criticized the way the Bush administration was going about its efforts—and substantive criticisms—those that directly challenged the wisdom of military action (see Entman and Page 1994; Entman 2004). The coding scheme for directional thrust of source statements was deliberately designed to be liberal, in the sense that the protocol was constructed to capture even faint signals of dissent regarding Bush administration policy on Iraq.

Before beginning the coding, we conducted preliminary analyses to make sure our scheme could be reliably put into practice. In that process, we resolved any discrepancies or problems with the coding instructions. As the work proceeded, we conducted two rounds of inter-coder reliability tests, double-coding 5% of all stories. For the directional thrust of each source statement, we achieved a Cohen’s *kappa* rating of 0.71, within the accepted range for content analysis (Neuendorf 2002). More information about the coding scheme and reliability measures are reported in [citation omitted].

**Table A-1. The Distribution of Support for and Opposition to the Iraq War from Various Sources, August 2002-March 2003 U.S. Network TV News Coverage**

	Iraqi		Domestic		Foreign	
	<u>Opposition</u>	<u>Support</u>	<u>Opposition</u>	<u>Support</u>	<u>Opposition</u>	<u>Support</u>
August 1-September 11 (41 days)	1.31	0.17	2.51	4.27	1.24	0.44
September 12-October 1 (20 days)	2.35	0.05	3.45	11.25	2.25	1.25
October 2-16 (15 days)	1.53	0.20	3.33	6.27	1.87	0.13
October 17-December 3 (48 days)	1.54	0.04	0.52	3.94	0.83	0.33
December 4-January 7 (35 days)	3.83	0.20	1.00	3.89	0.66	0.03
January 8-February 11 (34 days)	4.41	0.29	3.53	14.18	5.82	2.62
February 12-March 12 (29 days)	4.72	0.03	2.76	11.34	5.13	2.86
<b>Average</b>	<b>2.79</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>2.17</b>	<b>7.34</b>	<b>2.41</b>	<b>1.12</b>

*Note:* Cell entries show the average number of all directional statements per day in each news period coded as opposed to or supportive of military action in all ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news stories, broken down by source category. See the Appendix, and [citation omitted], for a full description of the content analysis.

