

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

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Public opinion in the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq War presents a puzzle. Despite the fact that domestic political elites publicly voiced little opposition to the invasion, large numbers of Americans remained opposed to military action throughout the pre-war period, in contrast to the predictions of existing theory. We argue that some rank-and-file Democrats and independents expressed opposition because of the widely reported antiwar positions staked out by foreign, not domestic, elites. Merging a large-scale content analysis of news coverage with public opinion surveys from August 2002 through March 2003, we show that Democrats and independents—especially those with high levels of 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 communication effects on U.S. public opinion, show that scholars must account for the role played by non-U.S. officials in prominent foreign policy debates.

Most theorizing and empirical research on American mass communications and public opinion conclude 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.” While recent work has made revisions to this model (Baum and Groeling 2010; Berinsky 2009), its principal tenets remain intact. 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 domestic 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 preemptive invasion and occupation of Iraq (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2007; Calabrese 2005; Hayes and Guardino 2010; 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

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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, Huddy, and Marcus 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, many of whom were generally predisposed to reject a preemptive and unilateral invasion. Employing a dynamic approach 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 antiwar statements.

We make several contributions. First, in offering a solution to the puzzle of public opinion in the pre-Iraq War period, our research adopts a new theoretical perspective. Scholars have generally cast aside foreign actors as influences on U.S. public opinion, but we argue that individual-level partisan-ideological predispositions can trigger mass reception of nondomestic arguments on foreign policy issues when significant U.S. elite opposition is absent from the news. In such circumstances, models of attitude formation must consider the possibility that foreign voices can shape the contours of domestic public opinion. Our findings—which constitute the first empirical demonstration that foreign elites can affect mass policy attitudes—raise the prospect of wider influence by international actors on American public opinion in a post-Cold War context than the conventional wisdom allows.

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 mes-

sages 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 combine 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 is a promising 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 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.

In most of the empirical work employing variants of the dominant model, scholars have focused almost exclusively on the influence of persuasive arguments made by domestic political elites (e.g., Baum and Groeling 2010;

Berinsky 2009; Berinsky and Druckman 2007; Feldman, Huddy, and Marcus 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: mainstream news reports are dominated by voices emanating from the centers of U.S. government power (Bennett 1990; Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2007; Lawrence 2000; Mermin 1999). When nonofficial domestic voices do appear in mass media coverage—which remains the primary 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; McLeod and Hertog 1992; Shoemaker 1991).

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. “Foreign critics, as a rule,” Mermin notes, “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” (1999, 13). Similarly, Entman calls foreign sources “people whom Americans might well discount, mistrust, or ignore entirely. . . . The political culture encourages Americans to disregard foreign criticism of the United States” (2004, 55).

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 effects. Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey’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 attitudes. While the views of U.S. actors, including media commentators, policy experts, and presidents themselves, moved opinion, the perspectives of foreign officials did not (Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 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 signifi-

cant direct effects on aggregate public opinion that could be traced to either “friendly” or “unfriendly” non-U.S. sources 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 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” (1994, 219).

Why Foreign Elites Can Matter for U.S. Public Opinion

A growing literature, however, 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 content have found impressive evidence. 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 cited 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. Jordan and Page (1992) and Mermin (1999) have documented a substantial volume of foreign sources in U.S. television outlets. And Entman’s (2004, 50–75) analyses of *New York Times* and network TV coverage of the 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.¹ These findings have been accompanied by a call to reexamine the role of nondomestic actors in recent U.S. foreign policy debates: with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of a bipolar global power structure, American media outlets—continually in search of the journalistic holy

¹In 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% 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.

grails of balance and conflict—may increasingly incorporate the perspectives of external actors into foreign policy discussions (Althaus et al. 1996; Livingston and Eachus 1996).

At the same time, the conventional wisdom that foreign elites are reflexively viewed by the entire American public as hostile or noncredible 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 data limitations, researchers in this area have typically analyzed aggregate-level opinion only, rather than breaking down survey results by demographic characteristics and other individual-level factors. This is a serious shortcoming in 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). By predispositions, we mean the basic, 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; Zaller 1992).

Predispositions alone, however, are insufficient to guide citizens' policy views. Unless people encounter information and arguments that connect issue debates to their more general (and often inchoate) orientations, most individuals 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 (Petty, Priester, and Brinol 2002). 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.²

²To 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 analyses below find the strongest effects on policy opinion of foreign dissent against the Iraq War reported in the news.

