

The Relationships Between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis

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Abstract

Democracy requires that citizens' opinions play some role in shaping policy outcomes, including in foreign policy. Yet, although the literature on public opinion and foreign policy has made great progress in recent decades, scholars have reached no consensus concerning what the public thinks, or thinks about, with respect to foreign policy; how it comes to hold those opinions; or whether those opinions influence (or even should influence) foreign policy. In this article, we first review the extensive gains in scholarly knowledge in the area of public opinion and foreign policy over the past several decades, emphasizing relatively recent work. We then suggest a framework, based on the concept of market equilibrium, aimed at synthesizing the disparate research programs that constitute the literature on public opinion and foreign policy. To do so, in addition to considering the relationship between leaders and the public, we incorporate a third strategic actor, the mass media, which we believe plays a critical role alongside citizens and elites in shaping the public's attitudes about, and influence on, foreign policy. Our goal is to clarify the multifaceted relationships between these actors and foreign policy outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Following the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, members of Congress from both parties, and the Bush administration, complained that biased media coverage was turning public opinion against the war. Congressman James Marshall (D-GA) opined that reporters were painting a “falsely bleak picture” that “weakens our national resolve” (Marshall 2003). President Bush struck a similar chord, claiming, “We’re making good progress in Iraq. Sometimes it’s hard to tell when you listen to the filter [media]” (Bush 2003). Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld added that “the news media seem to want to carry the negative” (Rumsfeld 2005). These statements reflect two assumptions widely shared by decision makers of all political perspectives: First, that the mass media often fail to deliver the messages policy makers think they should convey, and second, that the media shape public opinion about foreign policy.

Yet, although political leaders routinely assume that the media wield independent influence on public opinion and policy, most political science scholarship reduces the media’s role to a “conveyor belt” that passively transports elite views (e.g., Jentleson 1992, Brody 1991)—particularly the views of the most powerful elites (Zaller & Chiu 2000, Bennett et al. 2006)—to the public. In contrast, a parallel literature in political communication (Kuypers 1997, Graber 2002, Paletz 2002) details the processes by which the media shape political opinions. This literature does not consistently link the relationship between media coverage and public opinion to policy outcomes.

There is, however, an emerging recognition among scholars who study the interactions of the public, leaders, and the media that these actors are interdependent and that exclusive attention to one or two of the three may distort theoretical predictions and empirical findings (Entman 2000, Nacos et al. 2000, Holsti 2004).

In this article, we first review the extensive gains in scholarly knowledge in this area

over the past several decades, with emphasis on relatively recent work. We then begin to synthesize into a more coherent framework the disparate research programs that constitute the literature on public opinion and foreign policy. Our goal is to clarify the multifaceted relationships between these actors and link them to foreign policy outcomes. Although many of the insights from this literature are intended to be general, until quite recently scholarship—and especially empirical research—has largely focused on the US case. Hence, this is our primary, albeit not our exclusive, focus.

The key to such a synthesis lies in determining how to fit the mass media into this complex set of interrelationships. Are the media a causal or a caused variable, an intervening variable between public opinion and foreign policy, or primarily a conveyor belt for messages from the elite to the public, as the political science literature often implies?¹

In our view, the media are engaged in a constant process of framing the news in response to the often competing requirements of leaders and the public. Consequently—although, consistent with indexing theories (e.g., Hallin 1986, Bennett 1990, Zaller & Chiu 2000), political elites clearly influence news media content—we believe the mass media are nonetheless more accurately characterized as a discrete strategic actor. As such, the media’s framing of elite rhetoric has an independent causal effect on public perceptions of conflict characteristics, and through this process, on foreign policy.

Indeed, we argue that the media influence nearly every aspect of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. Hence, any comprehensive theoretical framework attempting to account for either public opinion regarding foreign policy or the effects

¹To enhance analytic traction, we treat the media—analytically, but not grammatically—as a unitary actor. Of course, we recognize that the mass media consist of a diverse array of distinct actors with varying incentives. (In the conclusion, we consider the implications of relaxing this assumption.)

of public opinion on foreign policy requires an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates public opinion, elite preferences, and the mass media as independent strategic actors with distinct preferences and incentives.

The literature outlines a dizzying array of interactions between the public, leaders, and the media, the complexity of which is evident in **Figure 1**. Even this highly stylized representation of the literature reveals studies maintaining that the media influence public opinion, public opinion influences the media, public opinion influences decision makers, decision makers influence public opinion, decision makers influence the media, foreign pol-

icy influences public opinion, decision makers influence events, and the media influence foreign policy. This is further complicated by feedback from both foreign actors and the emerging “facts on the ground.” In short, scholars have investigated every conceivable causal link between the public, decision makers (foreign and domestic), and the media. We believe this web of causal arrows has become so dense that further investigation into these narrow individual pathways is likely to produce diminishing returns.

The early stages of many research programs are characterized by scholarly emphasis on delineating causal pathways among the

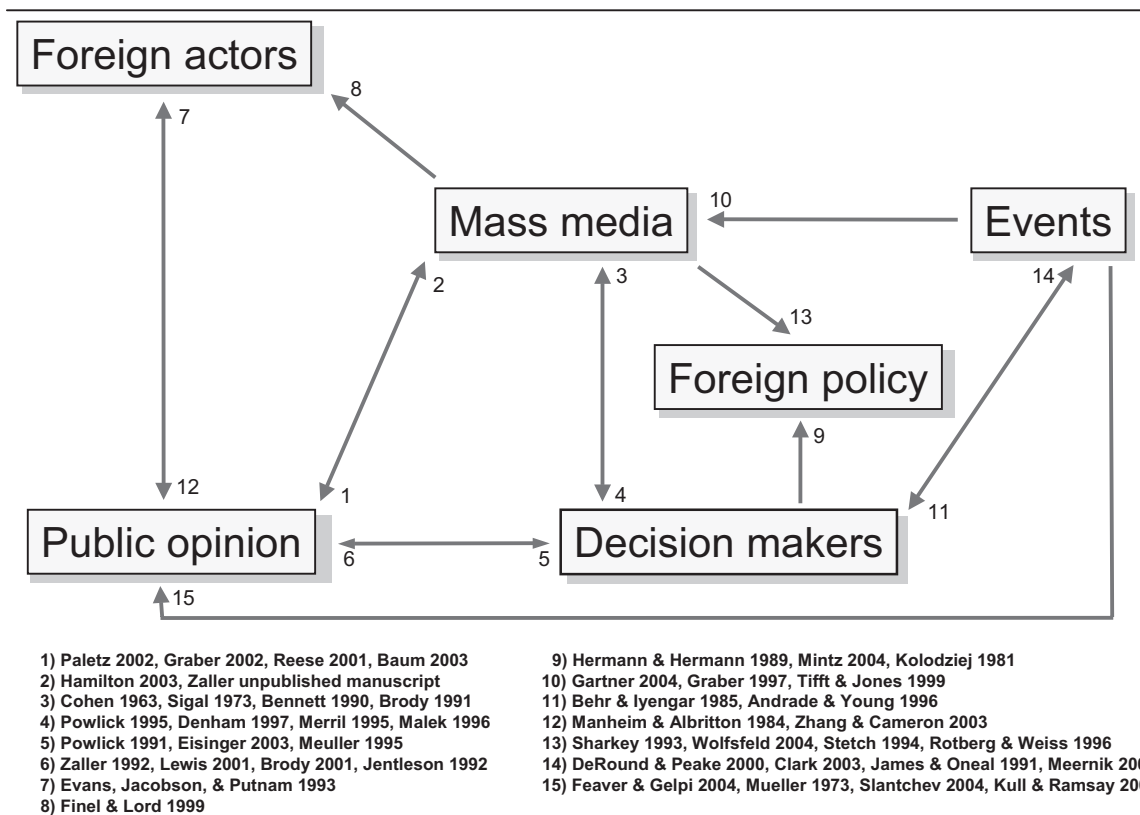


Figure 1

Prior specifications of causality in relationship(s) between the mass media, public opinion, and foreign policy. The citations associated with each arrow are illustrative rather than exhaustive. They represent simplifications of the authors’ arguments, intended to highlight the absence of a clear causal chain across the broader system.