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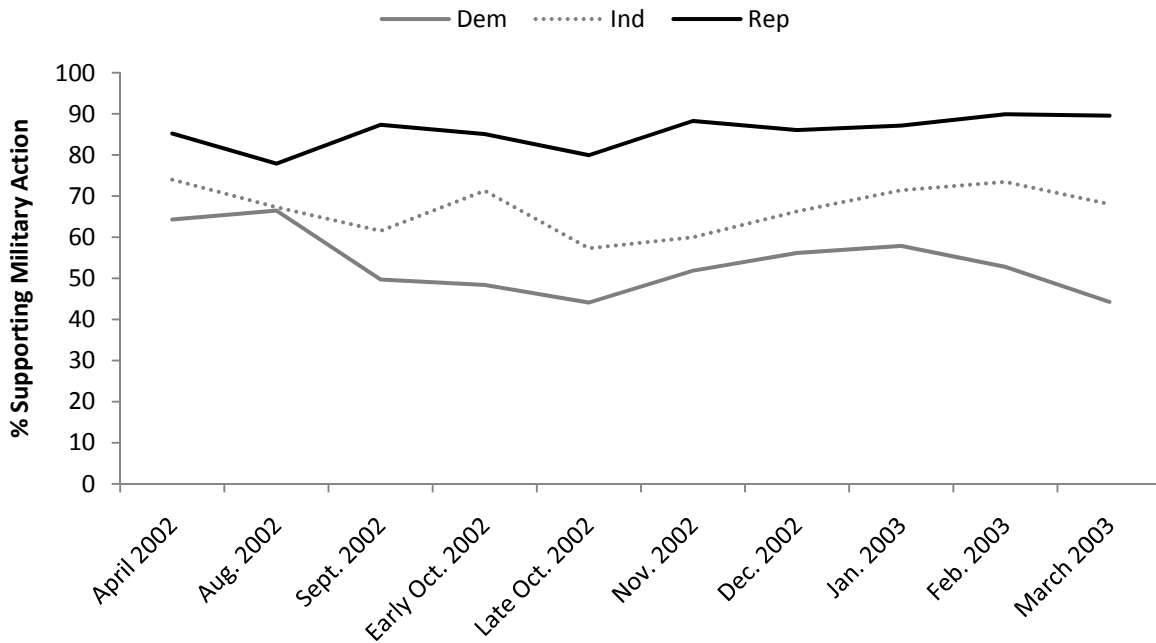
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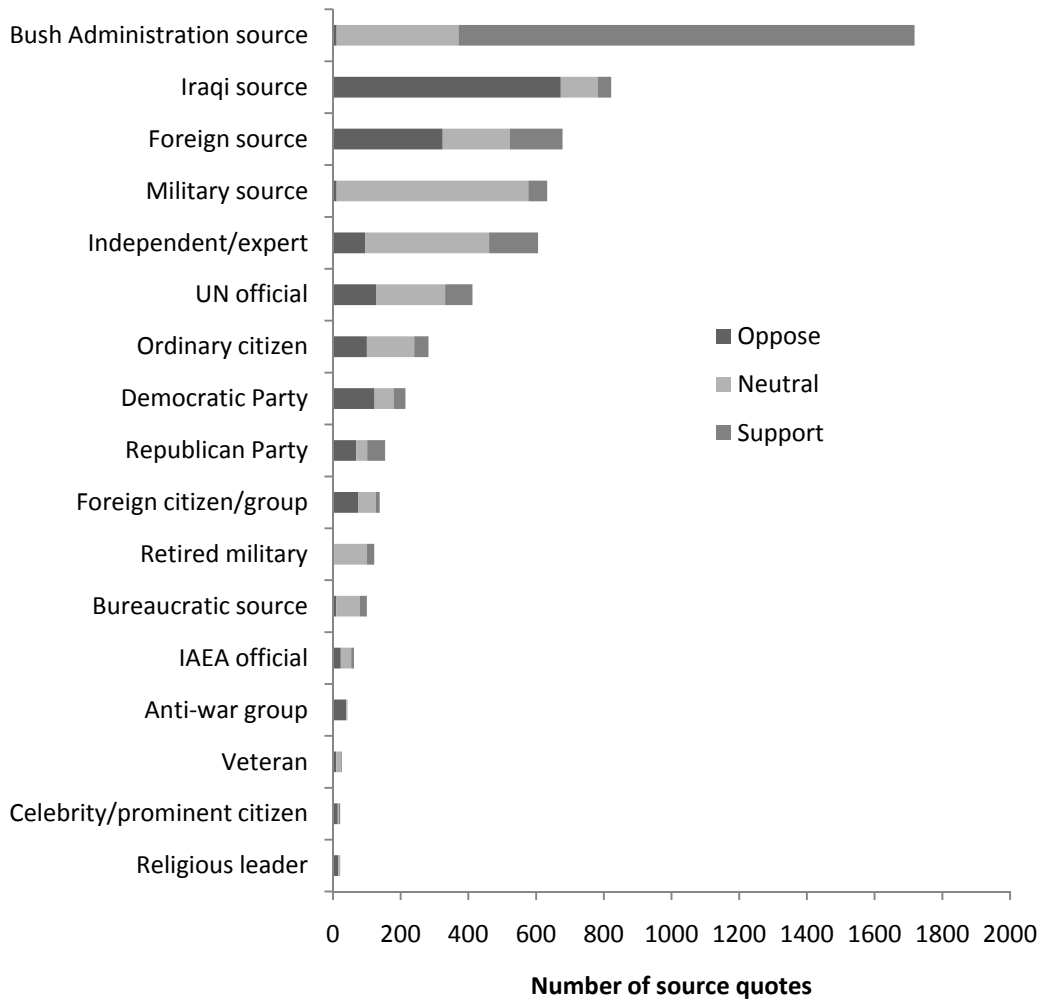
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**Figure 1. Public Support for Military Action in Iraq, by Party Identification, April 2002-March 2003**



