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

Democracy requires that citizens' opinions play *some* role in shaping policy outcomes, including in foreign policy. Yet, while the literature on public opinion and foreign policy has made great progress over the past several 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 opinion *do* or *should* influence foreign policy. In this chapter, we first review the extensive gains in scholarly knowledge in the area of public opinion and foreign policy over the past several decades (with a particular emphasis on relatively recent work). We then suggest a framework, based on the concept of market equilibrium, aimed at synthesizing the various disparate research programs that together constitute the literature on public opinion and foreign policy. To do so, we incorporate a third strategic actor, the mass media, which we believe play a critical role alongside citizens and elites in shaping public attitudes about, and influence upon, foreign policy. Our goal is to clarify the multifaceted relationships between these actors and foreign policy outcomes.

Matthew A. Baum

Philip B. K. Potter

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). George W. 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). Donald Rumsfeld added, “the news media seem to want to carry the negative” (Rumsfeld 2005). These statements reflect two assumptions widely shared by decisionmakers 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, while political leaders routinely *assume* that 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., Brody 2001; Jentleson 1992) -- particularly those of the most powerful elites (Bennett *et al.* 2006, Zaller & Chiu 2000) -- to the public. In some contrast, a parallel literature in political communication (Graber 2002; Kuypers 1997; Paletz 2002) details the processes by which 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; Holsti 2004; Nacos *et al.* 2000).

In this chapter, we first review the extensive gains in scholarly knowledge in this area over the past several decades (with a particular emphasis on the most recent work). We then begin the process of synthesizing into a more coherent framework the various disparate research programs that together constitute the literature on public opinion and foreign policy. Our ultimate goal is to clarify the multifaceted relationships between these actors and link them to foreign policy outcomes.

The key to such a synthesis lies in determining how to fit 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?²

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, while, 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, whose 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

² For purposes of enhancing analytic traction, we treat the media – analytically, but not grammatically -- as a unitary actor. Of course, we recognize that the mass media are composed of a diverse array of distinct actors with varying incentives. (In the conclusion, we consider the implications of relaxing this assumption.)

to account for either public opinion *regarding* foreign policy or the effects 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.

Existing work outlines a dizzying array of interactions between the public, leaders, and the media, the complexity of which (when taken together) is evident in Figure 1. Even this highly stylized representation of the existing literature reveals studies maintaining that media influence public opinion, public opinion influences media, public opinion influences decisionmakers, decisionmakers influence public opinion, decisionmakers influence media, foreign policy influences public opinion, decisionmakers influence events, and 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, decisionmakers (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.

[Figure 1 here]

The early stages of many research programs are characterized by scholarly emphasis on delineating causal pathways among the 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, the “hidden face” can also be obscured by the very foundational research aimed at ultimately revealing it. Some scholars have observed such a pattern in the scientific study of public opinion and foreign policy (e.g., Entman 2003; Robinson 2000).

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 co-equal players within a *market* that produces foreign policy outcomes through dynamic interaction.³ The circularity of the 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 contrasting short- and long-term equilibria. This distinction guides much of the discussion that follows.

Figure 2 illustrates the process through which differing short- and longer-term equilibria can arise. It traces the typical path of the foreign policy informational advantage enjoyed by leaders, relative to the public (that is, the information gap). 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, over time, the information gap portrayed in Figure 2.

[Figure 2 here]

Typically public attention to foreign policy (and as a direct corollary, 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 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

³ In a similar argument, Hamilton (2003) asserts that “newsworthiness” is a “function of the number of consumers and their value in the marketplace.”

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. Absent *some* 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 in close proximity to 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 suggest 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 period 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 and Groeling 2007), prior research tends to focus on the former (Brody 2001; Baum 2002; Baker & Oneal 2001) or the latter (Feaver & Gelpi 2004; Gartner & Segura 2000), 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 a number of other previously disparate literatures into a single coherent framework.

This is the task we undertake in the remainder of this chapter. We begin by “setting the stage” 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 mass public’s capacity to contribute constructively to political decisionmaking, 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 generally placed on 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 1920;

Almond 1950), or that the public naïvely 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 very 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 (Popkin 1994; Jentleson 1992; Page & Shapiro 1992). Still, a widespread perception persisted that, most of the time, the public was fundamentally incidental to the foreign policy process (Holsti & Rosenau 1984; Mueller 1973).