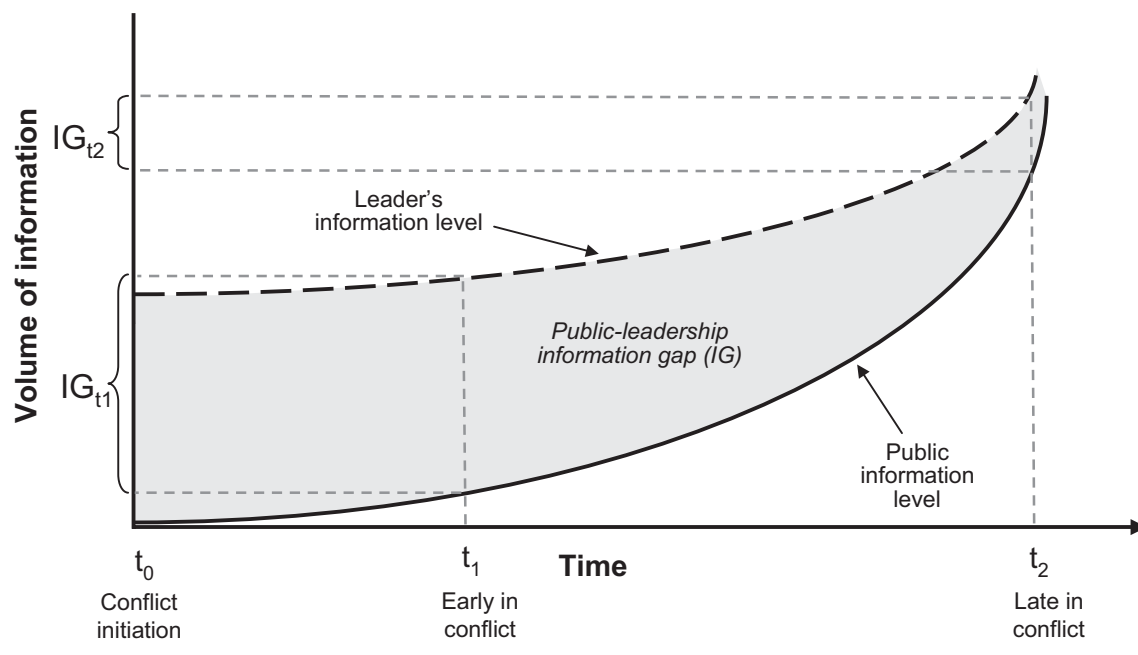


Figure 2

Information gap between leaders and the public, over time during a military conflict.

constituent elements within a broader theoretical framework. This is frequently how knowledge accumulates. Eventually, enough of the linear relationships become illuminated that the proverbial “hidden face within the picture” emerges. However, that face can also be obscured by the very foundational research aimed at revealing it. Some scholars have observed such a pattern in the scientific study of public opinion and foreign policy (e.g., Robinson 2000, Entman 2003).

We argue that a clearer understanding of the media–opinion–foreign policy nexus emerges when, rather than exploring static snapshots of bilateral relationships between foreign policy actors, we consider them together as coequal players within a market that produces foreign policy outcomes through dynamic interaction.² The circularity of the

²In a similar argument, Hamilton (2003, p. 19) asserts that “newsworthiness” is a “function of the number of consumers and their value in the marketplace.”

relationships between leaders, the media, and public opinion in the foreign policy arena is in many respects analogous to the classical economic notions of supply and demand, and of producers and consumers in a marketplace. This foreign policy marketplace is driven primarily by the distribution of the key market commodity—information—among these three actors. Typically, information favors leadership; however, certain dynamics can lead the public to overcome its informational disadvantage, producing different short- and long-term equilibria. This distinction guides much of the discussion that follows.

Figure 2 illustrates the process through which differing short- and long-term equilibria can arise. It traces the typical path of the foreign policy information gap, that is, the informational advantage that leaders enjoy over the public. As the primary traders of information in the marketplace—simultaneously beholden to leaders for their supply of this key commodity and to the public for

demand—the media play a central role in narrowing this information gap over time.

Typically, public attention to foreign policy (and consequently demand for foreign policy news) is very low, resulting in an equilibrium favorable to leaders. This is especially true in the early stages of a military conflict, where, in **Figure 2**, IG_{t_1} represents the relatively large information gap at time t_1 . However, several factors—including casualties, elite discord, and evidence that leaders have “spun” the facts beyond credulity (a concept we term the elasticity of reality)—can prompt the public to increase its demand for information from the media, thereby narrowing the information gap. This becomes more likely as a conflict drags on, represented in **Figure 2** by the smaller information gap (IG_{t_2}) at time t_2 . The media play a crucial role because they produce this dynamism. If there were no third actor controlling the flow of information, or if such an actor were merely a passive conveyor belt, leaders would have less incentive to respond to changes in the public’s demand for information (except perhaps near an election).

Economists rarely ask whether supply causes demand or whether consumers cause producers. Rather, in attempting to understand markets, scholars focus on the concept of equilibrium—how to identify it and determine when it is likely to shift. We believe this is also a useful way to conceptualize the process of foreign policy formulation. Present knowledge about the relationships between actors in the foreign policy marketplace emerges from static snapshots. Yet, each of these snapshots suggests a common, and perhaps interesting, market equilibrium. For example, in the “rally round the flag” literature (discussed below), the well-documented short-term market equilibrium (time t_1 in **Figure 2**) favors leaders. However, the literature on the public’s response to casualties (also discussed below) implies the presence of another long-term equilibrium (time t_2 in **Figure 2**) where public opinion can shape, or at least constrain, policy.

These contrasting findings have proven difficult to unify within a single conceptual framework. In fact, with a few exceptions (e.g., Baum & Groeling 2007), prior research tends to focus on the former (Baker & Oneal 2001, Brody 1991, Baum 2002) or the latter (Gartner & Segura 2000, Feaver & Gelpi 2004), but not both. By viewing these distinct equilibria through a dynamic rather than static lens, derived from a broader understanding of the marketplace that produces them, it becomes possible to synthesize these and other previously disparate literatures into a single coherent framework.

This is the task we undertake in this article. We begin with a review of the state of knowledge concerning the three main actors in the foreign policy marketplace: the public, their leaders, and the media.

THE ACTORS

The Public

The public’s capacity to gather and retain information, and to use it to formulate coherent opinions, is arguably integral to the functioning of democracy. Madison, Hamilton, and other like-minded federalists were suspicious of the public’s capacity to contribute constructively to political decision making, especially in foreign policy. In contrast, a long liberal tradition—with origins in the work of Kant, Rousseau, Bentham, and Mill, and more recently manifested in the vast literature on the democratic peace (e.g., Doyle 1986, Russett & Oneal 2001)—views citizen engagement as crucial to well-considered policy and peaceful international relations. Contemporary democratic theorists (e.g., Habermas 1996) also consider responsiveness to the public to be a cornerstone of democratic governance. However, despite the theoretical importance of the public’s engagement with foreign policy, social scientists have struggled to consistently characterize the public’s actual role in the foreign policy process.

The prevailing scholarly consensus in this area has steadily evolved. Early work

suggested that public opinion was volatile and lacked a coherent structure (Lippmann & Merz 1920, Almond 1950), or that the public naively follows elite leadership (Lipset 1966, Verba et al. 1967). Over time, a rebuttal emerged from scholars who, while recognizing that typical individuals do not know much about politics or foreign policy (Delli-Carpini & Keeter 1996, Holsti 2004), argued that the public's individual and collective behavior was nonetheless efficient and rational (Jentleson 1992, Page & Shapiro 1992, Popkin 1994). Still, a widespread perception persisted that, most of the time, the public was fundamentally incidental to the foreign policy process (Mueller 1973, Holsti & Rosenau 1984, Zaller 1994b, Jacobs & Shapiro 2000, Katz 2000).