Previous theory and research suggest 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. 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. Indeed, international relations scholars have recently begun to explore the influence that cues from organizations like the United Nations may have on U.S. public support for both the president and military action (Chapman 2011; Chapman and Reiter 2004; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009; 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 on purely a priori assumption.

Foreign Voices and Citizen Predispositions in the Iraq War Debate

With its high level of disagreement between U.S. and foreign leaders, the Iraq War debate presents an ideal opportunity to examine this possibility. Existing work has confirmed the prominence of foreign critics of the Bush administration—including various United Nations officials, French President Jacques Chirac, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, and Saddam Hussein himself, among others—in American media coverage of the episode (Hayes and Guardino 2010).

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 news consumers (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 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” (1999, 14, emphasis in original). 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?³

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, preemptive war as precisely that kind of attitude—people are more likely to respond to available alternative cue givers. Americans who were generally uneasy with the prospect of military action may have been receptive to foreign elite discourse that articulated skepticism about the administration's rationales for war and the wisdom of a preemptive strike on Iraq.

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

³In 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, as well as by the senator who was to become the early front-runner for the 2008 nomination, Hillary Clinton. 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 antiwar groups—did express (Guardino and Hayes 2010).

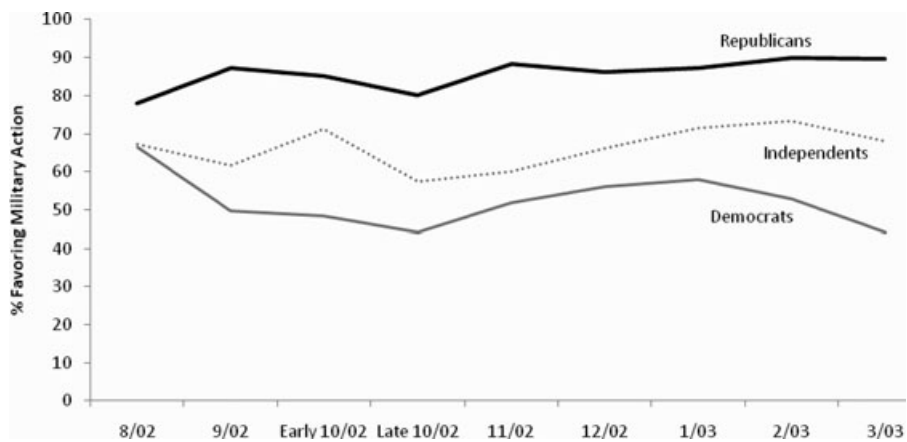
different perspectives on international institutions, multilateral foreign policy decision making, and the use of force. These general “postures” and values have long been viewed as important antecedents of specific foreign policy opinions (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987).

Democrats and independents are significantly more likely to endorse collaborative decision making between the United States and the European Union and are more willing to support giving up American autonomy in some foreign policy contexts (Holsti 2004, 170–71; Page and Bouton 2006, 142–43). 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, 170–71), 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). Democrats and independents also expressed greater reluctance to use military force than did Republicans in a variety of hypothetical scenarios (Page and Bouton 2006, 69). Finally, 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 (see also Althaus and Coe 2011). Crucially, according to Kam and Kinder's data, Republicans were on average more ethnocentric than Democrats.⁴ We suspect this would make Democrats less likely to support the essentially unilateral 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. This predisposition should also serve to make them more open to news discourse from foreign sources.⁵ These significant

⁴We are grateful to Cindy Kam for providing us with these data.

⁵Kam and Kinder (2007) argue that political context—which includes most centrally 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 preemptive war rhetoric of the Bush administration and its supporters with

FIGURE 1 Public Support for Military Action in Iraq, by Party Identification, August 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 August 2002 and March 2003 by the Pew Research Center. The question was: “Would you favor or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein’s rule?”

differences among partisans undergird our expectations that Democrats and independents would have been receptive to news discourse challenging the Bush administration’s push for a unilateral, preemptive military conflict with Iraq.

The conditioning role of predispositions in shaping receptivity to dissenting messages is one piece of the puzzle of public opinion about the Iraq War. Consistent with existing theory, we also 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). Citizens with higher levels of political awareness are more likely to be exposed to messages,

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.