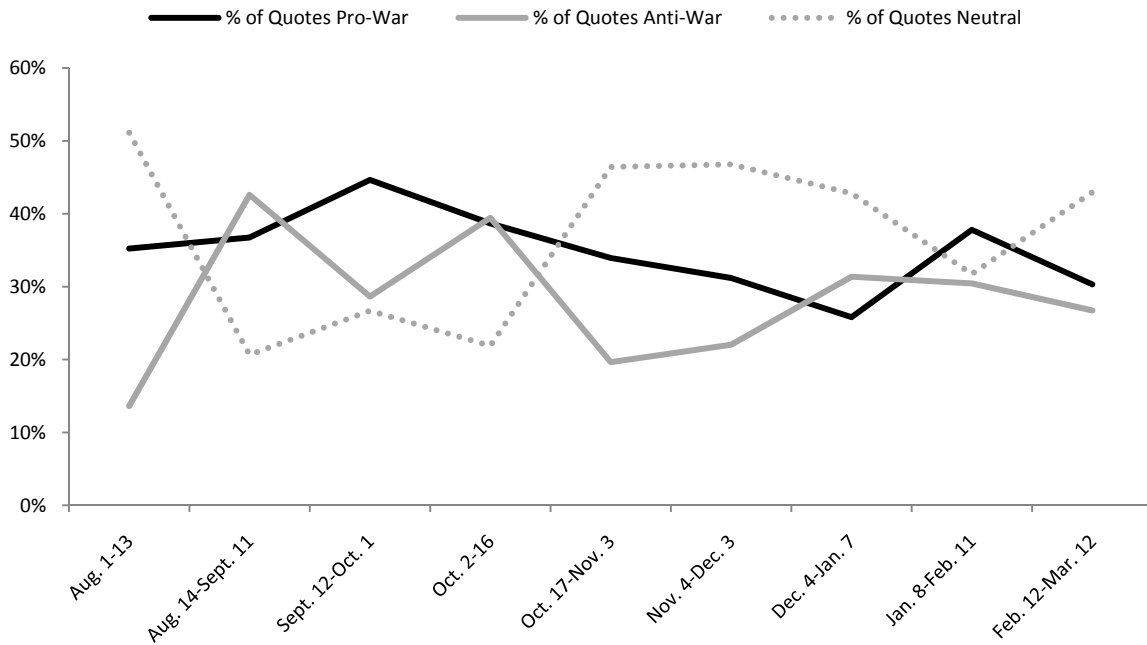
*Note:* Chart shows the percentage of Republicans, independents and Democrats supporting military action in Iraq. Independent “leaners” are categorized as partisans. Data are from surveys conducted between April 2002 and March 2003 by the Pew Research Center. The question in August and thereafter was “Would you favor or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein’s rule?” The question in April was “As part of the war on terrorism, would you favor or oppose the US and its allies taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein’s rule?”

**Figure 2. Distribution and Direction of Source Quotes on U.S. Network Television, August 2002-March 2003**



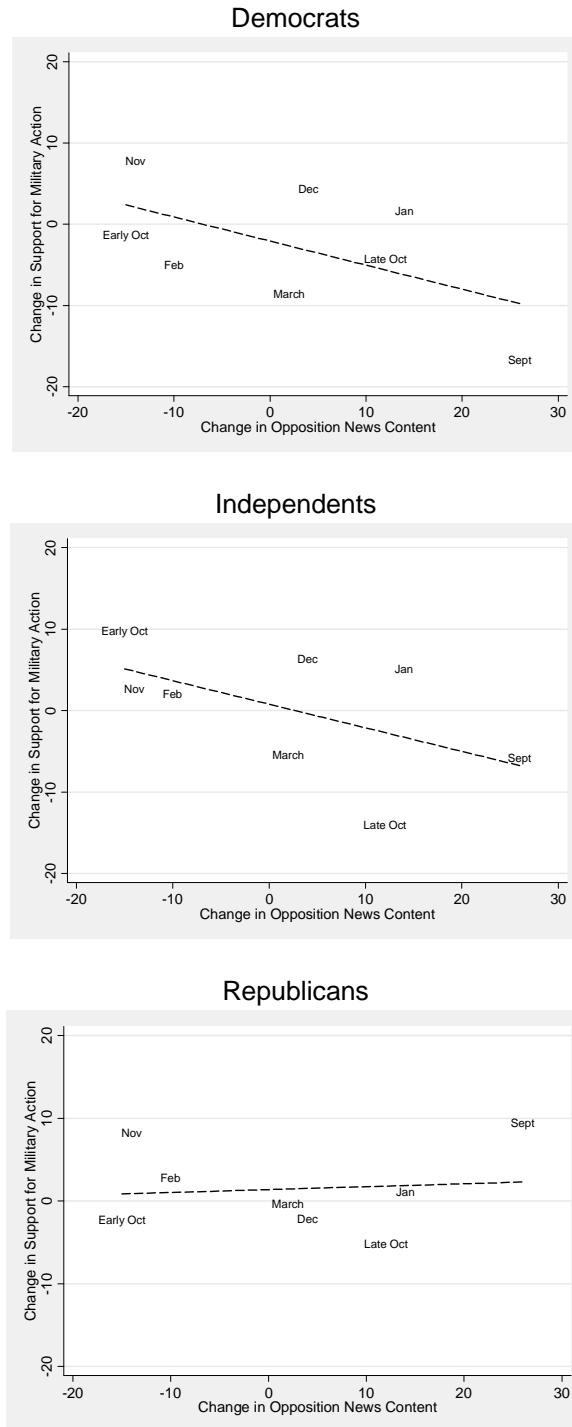
*Note:* Chart presents the number of quotes attributed to each source category in Iraq stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news programs from August 1, 2002 through March 19, 2003. The shading of the bars represents the number of each source category’s quotes coded as supportive of, neutral toward, or opposed to the Bush administration’s Iraq policy. Source categories that did not make up at least one-third of 1% of all quotes are omitted. See the Appendix, and [citation omitted] for a full description of the content analysis.