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 *whether* 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.*, Popkin 1993), most notably the opinions of trusted political elites, and primarily as reflected in the mass media (Krosnick & Kinder 1990; Iyengar & Kinder 1987; 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 resolving 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 upon which our understanding of the foreign policy marketplace rests. Existing research suggests that there exists a consensus around two key points: (1) citizens are typically at a significant informational disadvantage *vis-à-vis* leadership elites; and (2) they compensate by employing heuristic cues, thereby allowing them to make reasoned judgments based on 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. While 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, if any, role public opinion *actually plays* in specific American foreign policy crises. For instance, some research suggests public opinion influenced U.S. foreign policy toward Nicaragua (Sobel 1993, 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 (Brody 2001; Mueller 1973); 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 extends, 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 longer-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) noted, “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 (Callaghan & Virtanen 1993; James & Oneal 1991; Oneal & Bryan 1995). Others, however, counter that rallies tend to be infrequent and ephemeral and hence rarely of political consequence (Oneal *et al.* 1996; Stoll 1984).

For instance, Baker and Oneal (2001) find no significant evidence of a consistent rally effect across 193 U.S. 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 a rally depends upon 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 and Reiter (2004) further explore whether the rally effect is more nuanced than a simple reaction to the use of force abroad. They find that UN backing significantly increases the size of rallies during MIDs between 1945 and 2001, suggesting that the public is capable of maintaining longstanding policy preferences -- including a preference for multilateralism. This also demonstrates that the public is able to 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, based in the same data, Lai and 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 U.S. 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 a president’s fellow partisans typically approve of his performance *prior* to a rally event. Consequently, they cannot re-evaluate the president’s performance upwards. Just such a pattern emerged following 9/11: nearly all of George W. Bush’s record 36-point, post-9/11 rally occurred among Democrats and Independents, majorities of whom 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 (Brody 2001; Lee 1977; Mueller 1973) that rallies tend to recede in the presence of information contradicting 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, who they consider most

credible -- due 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 focused 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; Milstein 1974) or public perceptions regarding their relative success (Feaver & Gelpi 2004; Gelpi *et al.* 2005; Eichenberg 2005). Yet, a variety of competing ideas have emerged about how such relationships might operate. One view holds that the public reacts negatively to casualties under most circumstance 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 to decisionmaking elites is not going well (Larson 2000; Kull & Ramsey 2001).

Mueller (1973) famously argues that public tolerance for casualties follows a roughly logarithmic function where small numbers of casualties produce large drops in support early in a conflict, while the public might tolerate even large numbers of casualties later in a conflict. Recent variants of Mueller's hypothesis suggest that rather than the raw number of casualties, the

key factor in determining the influence of casualties on public support is 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 -- whether because they *self-select* in to conflicts they are likely to win (Reiter & Stam 2002) or are *selected* into such conflicts by risk-acceptant adversaries (Filson & Werner 2004) -- democracies are more likely than autocracies to win the wars they fight, at least when such conflicts are relatively short in duration (Bennett & Stam 1998).

Scholars have offered a variety of critiques of the casualty aversion hypothesis. For instance, Berinsky (2007) argues that typical individuals are not particularly knowledgeable about foreign policy events, even in wartime. Hence, they tend not to incorporate very much factual knowledge regarding a given event -- such as casualty levels -- into their summary judgments about it. Rather, he argues 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, while only supporting more aggressive or less traditional missions (such as efforts to depose foreign leaders or humanitarian interventions) if the costs remain low. Larson (2000) supports Jentleson's central claim that public responsiveness to casualties is contextual. However, similar to Brody's (2001) "elite debate" explanation for short-term opinion rallies, Larson's argument 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 Reiter and Chapman (2004), Kull and Ramsey (2001) argue that the public will support a conflict despite casualties if it observes other countries supporting the policy. Gelpi and Feaver (2004), in turn, argue 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 and Groeling (2007) observe, the above studies treat public opinion largely, if not entirely, as an undifferentiated mass. Yet important variations arise when one recognizes that public opinion is not uniform. Gartner and 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, while support for the war declined faster among African Americans than whites, the authors found no evidence that the racial composition of the casualties influenced attitudes.

Recent research on framing effects addresses the heterogeneity of public opinion in greater detail. Druckman (2001) and others have found that politically sophisticated individuals

are more resistant than political novices to elite 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 George W. 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. While 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.

Existing 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 hence 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 informational 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 preferred framing of information by elites begins to break down and the public is able to assert 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 dominated research to this point.