Moreover, there is clear evidence from polling data that for a substantial number of Americans, the credibility of foreign voices was not damaged during the debate over the Iraq War—and in some cases was even enhanced (see Hayes and Guardino 2010, 65). In addition, 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 United Nations to be knowledgeable about the situation.

and they tend to possess the background information and cognitive capacity to connect the arguments they hear to their values and perceived interests. Thus, we expect to find that highly aware Democrats and independents—but not their less aware counterparts—were responsive to foreign criticism of the Iraq War in the news.⁶

Public Opinion and Media Coverage before the Iraq War

We begin our analysis by illustrating the puzzle laid out in the introduction. Figure 1 displays the level of support for military action in Iraq between August 2002 and March 2003 among Republicans, Democrats, and

⁶The 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 awareness and orientations—and the Iraq War has been pointed out by Feldman, Huddy, and Marcus (2007) and Berinsky (2009). 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 2010; Neuwirth, Frederick, and Mayo 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—and the potential influence of these voices on U.S. public opinion—nor combined systematic media analysis with nationally representative survey data.

independents.⁷ The data come from nine 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?”

Despite the minimal criticism voiced by Democratic elites and other domestic sources in news media during the prewar period (Berinsky 2009; Feldman, Huddy, and Marcus 2007; Hayes and Guardino 2010; Jacobson 2007; Massing 2004; Rich 2006), rank-and-file Democratic opposition to an invasion was relatively high. In the first survey, taken in 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 2003, days before the first bombs fell on Baghdad. Meanwhile, Republican support for the invasion was overwhelming; no less than 78% of GOP identifiers endorsed the war at every 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 prowar, Democrats grew more antiwar 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 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?⁸

We have suggested that 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 the plausibility of this idea, we conducted a detailed content analysis accounting for every pro- and antiwar statement in every story about Iraq aired on the three broadcast network nightly news programs from August 1, 2002, through March 19, 2003, the eve of the invasion. In all, we analyzed 1,434 stories.

⁷The 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.

⁸While we focus on the Pew data, identical patterns appear in polls from other survey firms (Jacobson 2007, 98).

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 outlets garnered substantially less attention. In addition, given the well-documented homogeneity in coverage among mass media organizations (Graber 2006), network TV content was likely very similar to the other most popular forms of news, such as local television and newspapers.⁹ Thus, our content analysis serves as a good proxy for the information environment that 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

⁹Online news audiences were small at this time. A 2002 Pew 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 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 evidence from the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study gives us a sense of just how tiny. Lawrence, Sides, and Farrell (2010) 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 mere 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 nonmainstream websites and blogs, were unimportant in generating and sustaining antiwar 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 antiwar tide in response to non-U.S. views in the media was strongest.

To validate our choice to focus on TV news, we also conducted an identical content analysis of a random sample of 500 *USA Today* stories over the same period. The distribution of source-statements in each category was strikingly similar, resulting in a correlation with TV coverage of 0.91. Likewise, foreign voices were the top (non-Iraqi) source of criticism in the newspaper coverage, just as in network TV news, and domestic sources of opposition received relatively little attention. The main difference was a larger proportion of neutral coverage in *USA Today* and slightly more attention to the views of independent experts. But the differences are slight and similarities great, suggesting that our comprehensive TV data are representative of the broader mass communications environment.

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 full description of the coding scheme appears in the supplementary technical appendix and in Hayes and Guardino (2010). We achieved acceptable rates of intercoder reliability on our key variables.

Detailed results from the content analysis are reported in Hayes and Guardino (2010), but two findings are important for the present purposes. 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 Chirac, Schroeder, and various British Labour Party members opposed to the war. About 8% came from U.N. 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.

Second, not only were foreign voices prominent in the mass media, but they were also the most frequent source of opposition to the Iraq War. Foreigners accounted for 65% of all antiwar statements aired on television news in the lead-up to the war. In other words, nearly two of every three statements opposed to the Bush administration's war plans presented on the network news came from non-American sources. In combination with the minimal domestic dissent—Democrats were rarely quoted (4% of all quotes), and other critical sources, such as American antiwar 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 mainstream news, most of those signals probably originated overseas.

