The Electoral Consequences of Military Intervention: Comparing British and American Election Campaigns

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This paper examines media coverage of the war in Iraq and its impact on the re-election campaigns of George W. Bush and Tony Blair in 2004 and 2005. Much of what is known about war, the media, and public opinion comes from single country studies. Moreover, a great deal of conventional wisdom about media effects is based on the US case alone, with mere speculation as to its generalizability. The electoral response to political representations—campaign communication and election news coverage—of the war in Iraq provides a unique opportunity to go beyond a single case and compare media coverage and public opinion in two countries whose leaders were intimately associated with the decision to go to war. The case also gives an opportunity to consider public responses to rationales (in many cases, rationales that proved to be faulty) for policies associated with the war. The uniqueness of this two-case study derives from several factors, including: 1) the extent to which the decision to go to war was personally associated with these two leaders, 2) the absence of a coalition that went much beyond their two countries, and 3) the fact that both incumbents fought elections within six months of each other while the war was still ongoing—albeit long after one of them had declared the mission accomplished. Other military conflicts such as the Second World War or first Gulf War have some but not all of these features.¹

Beyond contributing to our understanding of media coverage of military interventions and its effects on elections this paper also makes a more specific contribution to understanding of the impact of the war in Iraq on voting behavior. Past research is conflicted about effects of the war in Iraq on support for Bush. Some studies say that it boosted support for Bush to the extent

¹ For example, Roosevelt and Churchill stood for re-election in 1944 and July 1945, respectively but a) the allied coalition went far beyond the US and UK and b) the war in Europe was over when the UK election took place. George H.W. Bush and John Major both stood for re-election in 1992 but a) the coalition was much more extensive than for the later war in Iraq and b) the war had ended the previous year.
that the public saw the conflict as connected to the broader war on terror and also perceived him
as a strong leader (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Norpoth and Sidman 2007). But other researchers
disagree, finding either that it cost him (Campbell 2004) or had little net impact (Wlezien and
Erikson 2005), perhaps because the magnitude of the war’s impact on vote choice, outside the
American south, was contingent on the number of casualties in a given state (Karol and Miguel
2007). By contrast, the war in Iraq appears only to have cost Blair support by undermining trust
in him (Clarke et al. 2009). None of these conclusions is based on a comparative approach,
however. In a previous paper, Stevens and Karp (2010) re-examined conventional wisdom by
conducting parallel analyses of how views of the war in Iraq and the war on terror affected
perceptions of the leaders’ virtues and the impact of those virtues on vote choice. They found
more similarities than differences and concluded that rather than the war having different effects
on perceptions of the leaders, the differences in the impact of the war were at least partly
explained by the nature of the leaders’ core supporters: Republicans tend to be more hawkish and
the war sat comfortably with those dispositions whereas Labour Party support tends to be more
dovish and Labour identifiers were demonstrably conflicted.

In this paper we examine the role of another potential factor—media coverage of the war
during the two elections—to explain why the war appears to have been more costly for Tony
Blair than for George W. Bush when these leaders faced re-election. We find that the news
media played an important part in these elections. The nature and effects of media coverage of
the war did indeed differ for Blair and Bush, both in terms of its tone and in its impact on support
for the two leaders and their parties. In each case, as well, representations of the war in news
coverage from the political right had a particularly strong impact on voting behavior.
**Previous Research**

In this section we survey several elements of the literature on foreign policy, foreign policy attitudes, and media. We examine the role of foreign policy in elections before drilling deeper into the perceived differences in their influence on British and American elections. We then explore media influence in a similar way, beginning with a general overview of media coverage of foreign affairs before looking more closely at differences in media systems in the two countries and their implications for coverage of the war in Iraq.

1. **Foreign policy and elections**

Although pundits and political scientists once thought voters in the US paid little attention to the seemingly “remote” issues raised by foreign affairs (Almond 1950), it is now well established that when US presidential election candidates talk about foreign policy they are not “waltzing before a blind audience” (Aldrich et al. 1989). To the contrary, while the influence of foreign policy attitudes appears more variable than perceptions of the economy, public opinion on foreign policy is stable and responds to real world events in logical fashion (Aldrich et al. 2006). It also has an influence on vote choice, albeit one that is often characterized as indirect via perceptions of specific leader traits such as strength or competence or, more broadly, through its impact on presidential approval (Gelpi et al. 2007; Page and Shapiro 1983; Sullivan et al. 1990). For example, Aldrich et al. (1989) show that foreign policy was as important as the economy in 1980 and 1984 (see also Nincic and Hinckley 1991), while Sullivan et al. (1992) show that patriotism was particularly influential in 1988. As we discuss in detail below, foreign policy attitudes also loomed large in the 2004 election (e.g., Hillygus and Shields 2005). Indeed, Layman et al. (2006) claim that foreign policy is part of the extension of party conflict that has contributed to growing party polarization in the US over the last few decades. While there is far
less research on the British public’s foreign policy attitudes, recent evidence suggests that British public opinion on foreign policy is also clearly structured and influences party preferences (Reifler et al. 2011).