Decisionmakers

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 stronger in longer conflicts as the information gap dissipates. We next consider how leaders respond to these same 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 is only likely to tempt a leader if she 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 and Orphanides (1995) use a principle agent model to demonstrate that asymmetric information 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, various studies have (James & Oneal 1991; Clark 2003; Howell & Pevehouse 2005), while various others have not (Meernik 2004; Moore & Lanoue 2003; Potter 2007) found evidence of politically motivated uses of force by the United States. Some scholars (e.g., Fordham 1998; Ostrom & Job 1986) report evidence that U.S. presidents are more prone to use force abroad when their approval ratings are falling. Others (e.g., DeRouen & Peake 2000) 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 U.S. case. Morgan and 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 U.S. 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, though Oneal and Russett (1997) originally reported that slow economic growth increased the likelihood of MIDs in all regime types, in subsequent work with a more complete dataset (Russett & Oneal 2001), they fail to replicate this finding.

The discrepancy between the U.S. 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 & Greico 2006). Based on a large-N, instrumental variable analysis, Chiozza and 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 is flawed for a variety of theoretical and methodological reasons.

Other scholars have raised methodological critiques of some *negative* findings in the diversionary war literature. For instance, Fordham and 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 U.S. foreign policy. He concludes that opinion constrains policy but does not dictate it. Oneal and 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 pin their hope on the possibility 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 use of force for diversionary purposes stems from some of the market mechanisms we have already discussed. Conflict tends to narrow the information gap between the public and their leaders unless it can be concluded rapidly (often an elusive goal). Leaders can also expect that the sorts of conflicts they might initiate to “wag the dog” -- non-traditional, aggressive or unilateral missions -- are the very types most likely to provide cues -- such as the partisan elite discord that would likely accompany a politically motivated conflict -- that tend to turn the public against an engagement. In short, the previously unresolved discrepancy between the empirically well-documented rally effect and the ambiguity in empirical evidence regarding (the logically compelling) diversionary war theory becomes considerably 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, in turn, keep their finger on the pulse of public opinion? Questions such as these appear to open a window for the media to mediate the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy leadership as a discrete third actor in the foreign policy marketplace. We thus turn to the mass media.

Mass Media

We have outlined how information largely dictates the dynamics between the public and their 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. We argue that media serve the crucial role of collecting, framing, and distributing the key market commodity -- information.

Without question, leaders place great value on controlling this commodity. As Bryan G. Whitman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Media Operations, observed with respect to the Pentagon's policy of embedding reporters within U.S. 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 upon a simplifying assumption that the media serve primarily as a linkage mechanism rather than as an independent, strategic actor in the policymaking process (Bloch & Lehman-Wilzig 2002; Brody 2001; Malek 1996). The most well 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 1998) shows how 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 n.d.).

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 hence unmotivated to object. Thus, the information equilibrium tends to favor leaders and, hence, the media are more responsive to leaders’ preferences than to the public as consumers of information. Consequently, while indexing theories are well-supported when the criterion for evaluation is the frequency with which media transmit elite messages, this criterion 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. However, 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 rely to a great extent on leaders for access to information, that is, for their *supply* of the key market commodity. However, this information usually comes “prepackaged” with a frame that leaders would prefer that 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, in turn, the public has 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.

Much as was the case 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 which seem to predominate under many circumstances and the more *proactive* media which sometimes emerge. The equilibrium between leaders and the public in the foreign policy marketplace accounts for this variance.

The media do not -- despite a widely held belief in the mission to inform (e.g., Bennett 1997; Patterson 2000) -- 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 (Chapman & Reiter 2004; Baker & Oneal 2001) -- when the public is informationally disadvantaged and thus *most* inclined to rally, 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 prepackaged rally frame. In this light, the market framework seems consistent with Zaller and Chiu’s (2000) finding that due to their dependence upon authoritative sources for information -- primarily the White House and executive agencies -- the media often rally along with the public when conflicts arise.

Similarly, the market framework seems consonant with Entman’s (2003) argument that media are most able 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 constitutes liberation or occupation). In contrast, Entman argues that 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.

In the latter case, 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 the former case the public’s informational disadvantage tends to dissipate more rapidly, 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. Understanding the role of media in this manner makes it possible to synthesize a variety of literatures on the media within a single, coherent conceptual framework.