And 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 antiwar content. Without over-time change in the volume of opposition reported in the news, media coverage cannot explain the shifts in opposition among Democrats and independents. Figure 2 presents the percentage of statements reported on network television coded as supportive of military action, opposed to military action, and neu-

tral 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 statements was 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 antiwar views in the mass media at varying levels. There was clearly sufficient variation to potentially implicate the content of news coverage in the dynamics of public opinion.

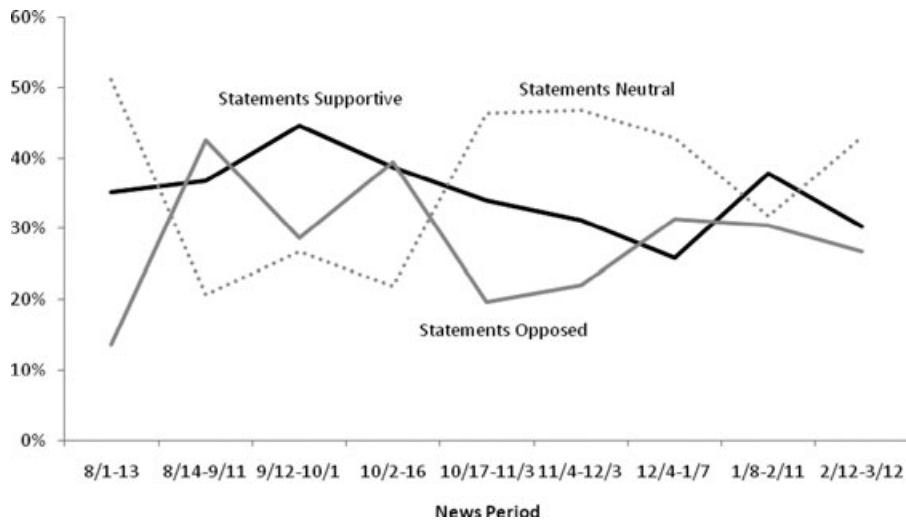
As we have noted, the prime suspect in similar research on mass foreign policy opinion is normally the valence from domestic elites (e.g., Baum and Groeling 2010). We, however, aimed to be more comprehensive. Not only were we interested in the effects of domestic discourse on opinion, but we also wanted 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.”) To explore the relationship between media coverage and American support for the proposed invasion of Iraq, we created measures of news content that we merged with our survey data.

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 news period of October 2–16—the period before the late October Pew poll—network television reported 50 antiwar statements and 94 prowar statements from domestic sources. In that same period, there were 23 critical statements from Iraqi sources and three statements of support for war.¹⁰ 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 in each news period are nearly perfectly correlated ($r = 0.97$); severe multicollinearity would result if both variables were included in the models. We have run a number of diagnostic tests, and it is clear that the opposition measure is the appropriate variable to leave in.¹¹ The models thus include five media content

¹⁰As should be expected, almost all the Iraqi statements in support of war came from dissidents such as Ahmad Chalabi, not regime officials.

¹¹In 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

FIGURE 2 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 supplementary technical appendix and Hayes and Guardino (2010) for a full description of the content analysis.

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, 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 UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, 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). 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 that were 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. Additional support from overseas would have been unlikely to affect them, but 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

variables: Iraqi Opposition, Iraqi Support, Domestic Opposition, Domestic Support, and Foreign Opposition.¹²

Our measures are preferable to a simple measure of the percentage of a source category's statements that are pro- or antiwar, 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 antiwar 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).¹³

more opposed. This is further evidence that overseas opposition, not support, was driving opinion change. Thus, we are confident that including the opposition measure, but not the support variable, does not leave the model underspecified.

¹²Ideally, 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, antiwar protestors, and others—had 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 valid statistical inferences. Thus, we are limited to aggregating sources together into the three groups we focus on here—domestic, foreign, and Iraqi sources.

¹³Our strategy also makes unnecessary the inclusion of a control for the total volume of coverage. Because the specific source content

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.¹⁴ In all, we include 5,755 respondents.¹⁵ Our question initially is simply whether U.S. public opinion moved in response to reported support and opposition from various sources in the news.

variables sum to the total, that control variable would explain no additional variance and would simply add 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. Moreover, the 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. 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 polls, 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. 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). Table A-1 in the supplementary technical appendix presents the scaled measures for each source in each news period.