Given these accounts of public opinion on foreign policy, it is perhaps unsurprising that domestic audience considerations enter into the foreign policy decision-making of elites. For example, there appear to be strong incentives in potential conflict situations such as Iraq for leaders to be hawkish because a consequence of non-intervention is that leaders are seen as less competent and thus less desirable standard bearers for the nation by the public (Smith 1998; Tomz 2007). On the other hand, a particularly great cost is incurred for “destroying the country’s honest record and thus putting in jeopardy the future benefits of being able to communicate during a crisis” (Guisinger and Smith 2002), suggesting a difficult balancing act between the push toward intervention and the pull of making the mistake of intervention under the wrong conditions. What a given political culture or partisan ideology considers a plausible or wrong-headed rationale for intervention may also vary; a comparison of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair’s styles, for example, argues that Blair was far more prone to use threats to non-democracies than was Clinton (Schafer and Walker 2006).

When countries do enter military conflicts, a characteristic response by the public is to “rally round the flag.” In the US, according to Jentleson (1992, 51), “The automaticity may have been tarnished by Vietnam and Watergate, but the public still is said to look to the president first and foremost, albeit not exclusively, for leadership on foreign policy.” In the US, the public and members of news organizations look to the president not only to identify geopolitical threats but to define foes such as Saddam Hussein; the explanation for this fact appears straightforward: “in foreign affairs the president is the most authoritative and hence newsworthy of all elites,” so “he
wields disproportionate influence over the content of media coverage of foreign affairs” (Baum 2008, 7). Under some circumstances news representations of conflict may drive public support for intervention as may have occurred in the early days of bombing and the ground offensive of the first Gulf War (Allen et al 1994; Mueller 1994). And it is not only the public and the media. In the US there is still strong evidence of “two presidencies”: one for domestic policy, where presidents’ power is severely limited by Congress, and another for foreign policy where there is a great deal of congressional deference (Canes-Wrone et al. 2008).

There are, however, differences in the longevity of the rally, contingent on the “principal policy objective”—whether the perceived foe presents a “standing threat” or has initiated aggressive actions (Jentleson 1992). In addition, public opinion turns negative if new information indicates that elite decisions have led to unsatisfactory progress in a conflict (Baum and Potter 2008; Kull and Ramsey 2001; Larson 2000) and as casualties rise, particularly if the public is unconvinced of the rationale for the conflict or if ultimate success appears unlikely (Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2005; Mueller 1973). Indeed, Gelpi et al. (2005, 153) argue that, “retrospective normative judgments serve as a more powerful predictor for vote choice [than the prospects for success].” Finally, according to Chapman and Reiter (2004, 892), “Insistence on working through the UN has remained high in the post-Gulf War period” and “any rally surrounding the use of force without a Security Council resolution is likely to be limited” (904).

In the US, issue ownership may be another factor in the influence of foreign policy attitudes. Gadarian (2010) argues that there is an asymmetry between Republican and Democratic presidents based on the evidence that national security issues are owned by the Republican Party. The result is that national security considerations weigh more heavily in evaluations of Republicans, all else equal, and the asymmetry is even greater when those issues
are particularly salient in an election. After discovering that foreign affairs can matter to electoral behavior, this research topic has also become the province of American politics specialists; research on issue ownership in British elections has generally focused on domestic issues and Europe rather than foreign policy or national security issues (e.g., Green and Hobolt 2008). But Stevens and Karp’s work (2010) suggests that in the UK as in the US, foreign policy may be owned by the traditionally more hawkish party, in Britain, the Conservative Party.

ii. **Comparing US and UK foreign policy representation and voter behavior**

An obvious but important difference between the United States and the United Kingdom is that the US is the superpower and has thus been the leader in most conflicts in which it has been involved since the Second World War. This fact muddies the waters for leaders of other governments who hope to manage the opinions of their voting publics regarding foreign policy, particularly when it comes to the rationale for conflict. For example, in the Cold War period, Risse-Kappen (1991) finds that in western Europe, perceptions of US policies were as important as negative feelings toward the Soviet Union in explaining individuals’ attitudes to security. Settled views on policy appeals and voting linkages from US opinion studies less clearly apply for other publics. For example, although UN Security Council approval is a factor in rally effects, Lai and Reiter (2005) suggest that it affects American public opinion, positively, in a way that it does not affect British public opinion. They speculate that UN approval may serve a different signalling function for the foreign policy “audiences” of British party leaders.