The notion of media responsive to market pressures emanating from public opinion stands in contrast to the widely held belief that the media in a democracy *should* fulfill a “watchdog” function (Patterson 2000). However, the *capacity* of the media to fulfill this expectation is subject to debate (Hamilton 2003; Baum 2003). Most early work -- representing the intellectual precursor of contemporary indexing theories -- argues that the media’s reliance on official sources leads it to essentially parrot the information obtained from decisionmaking elites (Cohen 1963). Reporters who spend years as White House correspondents can 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” (Graber 2002; Iyengar & Reeves 1997). Others, however, counter that media reliance on elite framing has declined in recent years. Livingston and 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, but that 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).⁶ According to early proponents of this perspective (Sharkey 1993; Maren 1994), citizens, shocked by dramatic, real-time television 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 are 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 technological changes characterized by the CNN effect might fundamentally alter the market equilibrium; however, the reality seems not to have proven so stark.

⁶ The 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.

In theory, the CNN effect could be expected to shift the market equilibrium in favor of the public by more rapidly providing information and, in doing so, undermining elite frames. Thus, the duration and magnitude of the public's informational disadvantage -- during periods where 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 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 which do not reveal a "smoking gun" either proving or disproving the thesis. For example, Susan 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 (Baum 2004b; Livingston & Eachus 1995-96, Robinson 2001) found that in Somalia the media followed the flag rather than the other way around. These scholars attribute the intervention to pressure from decisionmaking elites, including key members of Congress and officials within the administration itself. Robinson (2001, p. 941) thus points to the "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 (2005), in turn, presents a comprehensive review of existing research in this area and finds that, despite a considerable body of theoretical and empirical work, "scholarly and professional studies of the CNN effect present mixed, contradictory, and confusing results" (p. 34), while no theory has satisfactorily specified its

precise parameters or properties.

The major challenge facing those seeking to precisely define and measure a CNN effect lies not in determining whether the relationship between media and policy is changing; most agree that it is. Rather, the difficulties lies in precisely defining *how* it is changing and in determining whether the 24-hour news cycle is responsible for any such change. A number of other changes in the international system have arisen as competing candidate explanations. For example, Entman (2003) argues that the relationship between decisionmaking elites and the media has changed considerably since the end of the Cold War.

Others have suggested that the events of September 11, 2001 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 the September 11th attacks. He finds that partisan differences become stronger predictors of presidential approval *after* terrorist attacks. Hutcherson, *et. al* (2004), in turn, find that following the 9/11 attacks 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 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 relatively fleeting 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 (Beaudion & Thorson 2002; Paletz 2002; Baum 2003). This is perhaps unsurprising given the sometimes-wide opinion gaps between elites and the public (Page & Barabas 2000; Page & Bouton 2006). Such a possibility complicates the market framework because our stylized framework envisions only discrete actors. However, this overlap might provide a secondary explanation for the tendency by media 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, Tifft and 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. Decisionmakers rely on these sources for factual information as well as informed opinion (Malek 1996; Ferre 1980).

The records of past presidents are replete with concrete examples of media shaping the information and opinions of leaders. We see this both in the extensive newspaper clippings found in archives of past decisionmakers as well as in evidence of 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 regarding foreign policy information he came across as a member of the press:

“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...whenever I stumble on anything as critical as the attached you will hear from me” (Mueller 1956).

Mueller’s letter illustrates how 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 members of the decisionmaking and media elites is less clearly defined than most theoretical models imply. In the above-cited letters, Mueller is clearly nominating himself for a position in the administration, a leap he personally did not make, but one that others do. 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 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 “horserace,” 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. When this mission complements the ability to sell, the media are likely to use the sellable 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 will they report on ideas that lie beyond the “sphere of legitimate controversy.” Others have suggested that an issue is likely resonate with the public if large

segments of the citizenry perceive it as affecting them. Neuman, *et al.* (1992), in turn, 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 helps account for why the public occasionally takes interest in a given foreign policy issue and why the media periodically begins to report on it. For example, casualties may both attract peoples' attention to foreign policy and turn them sharply against it (see above cites). 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 been relatively distant for 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 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 *episodically* to *consistently* incorporating 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, 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), in turn, explore the role of “going public” in 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 to date of the dynamic interactions between the actors in the foreign policy market, Entman’s (2003) “cascading activation” model attempts to clarify the process by which 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 existing literature incorporates an implicit model, along the following lines: (1) government interacts with the media; (2) 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 particularly well. Historically, media have varied from lapdog to watchdog with some regularity. The traditional model has difficulty explaining these transitions. Entman suggests a more complex model that 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 alignment between the media, public and the administration is far less reliable and stable than during 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 model, elite framing and spin remain dominant despite recent events and advances in technology that some suggest have favored the public (see prior discussion).