More recently, however, some scholars have begun to characterize public opinion as a relatively stable and consistent counterweight that policy makers must, or at least should, take into consideration (Page & Bouton 2006). This scholarly evolution began with a revolution—originating in the cognitive sciences—in our understanding of when and how citizens gather, retain, and retrieve information, as well as the degree to which elites are responsive to their preferences.

Scholars have long doubted the electorate's ability to gather and process information or manifest consistent opinions (Campbell et al. 1960, Zaller 1992), especially with respect to foreign affairs (Holsti 2004). An uninformed public cannot independently evaluate a president's claims. However, they may overcome this limitation through reliance on informational shortcuts (Sniderman et al. 1991, Popkin 1993), most notably the opinions of trusted political elites, and primarily as reflected in the mass media (Iyengar & Kinder 1987, Krosnick & Kinder 1990, Larson 2000). Nonetheless, some scholars have countered that the public can and does remain informed and active in the foreign policy arena (Aldrich et al. 1989, Destler 2001).

Aldrich et al. (2006) assess the overall scholarly understanding of public opinion in the context of foreign policy in hopes of re-

solving the debate concerning public competence. They conclude that a consensus has emerged that the public is able to develop and hold coherent views on foreign policy, that citizens can and do apply their attitudes to their electoral decisions, and that this leads politicians to consider the electoral implications of their overseas activities.

The question of the public's informational capacity is a crucial foundation underlying our understanding of the foreign policy marketplace. Research suggests a consensus around two key points: (a) Citizens are typically at a significant informational disadvantage vis-à-vis leadership elites, and (b) they compensate by employing heuristic cues that allow them to make reasoned judgments with small amounts of information.

Most scholars draw a clear distinction between public opinion on foreign policy in general, on the one hand, and public opinion in relation to conflicts or crises, on the other. Whereas the public is typically not closely attuned to the details of international politics, crises often appear to attract public attention. This has prompted scholars to ask what role, if any, public opinion actually plays in specific American foreign policy crises. For instance, some research suggests public opinion influenced US policy toward Nicaragua (Sobel 2001), Somalia (Klarevas 2002), and Iraq (Larson & Savych 2005).

As noted, there is a conceptual divide between studies emphasizing short- versus long-term opinion dynamics. In the near term, the public tends to rally behind presidential foreign policy initiatives, thereby giving presidents considerable influence over public opinion (Mueller 1973, Brody 1991); over the longer term, a separate body of research (Sobel 2001, Baum 2004a, Canes-Wrone 2006) suggests that public opinion can constrain foreign policy. We argue that these previously distinct literatures can be unified within a market framework. After all, the longer a conflict lasts, the greater the opportunity for the public to accumulate sufficient information to overcome—or at least

reduce—its informational disadvantage. To clarify this relationship, we next consider short- and long-term opinion dynamics.

The rally-round-the-flag phenomenon.

Political observers have long noted that the public often responds positively in the short term to military engagements abroad, and a voluminous literature has investigated the validity and magnitude of the rally phenomenon. Lee (1977, p. 253) notes, “the average man’s reaction [to engagement abroad] will include a feeling of patriotism in supporting presidential actions.” Most empirical updates and tests confirm the existence of a short-term rally effect to a greater or lesser extent, and under at least some circumstances (James & Oneal 1991, Oneal & Bryan 1995). Others, however, counter that rallies tend to be infrequent and ephemeral and thus rarely of political consequence (Stoll 1984; Oneal et al. 1996).

For instance, Baker & Oneal (2001) find no significant evidence of a consistent rally effect across 193 US militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) between 1933 and 1992. They do, however, find evidence of rallies when the United States either initiates a dispute or behaves in an openly revisionist manner. They also find a significant rally effect in full-blown wars and MIDs featured prominently in the *New York Times*. They conclude that the size of the rally effect depends on how a dispute is presented, the presence of bipartisan support, and White House spin—findings that foreshadow our discussion below regarding leadership and the media.

Chapman & Reiter (2004) further explore whether the rally effect is more nuanced than a simple reaction to the use of force abroad. They find that United Nations backing significantly increased the size of the rally effect during MIDs between 1945 and 2001, suggesting that the public can maintain longstanding policy preferences—including a preference for multilateralism. This also demonstrates that the public can employ information shortcuts—in this case the “costly”

signal by the typically cautious Security Council to endorse a military engagement—in assessing the wisdom of a foreign policy action. Interestingly, using the same data, Lai & Reiter (2005) find no evidence of such a preference in Great Britain.

Further demonstrating the importance of perceived common interests in determining individual responses to the use of force, Baum (2002), in a study of major US uses of force between 1953 and 1998, finds stark differences in individuals’ rally responses depending on their party affiliations and the partisan configuration of government. He finds that rallies are mostly limited to opposition party identifiers and Independents. The reason is that typically a president’s fellow partisans already approve of his performance prior to a rally event, so they cannot re-evaluate the president’s performance upwards. Just such a rally pattern emerged following 9/11; nearly all of George W. Bush’s record 36-point gain in approval ratings occurred among Democrats and Independents, majorities of whom had disapproved of his performance prior to 9/11.

The presence of a rally effect seems to suggest a “knee-jerk” public reaction to the use of force abroad. How can we reconcile this with the view of public opinion as largely rational and coherent? The likely answer, reinforced by an emerging body of research, is that rallies, or the absence thereof, may be rational responses to the interaction of pre-existing individual preferences with the information environment. For example, Colaresi (2007) develops a signaling model to demonstrate that the probability of eventual verification and punishment enhances the credibility of leaders’ choices and transmits information about the benefits of a military engagement to the voting public. This formalizes a longstanding insight (Mueller 1973, Lee 1977, Brody 1991) that rallies tend to recede in the presence of information that contradicts the administration’s preferred message, or of significant elite debate on the merits of a policy. In particular, typical individuals look to elites from their own party, whom they consider

most credible—owing to an assumption of shared preferences—in determining whether to support the president (Rahn 1993, Lupia & McCubbins 1998, Baum & Groeling 2007).

This suggests that in the face of a significant informational disadvantage, the public uses elite positions—and particularly those of fellow-partisan elites—as a critical cognitive shortcut. However, they do so only absent evidence undercutting the reliability of this shortcut. The rally effect results from a market equilibrium characterized by highly informed leaders and a public at a significant informational disadvantage.

Casualty aversion. In contrast to the rally literature, research on the longer-term relationship between public opinion and foreign policy primarily explores the characteristics of the conflicts themselves, particularly the casualties they engender (Mueller 1973, Gartner & Segura 2000) or public perceptions regarding their relative success (Feaver & Gelpi 2004, Gelpi et al. 2005; Eichenberg 2005). Yet, competing ideas have emerged about how such relationships might operate. One view holds that the public reacts negatively to casualties under most circumstances and that this hampers a consistent and well-considered foreign policy (Mueller 1973). Another perspective—somewhat more compatible with the foreign policy market framework—holds that the public turns against a conflict if information comes to light indicating that their delegation of responsibility for foreign policy to decision-making elites is not going well (Larson 2000, Kull & Ramsey 2001).

Mueller (1973) famously argues that public tolerance for casualties follows a roughly logarithmic function in which small numbers of casualties produce large drops in support early in a conflict, whereas the public might tolerate even large numbers of casualties later in a conflict. Recent variants of Mueller's hypothesis suggest that the key factor in determining the influence of casualties on public support is not the raw number of casualties but either

their rate (Slantchev 2004) or trend (Gartner 2006).