What of wars and elections in the two nations? The cliché is that wartime leaders do not lose elections because publics are reluctant to change horses in midstream. In fact the evidence is more nuanced than that in the US. As Weisberg and Christenson (2007) point out, the effects of specific wars on a given election vary as do the presidents’ popularity in wartime: two presidents
since the Second World War who were likely to struggle in their battles for re-election, Truman in 1952 and Johnson in 1968, chose to stand down instead. In Britain there have been fewer conflicts from which to draw conclusions but there are clues in the research on rally effects. Lai and Reiter (2005) argue that rally effects around military interventions are rare in the British context and occur, at least partly, through prime ministerial approval. They show rallies for the Falklands War and the first Gulf War but not for the conflicts in Korea, the Suez or Kosovo. The Falklands War is an interesting case: although hostilities ceased by the time Thatcher stood for re-election in 1983, the perception that Britain had been attacked remained along with the opinion that the Thatcher government had responded decisively. Media coverage of the conflict was partial and jingoistic (Carruthers 2011). Nevertheless, scholars dispute both the extent and duration of the Falklands War rally effect and its subsequent impact on the 1983 UK (Norpoth 1987; Sanders et al. 1993). An axiom of US opinion studies stated cogently by Gadarian (2010, 1047): “Times of foreign policy threat tend to increase support for more militant foreign policy and more hawkish leaders,”, as this review makes clear, is less readily generalized to the UK. Differences in media framings of conflicts, and resulting differences in public perceptions of conflicts, help explain this otherwise puzzling limitation of a near cliché expectation for wartime elections.

iii. Media and elections

Election campaigns are, in part, battles to influence media attention to issues and how they are framed. Media signal what the important issues are by virtue of how much attention they pay to them (agenda setting), which considerations they emphasize in their evaluations (priming), and how they structure the narratives causes, consequences, and conditions that may
lead individuals to think of an issue or candidate in a particular way (framing). Media also affect perceptions of reality into which these narratives flow, giving a sense, for example, of how well or badly the economy is doing (Hetherington 1996). The fact that mass media can have such an impact on perceptions of a phenomenon with which the public has direct experience suggests that its effects on perceptions of a military intervention, where very few members of the public have direct experience, is potentially greater. As Gelpi et al. (2007, 155) put it, “the press certainly has the potential to uniformly shape opinion—as long as the reporting from different bureaus is substantially similar—regardless of how well the reporting reflects the reality on the ground. If the press systematically reports international events differently than they occur, then we should expect citizen opinions to reflect media coverage more than the ‘events themselves’.”

Much has been written about the tendencies of mass media to provide what Zaller (1992) terms one-sided coverage during at least the early stages of a war. Contributing factors appear to be a desire, conscious or otherwise, to rally found the flag, and media “indexing” of their stories to the levels of consensus among elites. Journalists may scrutinize official pronouncements less closely when there are high levels of consensus, which is especially likely at the outset of a conflict (Bennett et al. 2007), indexing theory holds, and the public’s capacity to scrutinize such statements critically may be proportionately impaired. The implications are twofold. Most obvious is that the tendency for elites to grow less united over time will result in a fuller range of

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2 As Chong and Druckman (2010) have suggested, the three concepts of agenda setting, priming and framing are at best closely related but really seem to be part of a common process. Agenda setting, priming and framing are “equivalent processes that involve alterations of the weight component of an attitude, through changes in availability, accessibility, and/or applicability.” The media offer various frames in communication that may influence availability, accessibility or applicability.
voices being heard and thus more dissensus.\(^3\) Equally, if governments are unable to control messages at the beginning of a conflict, when the rationale for intervention is in dispute or the prospects for success are uncertain or remote, then high levels of public consensus about its wisdom are unlikely.\(^4\)

There are limits to these effects, however. Zaller and Chiu (2000) find that Cold War conflicts only conformed to the pattern of coverage anticipated by indexing theory if the conflict was clearly driven by the prevailing foreign policy value of anti-communism. The public in Britain also appears to be less in the thrall of spin than indexing theory implies. For example, although British audiences were presented with the government line that the rationale for the first Gulf War was to liberate Kuwait audiences continued to think that oil was also a major factor (Morrison 1992).\(^5\)

Media also have the capacity to influence elections by affecting perceptions of leaders. In a parallel to Clarke et al.’s (2009) account of how voters infer the competence of prospective governments from the qualities of its leaders, according to Slantchev (2006, 465)

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\text{forward-looking citizens will attempt to infer the likelihood of getting good policies in the future by evaluating the past performance of the current leader. Should they become quite pessimistic about these prospects, they would replace the leader with the untried opposition unless doing so is prohibitively costly.}
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\(^3\) Souva and Rohde (2007) suggest that an increasingly polarized Congress means that consensus on foreign policy is now less likely to be sustained.