Entman's work builds on Powlick and Katz's (1998) "activation" model of the American public opinion/foreign policy nexus. Powlick and 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 and Katz's 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 their 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 forbearers of our market framework.⁷ For example, in order to underscore the empirical observation that media only occasionally assert an independent frame on administration rhetoric, and do so only under a fairly restrictive set of conditions, Entman models 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, thereby accounting for the seemingly contrasting roles of leaders, the public and the media identified by previous scholars.

This approach is informed by a longstanding scholarly literature (e.g., Rosenau 1961; Key 1961; Zaller 1994) -- highlighted by Powlick and Katz -- suggesting that *latent* (or "prospective") opinion is a *constant* influential factor, due to leaders' anticipation of *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, this, we believe, suggests public opinion -- the "big club behind the door" (Weingast 1984) -- will nearly always influence foreign policy decisionmaking, albeit to varying degrees and frequently indirectly. More significantly, we view foreign policy as the equilibrium outcome of a market process.

⁷ However, 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 and 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 and Katz.

The Foreign Policy Marketplace

As noted, much of the difficulty 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. This becomes even more difficult 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 their 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. They are beholden to leaders (the *suppliers*) for much of the content of their news and therefore are under pressure to preserve elites' preferred framing of that information. However, they are equally beholden to the public (the *demanders*) as the consumers of this information, and the public's interest frequently lies in seeing beyond these very frames. Thus, the media walk a fine line

between paying enough deference to elite frames to maintain access, while deviating enough to generate and maintain public interest in their product (i.e., 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 decisionmaking 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., Brody 2001; Jentleson 1992; Zaller 1992) often assumes such a function. Yet, the government has little political or institutional incentive to provide “unframed” information, while, 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).

Nonetheless, elite messages are necessarily about *something*. Hence, on some level, and to at least some degree, *reality* or *facts* must enter the marketplace. Of course, in the interaction between elites *supplying* framed messages and the media *transmitting* them, the precise nature of *reality* is nearly always, to some extent, 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. Along similar lines, 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 awaken or demand accountability on foreign policy issues (Rosenau 1961; Zaller 1994); but when it does, and 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, elites have a substantial informational advantage. Consequently, from the public’s perspective, “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 recedes, thereby 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 in Iraq exceeded the elasticity of reality. The resulting fallout took the form of plummeting approval ratings for the President and the loss by his party of the Congress in the 2006 midterm election. Evidence of a preemptive media effort to prevent a comparable anti-media 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 accepted the Administration’s preferred frames so uncritically.

Branislav Slantchev (2006) shows why the ever-present implicit threat of public backlash

might *consistently*, rather than sporadically, influence -- via anticipated reactions -- the behavior of leaders. He develops a formal model to link the electorate's *theoretical* capacity to sanction leaders if they had full information to the logic of domestic audience costs (Fearon 1994). He 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 it a leader should be punished for a policy failure. In other words, a free press narrows the information gap between leaders and the public.

Stantchev's theory represents an important contribution to the process of delineating the underlying mechanisms through which our hypothesized foreign policy market might function. 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 conveyor belt to that of an independent, strategic actor (as is the case in *some* of the communications literature). Further, 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 hence, ultimately more empirically fruitful.

Scholars in the early stages of research on the relationships in the foreign policy arena between the public, leaders and the media concentrated on delineating the causal pathways

among the these actors. This approach yielded many important insights. Yet, inevitably, 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, in order 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; Baum & Groeling n.d.; Hamilton 2003). Yet, as noted, most research on public opinion and foreign policy treats “the 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. Baum and Groeling (n.d.) 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 the tightening of the elasticity of reality.

We have also primarily focused on the role of media and public opinion in *American*

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

Along similar comparative lines, there is much room for additional research on the relationship between the foreign policy formulation process both within and across regime types. In the former case, what are 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 (Moosebrugger n.d.), and, consequently, in the public's level of political sophistication (Schmitt-Beck 2003; Kumlin 2001). The implication is that, due in significant measure to the enhanced role of media as political information brokers, electoral systems that tend to produce larger numbers of parties (i.e., PR systems) tend to be associated with greater public constraint on government policymaking.