¹⁴Bush 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 would 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 attributes.

¹⁵We 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 A-5 in the supplementary technical appendix.) 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. Thus, 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

TABLE 1 The Effects of 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 ²	0.25
Log Likelihood	−3577.79
χ 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.15 for results of alternative modeling approaches. Data are from Pew Research Center surveys conducted between September 2002 and March 2003.

“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. This has no effect on the results, which, as noted, were virtually identical when the August and November surveys were included.

The results are presented in Table 1.¹⁶ Movements in public opinion about a military confrontation with Iraq were related to changes in the level of support and opposition reported in the news. The coefficients for two 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, the collective American public 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.¹⁷

¹⁶The 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 “intracluster” 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 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, similar results. Again, foreign opposition had a negative and significant effect on support for military action. The results of these analyses (provided in Table A-4 of the supplementary technical appendix) 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.

¹⁷The control variables move in unambiguous ways. Respondents who approved of Bush's job performance, had less formal educa-

Figure 3 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. The minimum-maximum shifts are based on the observed values presented in Table A-1 in the supplementary technical appendix.¹⁸ Estimates above the zero-line indicate increases in support for war; estimates below the zero-line indicate decreases in support.¹⁹ 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—most of which emanated from the Bush administration and its political allies—increased, 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 dynamic, however, does not appear for domestic opposition, as the estimate is not statistically distinguishable from zero. The small amount of media-reported criticism of the war from a handful of congressional Democrats, some GOP dissenters, antiwar protesters, and ordinary citizens did little to affect collective public opinion.²⁰

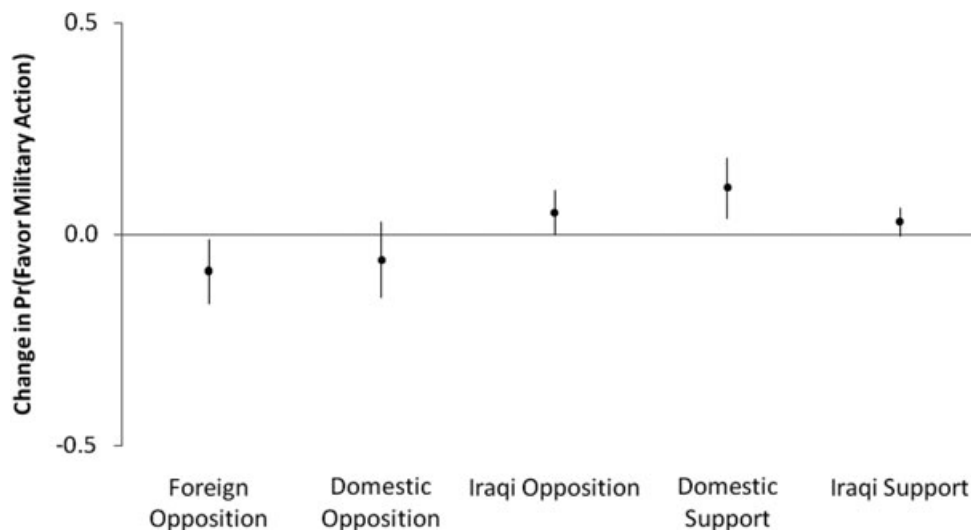
tion, were more conservative, and were male, older, and white were more likely to support military action against Iraq. Democratic and independent respondents were less supportive of war than Republicans. In addition, we are confident that no single survey result is driving the statistical significance 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 iteratively dropping one survey at a time from the analysis. The patterns we report in Table 1 were unchanged by eliminating any single survey.

¹⁸For 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).

¹⁹These probabilities reflect a survey respondent who is an independent 45-year-old white, moderate male with a mean level of education and mean level of Bush approval. The remaining variables were set at their mean values. The simulation and all others in the article were calculated using CLARIFY (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001) in Stata 10.0.

²⁰None of these results depend on our particular operationalization of media content. As shown in Tables A-2 and A-3 in the

FIGURE 3 The Effect of Support and Opposition in the News on Public Support for Military Action in Iraq



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.

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 that we have argued are crucial 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 is among highly politically aware Democrats and independents that we should see the strongest effects. This requires 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 mea-

supplementary technical appendix, we also ran the analysis after measuring opposition as the percentage of each source category's 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.

asures of general political awareness (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Price and Zaller 1993).²¹ 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.²² We

²¹Nor do the surveys consistently contain measures of media exposure, which are often used as substitute operationalizations for general political awareness.