In one form or another, Mueller's casualty-aversion hypothesis underlies a recent strand of research on the differences between democratic and autocratic performance in wars. For instance, some research suggests that sensitivity to negative public reactions to the costs of war—especially casualties—causes democratic leaders to be more cautious than their autocratic counterparts in initiating military conflicts and less credible in their threats to use force in high-risk situations (Filson & Werner 2004). The empirical effect appears to be that democracies are more likely than autocracies to win the wars they fight, at least when such conflicts are relatively brief (Bennett & Stam 1998). It is not, however, clear whether this is because democracies self-select, only entering conflicts they are likely to win (Reiter & Stam 2002), or because they are selected into such conflicts by risk-acceptant adversaries (Filson & Werner 2004).

Scholars have offered a variety of critiques of the casualty-aversion hypothesis. Berinsky (2007) contends that typical individuals are not particularly knowledgeable about foreign policy events even in wartime. Hence, they tend not to incorporate much factual knowledge—such as casualty levels—into their summary judgments about a given event. Rather, he asserts that citizens respond primarily to cues from trusted elites regarding the wisdom of a given foreign policy action (see also Baum & Groeling 2007). Casualty levels, rates, or trends, in turn, may or may not significantly influence elite rhetoric.

Jentleson (1992) offers a different critique (see also Jentleson & Britton 1998). The critical factor for Jentleson is not the cost in blood or treasure, but rather the nature of the mission itself—that is, the “principal policy objective.” He argues that the public will support conflicts involving traditional military tasks (such as using force to coerce an adversary engaged in aggressive action against the United States or its allies) even at significant cost but will support more aggressive or less traditional

missions (such as efforts to depose foreign leaders or humanitarian interventions) only if the costs remain low. Larson (2000) supports Jentleson's central claim that public responsiveness to casualties is contextual. However, similar to Brody's (1991) "elite debate" explanation for short-term opinion rallies, Larson's contention hinges on the degree of elite consensus surrounding a particular conflict. If consensus is high, public support will remain high in the face of casualties; otherwise, public support may collapse in response to even a few casualties.

Echoing Chapman & Reiter (2004), Kull & Ramsey (2001) argue that the public will support a conflict despite casualties if it observes other countries supporting the policy. Feaver & Gelpi (2004) assert that public tolerance for casualties is a function of the expected probability of success. Evidence from other studies supports this conclusion, both with respect to the war in Iraq (Gelpi et al. 2005) and more broadly (Eichenberg 2005).

As Berinsky (2007) and Baum & Groeling (2007) observe, the above studies treat public opinion largely, if not entirely, as an undifferentiated mass. Important variations emerge when one recognizes that public opinion is not uniform. Gartner & Segura (1998, 2000), for instance, consider the effects of race in their investigation of public opinion and Vietnam War casualties. They find that the number of casualties from respondents' home regions disproportionately influenced attitudes about the war. However, although support for the war declined faster among African Americans than among whites, the authors find no evidence that the racial composition of the casualties influences attitudes.

Recent research on framing effects addresses the heterogeneity of public opinion in greater detail. Druckman (2001) and others report that politically sophisticated individuals are more resistant than political novices to elites' efforts to frame information. Others have considered whether heterogeneity in public opinion varies over time. For example, Jacobson (2006) explores the fragmentation

of public opinion during the George W. Bush administration. He concludes that President Bush created historic levels of partisan polarization in the electorate, especially vis-à-vis Iraq. Taken together, these findings suggest that different segments of the public enter the "market" with differing informational disadvantages and, consequently, varying propensities to "buy" the frames attached by elites to the messages distributed by the media. Although our framework treats public opinion as unitary, these and other related studies highlight the fact that this is merely a simplifying assumption—intended to enhance conceptual clarity—rather than a faithful representation of reality.

Prior findings on the public's reaction to casualties are consistent with our conception of foreign policy formulation as a market process centered on the exchange of information. As we have seen, the public appears to tolerate casualties more readily in the presence of elite consensus, multilateral support, and traditional missions—all clear informational cues indicating that a mission is likely to be worthwhile. The reciprocal circumstance is equally suggestive: Public support tends to be more fragile when the public has less experience with the mission and thus requires greater information to assess it. In such cases, the public may react quickly and negatively to the information produced by elite discord, while being especially responsive to the higher information content of local casualties.

The missing link between the rally and casualty-aversion literatures lies in the realization that the various actors in our marketplace gather information in different ways and, even more significantly, at different rates. As we have seen, the public's informational disadvantage makes it susceptible to the framing of information by elites. However, if this disadvantage wanes, as in a protracted conflict, tolerance for the framing preferred by elites begins to break down, and the public asserts itself in the foreign policy arena.

This is, of course, a highly stylized representation of a vastly complex reality. Yet,

we argue that, in part because of its simplicity, it better captures the dynamics of the foreign policy marketplace than the static snapshots that have previously dominated research.

Decision Makers

We have considered the dynamics of public behavior in the foreign policy marketplace and found that outcomes are driven, in part, by the supply of and demand for information. The public's influence on foreign policy appears to be lowest when it is informationally weakest (typically in early stages of conflicts) but somewhat higher in longer conflicts as the information gap dissipates. We next consider how leaders respond to these market dynamics and constraints.

The diversionary use of force. Leaders' expectations complicate the short-term relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. Ample evidence suggests leaders recognize their informational advantage early in conflicts. This recognition can produce an incentive—especially in democracies—to use conflict to manipulate public opinion. This is the key insight of the diversionary-war literature. The link to the rally phenomenon is clear; a diversionary war aimed at distracting attention from domestic problems or bolstering electoral prospects—popularly known as a “wag the dog” scenario—is only likely to tempt a leader who anticipates a rally response from the electorate (Baum 2004a). If leaders act on such expectations in systematic ways, this effectively reverses the causal relationship between public opinion and foreign policy.

The internal logic of the diversionary argument is compelling and theoretically well supported. For example, Hess & Orphanides (1995) use a principle-agent model to demonstrate that information asymmetry favoring the president can lead to significant incentives for a diversionary use of force. Yet, the corresponding empirical evidence is decidedly mixed (Levy 1989). For instance, some

studies have found evidence of politically motivated uses of force by the United States (James & Oneal 1991, Clark 2003, Howell & Pevehouse 2005), but others have not (Moore & Lanoue 2003, Meernik 2004, Potter 2007). Some scholars (e.g., Ostrom & Job 1986, Fordham 1998) report evidence that US presidents are more prone to use force abroad when their approval ratings are falling. Others (e.g., DeRouen & Peake 2002) suggest that the use of force can divert public attention from a bad economy. There is also support for ancillary hypotheses derived from the diversionary argument, again mostly limited to the US case. Morgan & Bickers (1992) argue that presidents sometimes respond forcefully abroad to domestic discontent among their fellow-partisan constituents. Fordham (2005), in turn, finds that other states moderate their conflict behavior toward the United States when US domestic conditions make a diversionary use of force more likely.

Nonetheless, clear evidence of a generalized, cross-national tendency for leaders to employ diversionary uses of force remains elusive. Scholars have largely failed to find consistent evidence—particularly in large-N cross-national studies—of leaders outside the United States systematically manipulating public opinion by engaging in military activities abroad. For example, although Oneal & Russett (1997) originally reported that slow economic growth increased the likelihood of MIDs in all regime types, subsequent work with a more complete dataset (Russett & Oneal 2001) fails to replicate this finding.

The discrepancy between the US case and cross-national studies may arise from the previously mentioned short-term nature of the rally effect and the uneven distribution of capacity in the international system. Few countries beyond the United States can use force in ways visible enough to engender a rally without a serious risk of war or prohibitively costly retaliation.