In the latter case, how do the foreign policy marketplaces of democracies and autocracies differ, and with what implications? We are only beginning to understand the marketplace in democracies; it seems likely that 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 (Chio & James 2006; Baum n.d.). While scholars have subjected the potential influence of the media on public opinion and policymakers to relatively intense scrutiny, they have paid comparatively little attention to the role of media in autocracies. Yet some recent research (Stein n.d.) suggests that, at least under some circumstances, 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 their 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 precise relationship between these factors and this narrowing process. This will entail determining 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 decisionmakers. 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, to hopefully facilitate a new avenue of research in this critically important aspect of democratic politics.

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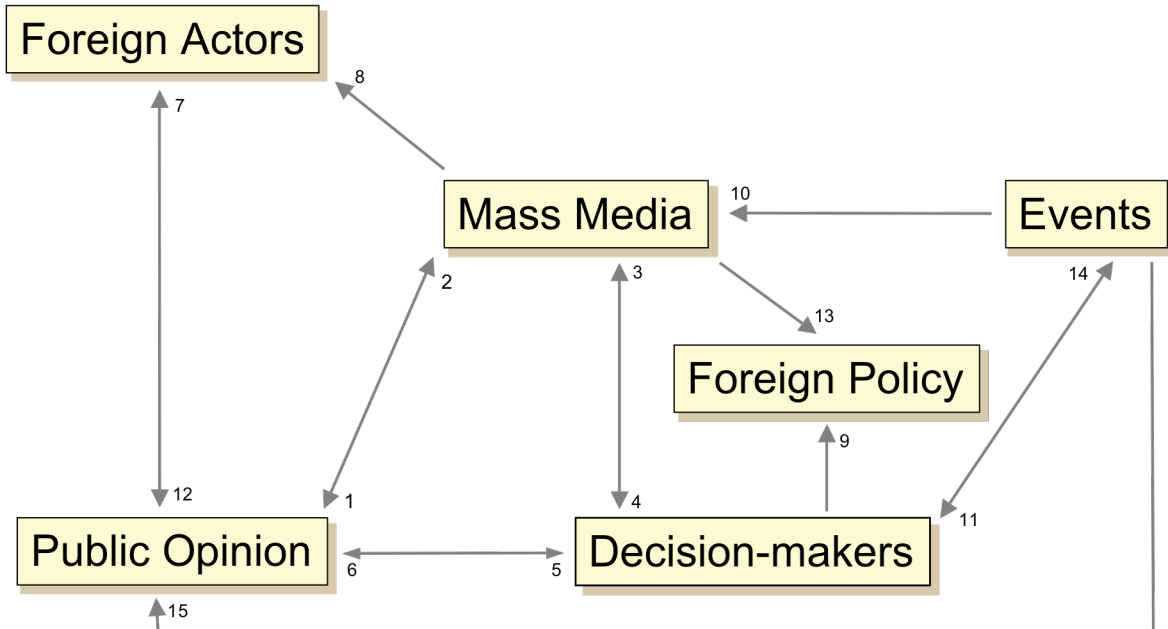
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FIGURE 1. Prior Specifications of Causality in Relationship(s) between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy



- 1) Paletz 2002, Graber 2002, Reese 2001, Baum 2003
- 2) Hamilton 2003, Zaller n.d.
- 3) Cohen 1963, Sigal 1973, Bennett 1990, Brody 1991
- 4) Powlick 1995, Denham 1997, Merrill 1995, Malek 1996
- 5) Powlick 1991, Eisinger 2003, Meuller 1995
- 6) Zaller 1992, Lewis 2001, Brody 2001, Jentleson 1992
- 7) Evans, Jacobson, & Putnam 1993
- 8) Finel & Lord 1999

- 9) Hermann & Hermann 1989, Mintz 2004, Kolodziej 1981
- 10) Gartner 2004, Graber 1997, Tifft & Jones 1999
- 11) Behr & Iyengar 1985, Andrade & Young 1996
- 12) Manheim and Albritton 1984, Zhang & Cameron 2003
- 13) Sharkey 1993, Wolfsfeld 2004, Stetch 1994, Rotberg & Weiss 1996
- 14) DeRound & Peake 2000, Clark 2003, James & Oneal 1991, Meernik 2004
- 15) Feaver & Gelpi 2004, Mueller 1973, Slantchev 2004, Kull & Ramsay 2001

NOTE: The citations associated with each arrow are illustrative rather than exhaustive, and 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 Public, Over Time.