²²This is not an ideal proxy, 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. 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 (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 perfect, we believe this makes for a conservative test of our hypotheses. If we find media effects consistent with our theoretical expectations even with a subpar 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

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 acumen that encourage exposure to and comprehension of messages.

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.²³ 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 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 news content 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 \times High Education \times 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 \times High Education \times 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 accounting for the

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.

²³We initially created three education categories, in which 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 had 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 collapsed those two categories, creating a dichotomous education measure (high and low). We ran all the education analyses with the trichotomized measure, and our substantive conclusions did not change. The results, available from the authors, reveal that middle- and low-education respondents reacted to news coverage in similar ways.

other messages 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 American government officials—a substantial group responded to non-U.S. dissent about the wisdom of a U.S. foreign policy proposal.

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 \times 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 \times 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 consistent with our theoretical expectations.

The substantive magnitudes of the effects are displayed in Figure 4. 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 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. The uncertainty estimates for high- and low-education independents are wide, which means we cannot confidently state that they are statistically different. But the level of uncertainty is in large part a product of sample size, given that just 473 pure independents are in the data set. The confidence interval estimates for high- and low-education Democrats also overlap, but only slightly, leaving us roughly 88% confident that the estimates are truly different. While this does not quite reach the conventional threshold of statistical significance, we consider this to be a reasonable degree of confidence, particularly in a model with a large number of interaction terms. The final two data points in the figure present the Republican estimates as a contrast; GOP identifiers, regardless of education

TABLE 2 The Effects of Party Identification, Education, and Opposition and Support in the News on Public Attitudes toward Military Action in Iraq

Democrat × High Education × Foreign Opposition	-0.38** (0.20)
Independent × High Education × Foreign Opposition	-0.52* (0.34)
Democrat × High Education × Domestic Opposition	0.33 (0.31)
Independent × High Education × Domestic Opposition	0.47 (0.47)
Democrat × High Education × Iraqi Opposition	0.37** (0.22)
Independent × High Education × Iraqi Opposition	0.26 (0.35)
Democrat × High Education × Domestic Support	-0.12 (0.13)
Independent × High Education × Domestic Support	0.01 (0.21)
Democrat × High Education × Iraqi Support	-4.53** (2.53)
Independent × High Education × Iraqi Support	-6.94** (3.64)
High Education × Iraqi Opposition	-0.07 (0.19)
High Education × Iraqi Support	1.50 (2.10)
High Education × Domestic Opposition	0.05 (0.24)
High Education × Domestic Support	0.07 (0.11)
High Education × Foreign Opposition	0.13 (0.17)
Democrat × Iraqi Opposition	-0.17 (0.16)
Democrat × Iraqi Support	2.53** (1.47)
Democrat × Domestic Opposition	-0.23 (0.18)
Democrat × Domestic Support	0.08 (0.08)
Democrat × Foreign Opposition	-0.02 (0.15)
Independent × Iraqi Opposition	0.23 (0.26)
Independent × Iraqi Support	2.46 (2.14)