Conversely, some research suggests that the public desire for economic growth may induce leaders to *avoid* military endeavors they

believe will hinder economic performance (Gelpi & Grieco 2008). Based on a large-N, instrumental variable analysis, Chiozza & Goemans (2004) find that leaders who are insecure about their reelection prospects are actually less likely to initiate a conflict. They argue that some previous work reporting evidence of diversionary uses of force suffers from a variety of theoretical and methodological flaws.

Other scholars have raised methodological critiques of some negative findings in the diversionary-war literature. For instance, Fordham & Sarver (2001) note that many cross-national studies that fail to find evidence for diversionary war (particularly those utilizing MIDs as a dependent variable) include Germany and Japan—countries with institutional restrictions on using force—in their analyses, and some even include Iceland, which has no military at all.

Others question whether diversionary force is really a threat to democracy or stability, even if leaders are occasionally tempted to resort to it. Sobel (2001) explores, through a series of case studies, whether public opinion influences US foreign policy. He concludes that opinion constrains policy but does not dictate it. Oneal & Tir (2006), in turn, explore whether diversionary war poses a significant threat to the democratic peace. They find that economic conditions—that is, very low rates of growth—do influence the likelihood that a democracy, but not an autocracy, will initiate a MID (including against other democracies). However, as the authors note, the “trigger” growth rates are so low that the practical significance of this potential motivation is dubious.

In our conception of the foreign policy marketplace, the diversionary argument is the mirror image of the rally phenomenon. The prospect of a short war may occasionally tempt leaders who gamble that the conflict will not outlast the rally. However, the ever-present possibility that a conflict may drag on makes using force particularly risky, in part because the public may respond negatively

to the casualties such extended conflicts frequently engender.

We suspect that the mixed evidence regarding the diversionary use of force stems from some of the market mechanisms discussed above. Conflict tends to narrow the information gap between the public and their leaders unless it can be concluded rapidly (often an elusive goal). The nontraditional, aggressive, or unilateral missions leaders might initiate to “wag the dog,” in turn, are the very types of conflict most likely to provide cues (such as partisan elite discord) that tend to turn the public against a military engagement. In short, the discrepancy between the empirically well-documented rally effect and the ambiguous empirical evidence regarding the (logically compelling) diversionary war theory becomes less puzzling when both are considered within the broader context of a foreign policy marketplace.

Still, our picture of this marketplace is not yet complete. How do these informational cues travel from leaders to the public? How do leaders monitor public opinion? Such questions appear to open a window for the mass media to mediate the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy leadership as a discrete third actor in the foreign policy marketplace.

Mass Media

We have outlined how information asymmetry largely dictates the dynamics between the public and its leaders in the foreign policy marketplace—specifically the degree to which the public is informationally disadvantaged, thereby allowing leaders to sustain their preferred frames on information. The media play the crucial role of collecting, framing, and distributing information—the key market commodity.

Without question, leaders place great value on controlling this commodity. Bryan G. Whitman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Media Operations, observed with respect to the Pentagon’s policy of embedding

reporters within US combat units in Iraq in 2003, “Our goal was to dominate the information market . . .” (Carr 2003).

The traditional view of the media—especially in political science—as a mostly accommodating conduit for elite messages is built on a simplifying assumption that the media serve primarily as a linkage mechanism rather than as an independent, strategic actor in the policy-making process (Malek 1996, Brody 1991, Bloch & Lehman-Wilzig 2002). The best-known variant of this perspective holds that the media “index” their coverage to elite rhetoric in Washington (Hallin 1986, Bennett 1990, Bennett et al. 2006). Some research from outside political science, however, suggests that the media may be more proactive than indexing theories suggest. For example, the political communication “gatekeeper” literature (White 1950, Galtung & Ruge 1965, Patterson 1993) shows that journalists shape news by determining the newsworthiness of stories. This suggests the media may well present an unrepresentative sample of elite rhetoric. This potential for bias increases with the heightened prominence of more-partisan “new” media outlets (Baum & Groeling, unpublished manuscript).

The indexing hypothesis has proven durable in part because media do frequently transmit elite messages with largely intact frames. As noted, the public is typically ill-informed and so unmotivated to object. Thus, the information equilibrium tends to favor leaders, and, hence, the media are more responsive to leaders’ preferences than to those of the public. Consequently, although indexing theories are well-supported when the criterion for evaluation is the frequency with which the media transmit elite messages, this overlooks the market dynamic through which the prevailing equilibrium can shift from one favoring leaders to one favoring the public.

In contrast to the passive-media assumption implicit in much of the indexing literature, in the foreign policy market the media play a critical role in these shifts when they occur. In fact, as the primary link between

leaders and the public, the media are a central actor in the foreign policy marketplace. The nature of this link is not well captured by the conveyor-belt analogy. Within the market framework, the media are more aptly characterized as a middleman or trader of information, simultaneously beholden to two actors whose interests often conflict: leaders and the public. The media primarily rely on leaders for access to information, that is, for their *supply* of the key market commodity. However, this information usually comes prepackaged in a frame that leaders would prefer that the media retain.

Of course, the media are equally reliant on the *demand* of the public as the ultimate consumers of this information. In their role as democratic citizens, members of the public have an interest in obtaining unframed (i.e., objective) information. Understanding how the media respond to these competing market pressures is the key to unlocking the foreign policy process as a dynamic phenomenon.

As when we sought to account for short- and long-term public opinion, we argue that the market framework can account for both the relatively passive media that seem to predominate under many circumstances and the more proactive media that sometimes emerge. The equilibrium between leaders and the public in the foreign policy marketplace accounts for this variance.

Despite a widely held belief in the media’s mission to inform (e.g., Bennett 1997, Patterson 2000), they do not consistently act to remedy the informational inequities in the foreign policy marketplace. Rather, they react in ways that tend to exacerbate the prevailing trend. Early in conflicts—and especially major conflicts (Baker & Oneal 2001, Chapman & Reiter 2004)—when the public is informationally disadvantaged and thus most inclined to rally ’round the flag, the media are least likely to naysay; to the contrary, the media provide what the market equilibrium dictates. The public is sold the rally message it is predisposed to buy, while the media preserve their relationship with leaders who prefer that

they retain the rally frame. In this light, the market framework seems consistent with Zaller & Chiu's (2000) finding that the media often rally along with the public when conflicts arise because of their dependence on authoritative sources for information—primarily the White House and executive agencies. Similarly, the market framework seems consonant with Entman's (2003) argument that the media are most likely to independently influence foreign policy when leaders debate over what he terms contestable frames for a given policy action—that is, culturally ambiguous frames subject to multiple interpretations (e.g., whether the Iraq War and its aftermath constitute liberation or occupation). In contrast, the media are least likely to exert independent influence when leaders employ culturally congruent frames—that is, frames congruent with schemas habitually employed by most citizens. An example is President Bush's post-9/11 characterization of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda as "evil doers." Such culturally congruent frames are extremely difficult for the media to challenge (Entman 2003).

When leaders employ culturally congruent frames, the public's information disadvantage is exacerbated by the one-dimensional tone of media coverage. The media provide what the market demands: coverage consonant with a dominant and culturally congruent frame offered by the administration. In contrast, when leaders debate over contestable frames, the media hasten the dissipation of the public's informational disadvantage, as the "framing war" (i.e., elite debate) exposes citizens to more and more varied information. In the absence of a clear market demand for a single, dominant frame, the media offer multiple frames to satisfy diverse consumer preferences. In doing so, they narrow the information gap between leaders and the public, thereby increasing the potential for the public to influence policy. This understanding of the media's role makes it possible to synthesize a variety of literatures on the media within one coherent conceptual framework.