**Figure 3. Changes in Reported Support for and Opposition to the Iraq War on U.S. Network Television, August 2002-March 2003**



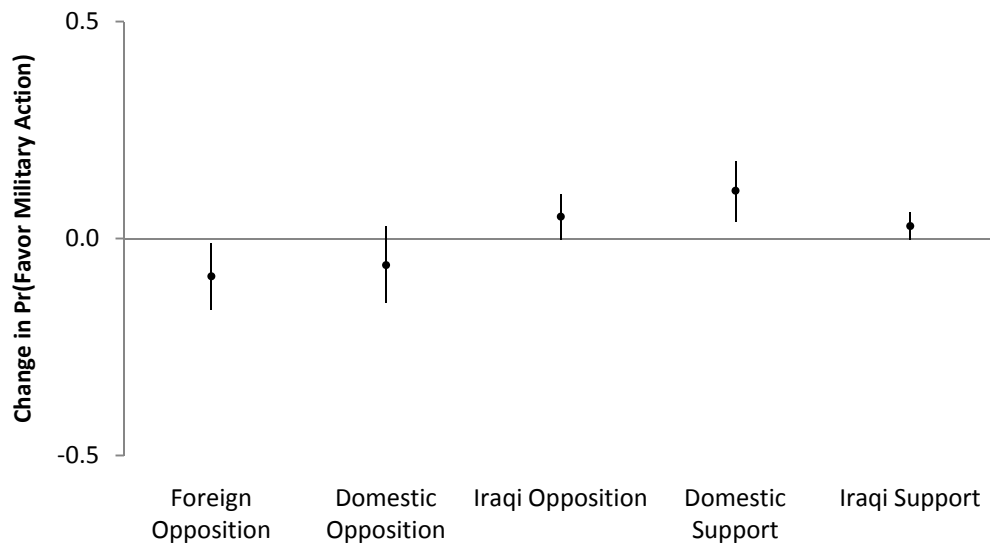
*Note:* Chart shows the percentage of statements reported on network television news that were coded as supportive of, opposed to, or neutral toward military action in Iraq. See the Appendix, and [citation omitted], for a full description of the content analysis.

**Figure 4. Democratic, Independent, and Republican Support for Military Action in Iraq and Reported Opposition on Network Television, September 2002-March 2003**



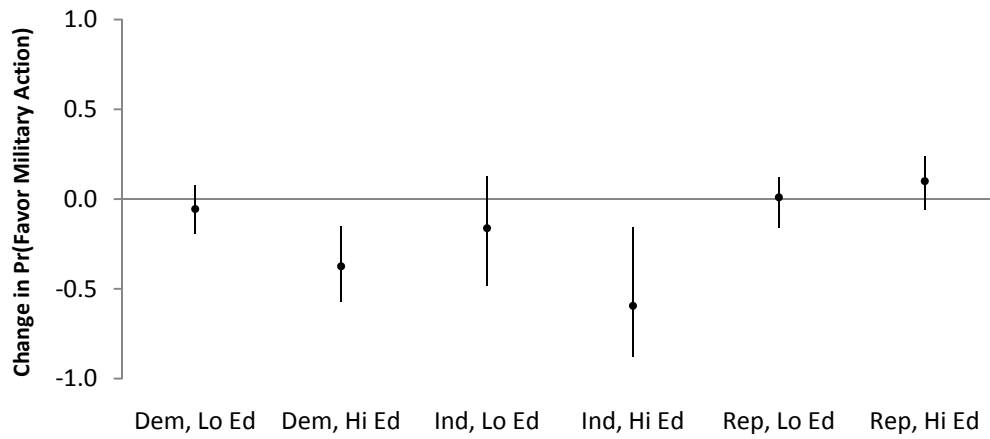
*Note:* Each panel shows the percentage-point change in support for military action in Iraq (y-axis) and the percentage-point change in reported opposition on television news (x-axis) for each period. Public opinion data come from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, and media content data come from [citation omitted]. Independents are only those respondents who said they did not lean toward one party.