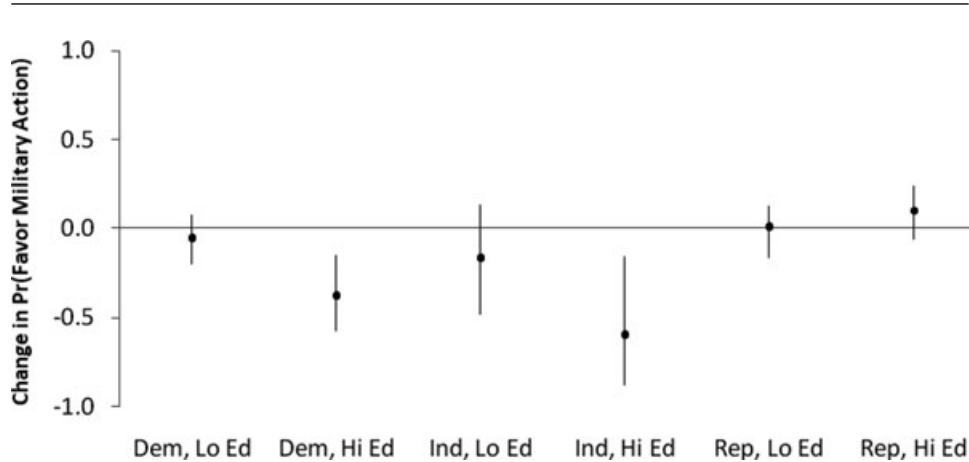
*(Continued)***TABLE 2 Continued**

Independent × Domestic Opposition	0.17 (0.31)
Independent × Domestic Support	-0.04 (0.12)
Independent × 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 ²	0.26
Log Likelihood	-3577.79
χ ²	1255.37

**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.15 for results of alternative modeling approaches. Data are from Pew Research Center surveys conducted between September 2002 and March 2003.

FIGURE 4 The Effect of Foreign Opposition in the News on Public Support for Military Action in Iraq, 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.

levels, were, as expected, not receptive to critical news sources from overseas.

The interactions with domestic opposition also highlight the influential role played by foreign elites in depressing 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 United Nations officials 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 virtual domestic oppositional vacuum within the U.S. media made foreign leaders strikingly influential in the Iraq debate.²⁴ Their role in shaping mass domestic opinion during foreign policy episodes appears more prominent than previously known.

²⁴Table 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 article. 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.

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 whose general predispositions 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.

Of course, we cannot be certain that the antiwar 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 forums for their views. Indirect evidence suggests, for instance, that print outlets more frequently

transmitted policy perspectives and concrete information that called into question the Bush administration's war plans than did network news (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2007; Feldman, Huddy, and Marcus 2007; Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2003). And it is surely the case that some politically aware citizens who were initially skeptical of the idea of unilateral, preemptive war—probably those 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 activist websites, and in similar outlets.

It is important to keep in mind, however, 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 mainstream news sources, like network TV. It is highly unlikely that the 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 antiwar messages in these alternative outlets. Moreover, it is clear that the major channels of mass communications in the United States—which, increasingly in their online forms, 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 (Hayes and Guardino 2010). 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 foreign source.

We also cannot be completely sure that media coverage of foreign voices *caused* public opinion to shift. These are observational, not experimental, data. And there is no guarantee that we have accounted for every possible source of influence on Americans' attitudes. But we can rule out reverse causation, or the possibility that media coverage responded to public opinion. Because our independent variables are measured in the period *before* each survey was taken, we know that the changes in media coverage we report are not a reaction to mass opinion. This is one virtue 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 research strategies could illuminate changing attitudes toward health care reform, immigration, or other policy areas where public debate occurs over an extended period.

In highlighting the need to account for the influence of non-U.S. official sources on American public opinion,

our findings challenge several recently elaborated analytic perspectives on foreign policy attitude formation. International relations scholars have suggested that citizen opinions respond directly to major foreign policy events, such as increased casualties or key votes by domestic legislatures or international bodies (e.g., Chapman and Reiter 2004; Gartner 2008). Though our results are not conclusive, we have strong circumstantial evidence to doubt this perspective. In a separate analysis, we find that the “directional thrust” of news stories—a measure we developed to operationalize the overall valence of each report, which thus includes the tenor of key events reported in the stories—has no relationship to support for the war among either Democrats or independents. This is not a definitive test, since the directional thrust measure also captures the balance of pro- and antiwar statements by sources appearing in the news stories. But it is highly suggestive that events in and of themselves had no direct effect on support for the Iraq War.

From a conceptual perspective, this should not be surprising: the vast majority of citizens do not experience political events—especially those related to foreign policy—directly. Rather, people learn about these events as they are filtered through the news (or else from members of their social networks who themselves rely on media accounts). As Berinsky (2009) also argues in his investigation of the “casualties” hypothesis, it is highly unlikely that events themselves could affect public sentiments to the extent that significant changes would register in polls. “Event-based” accounts of foreign policy opinion misapprehend the attitude-formation process, and they are inconsistent with copious research in political psychology and communication that has parsed message-processing mechanisms to specify the ways in which particular kinds of communication can affect the opinions expressed by particular kinds of people under particular contextual conditions (Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman 2001; Zaller 1992).

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, as other recent work has done (Baum and Groeling 2010; Berinsky 2009). But our empirical results raise questions about the ability of these authors' models to explain the dynamics of public opinion in the lead-up to the Iraq War.