The notion of a media responsive to market pressures emanating from public opinion conflicts with the widely held belief that the media in a democracy should fulfill a "watch-dog" function (Patterson 2000). However, the capacity of the media to fulfill this role is subject to debate (Baum 2003; Hamilton 2003; Zaller, unpublished manuscript). Most early work, representing the intellectual precursor of contemporary indexing theories, argues that the media's reliance on official sources leads them to essentially parrot the information obtained from decision-making elites (Cohen 1963). Reporters who spend years as White House correspondents become captured by the institution and beholden to the administration for the high levels of access granted to them. More recent observers have noted the media's reliance on packaged news, particularly in the form of pictures or video footage, which the White House Press Office is uniquely able to provide and thereby "spin" (Iyengar & Reeves 1997, Graber 2002). Others, however, counter that media reliance on elite framing has declined in recent years. Livingston & Bennett (2003), for instance, assess whether new technology renders news producers less dependent on government officials to cue and frame political content; they find technology has led to a rise in event-driven news stories, although official sources remain important to media coverage.

The CNN effect. Some scholars and journalists have argued that recent technical changes, culminating in the 24-hour news cycle, have fundamentally altered the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy—a phenomenon commonly referred to as the "CNN effect" (Gilboa 2005).³ According to early proponents of this perspective (Sharkey 1993, Maren 1994), citizens, shocked by dramatic, real-time television

³The term "CNN effect" emerged before competing 24-hour news networks (e.g., FOX, MSNBC) appeared. Recent studies use it as shorthand to refer to a wide array of news outlets.

images of suffering and hardship, may demand that their leaders “do something” to alleviate the problem, thereby pressuring politicians to act in circumstances where they otherwise would not. A closely related corollary holds that the 24-hour news cycle pressures leaders to react more rapidly to events than in prior eras, in order to appear responsive to the public and in control of the situation (Robinson 2000, 2001). Such pressures could compromise traditional diplomacy, especially in situations where deliberate, or “quiet,” diplomacy is most crucial (Wolfsfeld 2004).

Integral to this argument is the belief that the 24-hour news cycle is fundamentally different from previous formats because it transmits dramatic, vivid images to consumers in near-real time. In the context of the market framework, scholars were concerned that the CNN effect might fundamentally alter the market equilibrium; however, the reality seems not to have proven so stark.

In theory, the CNN effect could be expected to shift the market equilibrium in favor of the public by more rapidly providing information, thereby undermining elite frames. Thus, the duration and magnitude of the public’s informational disadvantage—during periods when the media primarily transmit officially framed information—could be expected to shrink as the speed and volume of news increases. Similarly, the need to fill airtime with varied content might lead the media to move beyond government-framed information more quickly.

The literature notes several cases in which we might expect the CNN effect to play a role, but that fail to either prove or disprove the thesis. For example, Moeller (1999) concludes in the case of Rwanda that the media did not function in the way that the CNN effect would seem to suggest that it should have. Operation Restore Hope in Somalia is often cited as the quintessential example of the CNN effect. Yet Mermin (1997) and others (Livingston & Eachus 1995–1996, Robinson 2001, Baum 2004b) found that in the Somalia intervention the media took their cue

from political leaders, rather than the other way around. These scholars attribute the intervention to pressure from decision-making elites, including key members of Congress and officials within the administration itself. Robinson (2001, p. 941) describes the Somalia case as representing an “illusion of a news driven media intervention.”

Elsewhere, Robinson (2000) argues that media-driven interventions are generally improbable. In subsequent research (Robinson 2002), he refines the original CNN-effect thesis, arguing that sympathetic news coverage at key moments in foreign crises can influence the response of western governments. Gilboa’s (2005) comprehensive review of the considerable body of theoretical and empirical work in this area finds that “scholarly and professional studies of the CNN effect present mixed, contradictory, and confusing results” (p. 34), and no theory has satisfactorily specified its parameters or properties.

For those seeking to precisely define and measure a CNN effect, the major challenge lies not in determining whether the relationship between media and policy is changing (most agree that it is), but in elucidating the nature of the change and in determining whether the 24-hour news cycle is responsible for it. A number of other changes in the international system are discussed as competing candidate explanations. Entman (2003) argues that the relationship between decision-making elites and the media has changed considerably since the end of the Cold War. Others have suggested that 9/11 produced a similar transition (Zelizer & Allan 2002).

Hindman (2004) applies “media system dependency theory” to the analysis of public opinion regarding the performance of both the media and the president before and after 9/11. He finds that partisan differences become stronger predictors of presidential approval after terrorist attacks. Hutcheson et al. (2004) find that following 9/11, governing elites articulated particularly nationalistic themes. They suggest that this emphasis was explicitly aimed at uniting public opinion

behind the war on terror. Similarly, Robinson (2005) argues that current events (e.g., the war on terror and the war in Iraq), combined with strengthened media management by the government, have undermined the CNN effect and reinstated some of the media deference that characterized the Cold War.

The implication seems to be that the CNN effect, to the extent it ever existed, was a temporary phenomenon made possible by the coincidental confluence of new technology and the absence of a coherent geopolitical threat. These arguments likely combine to explain why the CNN effect seems to have had a significantly less transformative effect than early scholarship anticipated.

Elite media and media as an elite. Several authors have suggested a distinction between the elite and the popular media, which may respond in different ways to the forces outlined above (Paletz 2002, Baum 2003). It is perhaps unsurprising that there might be a division in the media along this faultline, given the sometimes wide opinion gaps between elites and the public (Page & Barabas 2000, Page & Bouton 2006). Such a possibility complicates the stylized market framework, which treats the media as unitary. However, relaxing this assumption might help further account for the media's tendency toward deference to elites, at least under many circumstances.

Elite media are thought to play a more active role in the shaping of elite opinion and, through it, foreign policy. For example, Tiftt & Jones (1999) find that leaders often lack independent access to news and information and so rely on the media to inform them of important emerging events (see also Powlick 1995). More directly, the editorial content of elite publications such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Foreign Affairs* influences the thinking of leaders about foreign policy issues. Decision makers rely on these sources for factual information as well as informed opinion (Ferre 1980, Malek 1996).

The records of former presidents are replete with examples of media shaping the in-

formation and opinions of leaders. We see this in the extensive newspaper clippings found in archives of past decision makers as well as in more direct correspondence. For instance, at the height of the 1956 Suez Crisis, Merrill Mueller, an NBC correspondent and host, wrote the following to President Eisenhower:

Because I feel the attached [notes from an interview with British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd] is so important to our government at this time, I send you herewith one of my own copies of a report of mine that is now being distributed . . . [W]henver I stumble on anything as critical as the attached you will hear from me. (Mueller 1956)

Mueller's letter illustrates how the media can, at least sometimes, directly influence the information available to and hence opinions of leadership, even at the highest level. It also suggests that the distinction between decision-making and media elites is less clear than most theoretical models imply. In the above-cited letter, Mueller is clearly nominating himself for a position in the administration, and although he himself did not make this leap, others have. A prominent recent example is Tony Snow, who left his position as an anchor on the FOX News Channel to become White House Press Secretary. The academic literature has noted this cross-fertilization and its implications for the capacity of the media to function as the "fourth estate" (Holsti & Rosenau 1984, Reilly 1995).

The mass news audience demands local human-interest stories, political stories that can be framed as a "horseshoe," and so-called "soft news" (Baum 2003, Hamilton 2003); the general public does not typically demand to be informed about foreign policy. However, as noted, scholars (e.g., Patterson 2000) have long argued that the media has a partly self-imposed, but also constitutionally prescribed, mission to inform the public. When this mission complements the ability to sell, the media are likely to use the salable story as peg to inform. However, the degree to which

informing and selling coincide depends largely on whether the media are able to frame the news in a way that appeals to its buyers: the public.

Hallin (1986) suggests that the media do not report on items on which there is near universal agreement; nor do they report on ideas that lie beyond the “sphere of legitimate controversy.” Others have suggested that an issue is likely to resonate with the public if large segments of the citizenry perceive it as affecting them. Neuman et al. (1992) find that the electorate’s relative lack of interest in foreign relations results from the perceived distance between overseas events and their day-to-day lives.