**Figure 5. The Effect on Public Support for Military Action in Iraq of Shifts in Reported Support and Opposition to War from Various Sources on TV News**



*Note:* Chart shows the predicted change in the probability of a respondent supporting military action in Iraq, based on a shift from the minimum to maximum level of opposition/support from each source category. Simulations are based on the model in Table 1 and represent the probability shift for a 45-year-old white male moderate independent with average levels of Bush approval and education. Vertical lines represent 90% confidence intervals. Estimates were calculated using Clarify (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001) in Stata 10.0.

**Figure 6. The Effect on Public Support for Military Action in Iraq of Shifts in Reported Foreign Opposition to War, by Party Identification and Education Level**



*Note:* Chart shows the predicted change in the probability of a respondent supporting military action in Iraq, based on a shift from the minimum to maximum level of foreign opposition. Simulations are based on the models in Table 2 and represent the probability shift for a 45-year-old white male moderate with average levels of Bush approval. Vertical lines represent 90% confidence intervals. Estimates were calculated using Clarify (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001) in Stata 10.0.

**Table 1. The Effects of Reported Opposition and Support in the News on Public Attitudes toward Military Action in Iraq**

Foreign Opposition	-0.14** (0.06)
Domestic Opposition	-0.03 (0.14)
Iraqi Opposition	0.10* (0.07)
Domestic Support	0.06** (0.03)
Iraqi Support	0.66 (0.56)
Bush Approval	1.95** (0.09)
Education	-0.29** (0.05)
Ideology	0.20** (0.04)
Female	-0.34** (0.08)
Age	-0.02** (0.00)
White	0.38** (0.09)
Democrat	-0.70** (0.10)
Independent	-0.44** (0.14)
Days in News Period	0.02** (0.01)
Constant	-0.36 (0.53)
N	5,755
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.25
Log Likelihood	-3577.79
$\chi^2$	1137.50

\*\*p<.05; \*p<.10, one-tailed

*Note:* Dependent variable is support for U.S. military action in Iraq. Cell entries are logistic regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. See fn.23 for results of alternative modeling approaches. Data are from Pew Research Center surveys conducted between September 2002 and March 2003.

**Table 2. The Effects of Party Identification, Education, and Reported Opposition and Support on Public Attitudes toward Military Action in Iraq**

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Democrat X High Education X Foreign Opposition	-0.38** (0.20)
Independent X High Education X Foreign Opposition	-0.52* (0.34)
Democrat X High Education X Domestic Opposition	0.33 (0.31)
Independent X High Education X Domestic Opposition	0.47 (0.47)
Democrat X High Education X Iraqi Opposition	0.37** (0.22)
Independent X High Education X Iraqi Opposition	0.26 (0.35)
Democrat X High Education X Domestic Support	-0.12 (0.13)
Independent X High Education X Domestic Support	0.01 (0.21)
Democrat X High Education X Iraqi Support	-4.53** (2.53)
Independent X High Education X Iraqi Support	-6.94** (3.64)
High Education X Iraqi Opposition	-0.07 (0.19)
High Education X Iraqi Support	1.50 (2.10)
High Education X Domestic Opposition	0.05 (0.24)
High Education X Domestic Support	0.07 (0.11)
High Education X Foreign Opposition	0.13 (0.17)
Democrat X Iraqi Opposition	-0.17 (0.16)
Democrat X Iraqi Support	2.53** (1.47)
Democrat X Domestic Opposition	-0.23 (0.18)
Democrat X Domestic Support	0.08 (0.08)
Democrat X Foreign Opposition	-0.02 (0.15)
Independent X Iraqi Opposition	0.23 (0.26)
Independent X Iraqi Support	2.46

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	(2.14)
Independent X Domestic Opposition	0.17 (0.31)
Independent X Domestic Support	-0.04 (0.12)
Independent X Foreign Opposition	-0.12 (0.23)
Iraqi Opposition	0.14 (0.14)
Iraqi Support	-0.55 (1.22)
Domestic Opposition	0.02 (0.19)
Domestic Support	0.02 (0.07)
Foreign Opposition	-0.09 (0.13)
Bush Approval	1.94** (0.09)
High Education	-1.20** (0.30)
Ideology	0.18** (0.05)
Female	-0.35** (0.08)
Age	-0.02** (0.00)
White	0.40** (0.09)
Democrat	-0.42 (0.33)
Independent	-1.14** (0.61)
Days in News Period	0.02** (0.01)
Constant	-0.71 (0.57)
N	5,755
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.26
Log Likelihood	-3577.79
$\chi^2$	1255.37

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*Note:* Dependent variable is support for U.S. military action in Iraq. Cell entries are logistic regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. See fn.23 for results of alternative modeling approaches. Data are from Pew Research Center surveys conducted between September 2002 and March 2003.