Berinsky (2009) proposes a model, elite cue theory, in which rank-and-file Democrats might express opposition to the Bush administration's war plans—even in the absence of widespread elite Democratic criticism—by inferring from Republican and White House support that

they should oppose the policy. But this perspective places an overly large explanatory burden on partisan orientations. There is little reason to expect that large numbers of Democrats would oppose a policy (especially a proposed war on a nation headed by a demonized dictator that is heavily promoted not only by the administration and almost all Republican elites, but also by many Democratic officials) purely because leaders of the opposite party endorse it. At its nadir, polls show that mass Democratic support for the Iraq War before the invasion never dipped below 44%, which is not insubstantial. While negative views of the Bush administration—along with basic predispositions in favor of multilateralism and diplomacy—surely made many Americans more open to antiwar 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. 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 flow of opposition messages in the media during specific time windows. In addition, as shown in Table 2, we find no significant effects associated with the amount of domestic support reported in the news: Democrats' and independents' attitudes did not move against the war in response to the prowar rhetoric emanating from the White House, as elite cue theory would posit. Again, the basic shape of Zaller's (1992) RAS model (with the addition of foreign elite voices, in certain contexts) remains: people generally require some information or substantive argument from credible sources, typically circulated through the mass media, that connects broad predispositional orientations (such as partisanship) to particular policy issues.

Baum and Groeling (2010) suggest that in-party criticism of the administration's foreign policy position—in the case of Iraq, Republican criticism of the Bush administration's proposed invasion—should drive mass opinion shifts against that position. Our comprehensive content analytic data from network TV news before the invasion lacks high enough volumes of opposition source-statements from specific categories of voices in consecutive news periods to directly test this proposition. But what evidence we can marshal suggests that such a “cheap talk” opinion-formation dynamic is highly implausible for the period immediately preceding the Iraq War: Republican elite criticism of the Bush administration's plans was exceedingly infrequent during this period. Just 3.6%

of GOP and administration source-statements reported in the media from August 2002 through March 19, 2003, opposed the administration position; this number comprised a minuscule 1.1% of all source-statements during the prewar period. Such low volumes of in-party opposition discourse make it highly unlikely that these communications could account for Democratic and independent opposition in public opinion polls.

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 are called for in part because these sources may become more prominent in future cases. As the Cold War recedes into history, 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, may become more frequent. With a range of complex issues on the global agenda—and lacking the anticommunist 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 nonmainstream domestic sources (such as antiwar 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 nondomestic 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 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 U.S. 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. Moreover, the fact that network TV news included these nondomestic perspectives may be viewed positively from the standpoint of democracy, in that journalists were not satisfied with the basically bipartisan prowar narrative that appeared to be emanating from U.S. institutional elites, and instead sought to diversify content with alternative arguments from overseas.²⁵

At the same time, most Americans likely would not consider antiwar 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 antiwar groups and Democratic members of Congress (assuming that the latter were willing to offer these critical statements), it seems probable that even more Americans would have articulated opposition to the war in public opinion polls. We do not 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 political pressures 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 mis-

deeds in Iraq that garnered widespread attention after the invasion.²⁶

Thus, regardless of the increasing frequency with which critical statements by foreign officials may appear in U.S. media outlets—and their potentially increasing importance in public opinion formation—these voices cannot 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 policy-making (see Bennett 1993, 2009; Herman and Chomsky 1988). 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 nongovernmental actors—many of whom may express more fundamental policy criticisms—should be on the agenda.

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 democratic media performance—remain unclear. But our findings about the effects on mass opinion of official foreign voices in the news underscore the high stakes that are implicated in these processes in an increasingly interlinked world characterized by emergent threats to both security and democracy.

²⁵However, 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 organizations, instead, understated the extent of official Democratic opposition to the Bush administration (and, perhaps, “oversampled” the presumably more newsworthy Democratic support and GOP criticism, as Baum and Groeling 2010) argue. Our preliminary research suggests that news media did, indeed, greatly underplay Democratic elite criticism of the impending war, as measured by statements on the floor of Congress (Guardino and Hayes 2010).

²⁶See Entman (2004) on the complex, reciprocal influences of media coverage, public opinion, and elite rhetoric and behavior during foreign policy episodes.

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