Some of the lessons learned in the communication literature about public preferences in media coverage help explain why the public occasionally takes interest in a given foreign policy issue and why the media periodically begin to report on it. For example, as discussed above, casualties may both attract people’s attention to foreign policy and turn them sharply against it. The mechanisms by which this occurs remain somewhat unclear, but viewing the media as an actor in a broader foreign policy market clarifies some of them. For instance, the media tend to frame casualties in terms of local losses, flag-draped caskets, and grieving American families. In short, casualties transform a foreign engagement into a domestic issue, making foreign crises seem close to home and to local communities (Aldrich et al. 1989). This attention then acts as a peg on which the media can hang more general stories on the conflict that had previously seemed distant to the public, thereby priming the public to assess whether an engagement is worth the cost.

SYNTHESIS: DEFINING THE FOREIGN POLICY MARKET

Our market formulation builds on other recent work that incorporates the interactions of the media, leadership, and public opinion into a single model. Examples include

“activation” models of public opinion (Powlick & Katz 1998) and “cascade” models (Entman 2003). In this section, we argue that gaining additional insight into foreign policy formulation requires moving from episodic to consistent incorporation of the role of media into our theoretical models.

Previous Attempts at Synthesis

As we have seen, absent the market framework or some other unifying concept, it is difficult to delineate clear relationships between leadership, the media, and public opinion. The seeming circularity of these interactions has inspired work questioning, “Who leads whom?” For instance, Canes-Wrone (2006) argues that presidents typically appeal to public opinion on issues the public is likely to support, but do so primarily when they themselves advocate such issues. Presidents aim such appeals at gaining leverage vis-à-vis Congress. She sees this as a benign process by which both the public interest and the president’s policy preferences become law, at least when the two coincide. Domke et al. (2006) explore the role of “going public” in the passage of the Patriot Act. They argue that political elites’ capacity to manipulate the media messages that reach the public is greatest in times of national crisis or upheaval.

In perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of the dynamic interactions between the actors in the foreign policy market, Entman’s (2003) cascade model attempts to clarify how elites pass information to the media, and subsequently to the public, and the inevitable pushback that occurs in the process. Entman observes that much of the literature incorporates an implicit model, along the following lines: (1) government interacts with the media; (2) the media tell people what to believe; and (3) people provide minor feedback to the media.

However, he argues that reality does not fit these stylized assumptions well. Historically, the media have varied from lapdog to watchdog with some regularity. The traditional

model has difficulty explaining these transitions. Entman's more complex model attempts to account for the interactions between the White House, the rhetoric that reaches the media, the media's framing of this rhetoric, and the public response. All this is further complicated by feedback loops and interactions.

Entman shows that the present alignment between the media, the public, and the administration is far less reliable and stable than the more rigid framework of the Cold War. He argues that variations in cultural congruence, power, strategy, and motivation imply a continuum in the media-administration relationship, ranging from instances where the media essentially distribute the administration's message, at one end, to cases where they are quite critical and emphasize a contrary frame, at the other. This overall assessment is not reassuring for those who believe public opinion can or should positively influence foreign policy. In Entman's (2003) model, elite framing and spin remain dominant despite recent events and advances in technology that some suggest have favored the public (see above).

Entman's work builds on Powlick & Katz's (1998) activation model of the American public opinion/foreign policy nexus. Powlick & Katz argue that public opinion is typically latent and inactive, leaving leaders a free hand in most circumstances to conduct policy as they see fit. However, they suggest that, under limited circumstances, foreign policy issues may "activate" public attention; a process typically prompted by elite debate and major media coverage emphasizing frames compatible with standing public interests (in Entman's terms, "culturally congruent" frames).

Powlick & Katz suggest that the process of activation begins when expert commentators deviate from the government's position on foreign policy. This forces the government to engage the public in order to enlist support on the issue. If this defection spreads to a wider array of credible elites, then the government may lose its ability to effectively manage public opinion.

These studies have taken important steps toward synthesizing the interrelated literatures we consider here, and are therefore in many respects the forebears of our market framework.⁴ For example, in order to underscore the empirical observation that the media only occasionally assert an independent frame on administration rhetoric, and do so only under a fairly restrictive set of conditions, Entman (2003) models the media as a periodic actor in his cascade. Our dynamic market framework takes this arrangement as a starting point. However, by incorporating the role of information in determining market equilibria, it captures the media's ubiquitous presence in the foreign policy process—either as lapdog or watchdog. In short, the market framework builds on prior research, offering additional insight into the dynamic nature of foreign policy process by introducing the concept of market equilibrium and thereby accounting for the seemingly contrasting roles of leaders, the public, and the media identified by previous scholars.

This approach is informed by a long-standing scholarly literature (e.g., Key 1961, Rosenau 1961, Zaller 1994a)—highlighted by Powlick & Katz (1998)—that suggests latent (or "prospective") public opinion exerts a constant influence as leaders anticipate potential future public reactions to their current policies. To the extent democratic leaders always consider whether and how the public is likely to react to their policies over the longer-term, we believe public opinion—the "big club behind the door" (Weingast 1984)—will nearly always influence foreign policy decision

⁴However, it is important to bear in mind exactly what each attempt at synthesis is attempting to accomplish. Entman's (2003) cascade model more closely approaches a fully formed theory than our conceptual framework, which does not make any specific claims of cause and effect. (Indeed, we argue that causality is typically multi-directional.) Powlick & Katz (1998) also do not propose a theory of cause and effect, but rather a framework for understanding media activation in the opinion-policy relationship. In this regard, our enterprise more closely resembles that of Powlick & Katz.

making, albeit to varying degrees and often indirectly. More significantly, we view foreign policy as the equilibrium outcome of a market process.

The Foreign Policy Marketplace

As noted, much of the difficulty in developing a coherent model of the foreign policy process results from conceptualizing leadership, public opinion, or the media independently from the broader context of the foreign policy marketplace. The difficulty increases when we try to model these relationships as sequential actions. Doing so blurs a dynamic characterized by expectations, anticipated reactions, and constant updating. Consequently, we have outlined some of the ways in which the foreign policy process shares important elements in common with marketplaces as we understand them in the study of economics. Both contexts involve the convergence of actors and information on points of equilibrium, rather than linear causal chains. We have traced the rough outline of how this market might work; we now offer a more concise summation.

Of the three primary actors in the foreign policy marketplace, two—the public and its leaders—are interested in creating policy that suits their interests and preferences, which are sometimes at odds. When these interests are at odds, the ability to influence policy varies with the relative amount of information (again, the primary market commodity) held by each actor. In a democracy, the electorate holds fundamental power. Yet, in international affairs, leaders typically enjoy a substantial informational advantage. In many cases, this allows them to effectively dictate foreign policy.

As the third actor in the marketplace, the media act as traders of information. On the supply side, they are beholden to leaders for much of the content of the news (their product) and therefore are under pressure to preserve elites' preferred framing of information. However, on the demand side, they are equally beholden to the public as the con-

sumers of this information, and the public's interest frequently lies in seeing beyond these very frames. Thus, the media walk a fine line—paying enough deference to elite frames to maintain access, while deviating enough to generate and maintain public interest in the news. Foreign policy outcomes result from the delicate equilibrium that emerges between these competing forces. In theory, we should be able to understand and scientifically analyze these equilibria—just as we do the equilibria between supply and demand in traditional economic markets—by observing the relative distribution of information among the primary market actors.

Such a market formulation of the foreign policy process accounts for the fact that decision-making elites and the media are motivated by goals other than the dispassionate transmission of objective information to the electorate. Many communication scholars (e.g., Bennett 1997, Patterson 2000) view such transmission as a key ingredient of a functional democracy, and the political science literature (e.g., Jentleson 1992, Zaller 1992, Brody 1991) often assumes such a function. Yet, the government has little political or institutional incentive to provide “unframed” information, and because news content is determined by the vicissitudes of the marketplace, the news media are arguably not well suited for this role (Hamilton 2003; Zaller 2003 and unpublished manuscript).

Nonetheless, elite messages are necessarily about something. Hence, on some level, and to at least some degree, objective reality or facts must enter the marketplace. Of course, in the interaction between the elites who supply framed messages and the media that transmit them, the precise nature of reality is nearly always subject to debate. We refer to this as the elasticity of reality, which we define as the range within which events can be spun, or framed, without inducing a significant backlash from the public. Similarly, Rosenau (1961, p. 36) writes of the “outer limits within which decisionmakers and opinion makers feel constrained to operate.”

The public is typically slow to demand accountability on foreign policy issues (Rosenau 1961, Zaller 1994a), but when it finds that reality has been stretched too far, the reaction can be swift and severe. The costs are very high for leaders who provide, and the media that transmit, messages that overstretch the elasticity of reality. This does not imply that, over time, reality trumps framing. The public rarely observes reality directly, especially in the realm of foreign affairs. Rather, the public observes and responds to a framed representation of reality, in both the short and longer term (Baum & Groeling 2007).

In the initial stages of a foreign policy event, when elites have a substantial informational advantage, the public's perception of reality is very elastic. This frequently allows a president to dominate the so-called "framing war." Over time, as events unfold and the public gathers more information, the degree of elasticity diminishes, opening a space for alternative frames to influence public opinion. If some entrepreneurs (e.g., journalists) elect to proffer an alternative frame, it stands a better chance of competing with the president's preferred frame, so long as it does not stray beyond the ever-shrinking elasticity of reality.

Events surrounding the conflict in Iraq provide a case in point. Whatever the "truth," the public, over time, arrived at a seemingly firm conviction that the Bush administration's justifications for the war exceeded the elasticity of reality. The resulting fallout took the form of plummeting approval ratings for President Bush and the loss by his party of the Congress in the 2006 midterm election. Evidence of a preemptive media effort to prevent a comparable antimedia backlash can be seen in the *New York Times'* wave of introspection—following the revelation that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq—concerning how and why it had accepted the administration's preferred frames so uncritically.

Slantchev (2006) shows why the ever-present and implicit threat of public back-

lash might consistently, rather than sporadically, influence the behavior of leaders via anticipation of public reactions. His formal model links the electorate's theoretical capacity to sanction leaders (given full information) to the logic of domestic audience costs (Fearon 1994). Slantchev (2006) argues that because an independent media can function as a relatively unbiased, and hence credible, information source, it can facilitate public monitoring—the ultimate source of audience costs (Schultz 2001, Baum 2004a)—of leaders' foreign policy actions. This makes it easier to determine when a leader should be punished for a policy failure. In other words, a free press narrows the information gap between leaders and the public.

Slantchev's theory represents an important contribution to the process of delineating the mechanisms underlying our hypothesized foreign policy market. However, additional theoretical and empirical work remains to first concretely establish and then fully explicate the functions and policy implications of this market process.

CONCLUSION

The next important scholarly step forward in explicating the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy requires an important conceptual refinement. Models of the policy formulation process must elevate the mass media from the role of a conveyor belt to that of an independent, strategic actor (as some of the communications literature does). Additionally, rather than continuing to represent this process through standard linear models that (with relatively few exceptions) predominate in the literature, we believe a market equilibrium approach is more conceptually faithful and thus will ultimately prove more empirically fruitful.

In the early stages of research on the relationships between the public, leaders, and the media in the foreign policy arena, scholars concentrated on delineating the causal pathways among these actors. This approach

yielded many important insights, but the broader theoretical framework remained obscured. We believe this framework is best characterized as a marketplace in which the relative distribution of information among these three actors in large part determines their relative influence on foreign policy. The market framework allows us to synthesize many disparate findings in the literature, thereby revealing the proverbial “hidden face in the picture.”

However, this synthesis represents only a preliminary step. A number of avenues for future research remain. For example, to enhance analytic traction, we treated the media as a unitary actor. This is obviously not descriptively accurate, and especially not in the contemporary era of 24-hour cable news networks, Internet blogs, and soft news (Baum 2003; Hamilton 2003; Baum & Groeling, unpublished manuscript). Yet, as noted, most research on public opinion and foreign policy treats “the mass media” as precisely that: an undifferentiated mass.

A potentially fruitful avenue for future research would thus entail unpacking this unitary-actor assumption, to consider the implications, only briefly alluded to herein, of increasingly niche-oriented and sometimes overtly partisan new media outlets. For instance, media fragmentation increasingly allows citizens to primarily expose themselves to information that reinforces their pre-existing beliefs. In an unpublished manuscript, Baum & Groeling conjecture that self-selection by citizens into ideologically “friendly” media environments may complicate future presidents’ efforts to forge sustainable bipartisan consensus behind their foreign policy initiatives. In the context of the foreign policy marketplace, such selective exposure may slow the narrowing of the information gap between leaders and the public, and hence also slow the tightening of the elasticity of reality.

This review has primarily focused on the United States, largely because the literature is centered on the American context. How-

ever, the dynamics we describe have obvious implications for the relationship between the media, public opinion, and foreign policy in other nations. In fact, comparative research in this area is rapidly proliferating (e.g., Risse-Kappen 1991, Arian et al. 1992, Cohen 1995, Morgan & Anderson 1999, Isernia et al. 2002). Such an extension is long overdue, as it will enhance our understanding of foreign policy in other countries and provide a more generalized conceptualization of the ways in which media interact with public opinion to produce foreign policy in democracies.

Also along comparative lines, there is much room for additional research on the relationship between the foreign policy formulation process within and across regime types. Research within regime types might explore the implications of different democratic institutional forms (e.g., Risse-Kappen 1991) or of different media systems (e.g., Hallin & Mancini 2004) for the media-opinion-policy connection. For instance, some research suggests a positive relationship between the number of political parties in a democracy and both the extent and diversity of public affairs content in the media (Moosbrugger, unpublished manuscript), and, consequently, in the public’s level of political sophistication (Schmitt-Beck 2003). The implication is that, due in significant measure to the enhanced role of the media as political information brokers, electoral systems that typically produce larger numbers of parties (i.e., proportional representation systems) tend to be associated with greater public constraint on government policy making.

Comparisons across regime types might investigate how the foreign policy marketplaces of democracies and autocracies differ, and with what implications. We are only beginning to understand the marketplace in democracies; extending this framework to autocracies may reveal important links between the literatures addressed herein and the expansive democratic peace literature. Early research in this area indicates that media openness may play an important role in the

“Kantian” peace (Choi & James 2006; Baum, unpublished manuscript). Scholars have paid comparatively little attention to the role of the media in autocracies. Yet some recent research (Stein, unpublished manuscript) suggests that, at least under some circumstances, the media can play an important role in the public policy process even in autocracies.

In another potential avenue for future research suggested by our market framework, recent real-world cases indicate that the information gap between the public and its leaders can narrow at very different rates depending (presumably) on the nature of the crisis and the rhetoric that surrounds it. We have identified some potential cues that might affect this rate (e.g., casualties and elite discord). More work is needed, however, to explicate the relationship between these factors and this

narrowing process. What motivates the public to acquire and incorporate new information across a broad range of foreign policy situations?

Scholars have learned a great deal about the interrelationship between the mass media, public opinion, and elite decision makers. Yet, as we have described, the daunting—and in some respects perhaps impossible—task of delineating clear causal pathways has constrained this advance. Recent research (e.g., Entman 2003, Powlick & Katz 1998) has begun to move beyond the limitations imposed by linear causal frameworks. Our proposed market framework is aimed at breaking through this conceptual wall once and for all, in the hope of facilitating a new avenue of research in this critically important aspect of democratic politics.

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The authors are not aware of any biases that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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