\(^4\) Baum and Potter (2008) argue that indexing theory has too static a view of the relationship between media and elites—that media, elites, and the public are involved in dynamic exchanges in which each is a discrete actor and influences the other—but acknowledge that the media-elite relationship is consistent with indexing theory, particularly in the early stages of a conflict when information is scarce.

\(^5\) It may also be the case that a public can be spun into more than one message cocoon, with “oil” no less a slogan than “freedom” among under analyzed views of policy motivations.
By providing information about leaders the media help voters to arrive at that evaluation (Stevens et al. forthcoming; Stevens and Karp forthcoming).

iv. Differences in the American and British media systems

As Robinson et al. argue, while Britain and the US share some aspects of culture and values, there are big differences in media–government relations (Doyle and Getler 2004; Robinson et al. 2009). Most pertinently, among US television news and newspapers there remains a norm of objectivity (Cunningham 2003; Hamilton 2004) (although newspaper editorials in the US are willing to question the claims of public officials (Bennett et al. 2007)). UK television, with its public service broadcasting tradition, shares that norm, although “critical neutrality” may be a more accurate description of its coverage than objectivity. But the UK press is overtly partisan, with no qualms about assuming the role of cheerleader or chief critic for its acknowledged side. Clearly such differences in media–government relations are likely to matter.

Thus, while indexing may be a tendency for media coverage of military interventions in Britain and the US there appear to be differences in its applicability, as one might expect. Writing before the invasion of Iraq, Stanyer described the relationship between the UK government and the media as follows: “the government faced a news media largely distrustful of its motives, disdainful in its coverage, hostile towards certain ministers and the Blairs, unwilling to reflect government initiatives, and keen to expose what it saw as sleazy practices” (Stanyer 2003, 312). Matters did not improve after 2003.

What do institutional differences imply for media effects on voter behavior during election campaigns? While the literature on US media has now established that there are often quite large effects of media coverage in the long campaign, research on British media effects, in what is a much shorter election campaign, are far more ambiguous. The explanations given for
this difference are two, neither of which relates to the length of the campaign: 1) that the British news media and the public differ in their views of what issues matter most (see, for example, Butler and Kavanagh 2002, 249; Deacon et al. 2001; Kavanagh and Butler 2005; Miller 1991; Norris 2006) and 2) that the partisanship of the British press means that its readers self-select based on their predispositions, leaving little room for any additional influence of specific instances of news coverage on public sentiments (Harrop 1986; Brynin and Newton 2003). We may expect that models of media effects may look different, while the fact may remain that media coverage of military interventions may influence voter choice in the UK and US alike.

v. **Iraq and the re-elections of Bush (2004) and Blair (2005)**

What do we already know about the war in Iraq and the elections of Bush in 2004 and Blair in 2005? The bare facts of the two elections offer some interesting contrasts. In the UK, although Labour won an unprecedented third term in the UK, it captured only 35 percent of the vote on a weak turnout, a drop of 5 points in support from 2001, while the Labour majority in the House of Commons was reduced by one hundred seats. The vote share of the Conservative Party was likewise unimpressive, but the Liberal Democrats, who had consistently opposed the war, gained four points during the campaign and finished with a relatively high 22 percent of the vote. The combined vote for minor parties, at 10.4 percent, was the highest on record and was apparently due to “immigration, Iraq, and Europe” (Webb 2005, 119).

In contrast, George W. Bush increased his number and share of the votes from 2000 on a higher voter turnout, became the first candidate for president to secure a popular majority of votes in sixteen years and, unlike any of his post-New Deal Republican predecessors, was re-

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6 It is important to note that Tony Blair and Labour were seeking a third term, i.e., up for re-election for a second time having been in power for eight years, whereas George W. Bush was standing for re-election for the first time after four years.
elected with Republican majorities in both houses of Congress. On the other hand, Election 2004 was the closest contest for any of the previously victorious incumbent presidents in the post-World War II era. Perhaps the two countries’ elections have more in common than meets the eye.

Turning for a closer look first to the US, foreign conflict was, without a doubt, a salient issue in 2004: more than one-third of survey respondents describe the war in Iraq and the war on terror as the most important issue in the election. Nevertheless, most studies agree that the war in Iraq was a drag on support for George W. Bush (e.g., Abramson et al. 2007; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; McAllister 2006), while also arguing that some factor or combination of factors limited its damage. To the extent that there is disagreement among researchers on these points it is one of emphasis over the factors that moderated the cost of the war on support for Bush.

According to Norporth and Sidman (2007) the invasion of Iraq prolonged the boost to Bush’s ratings that occurred in the wake of 9/11 and the war on terror. The administration’s consistent framing of the war in Iraq as integral to the war on terror (Gershkoff and Kushner 2005) along with an absence of significant dissent or scrutiny from political elites and the media and widespread public misconceptions about the association of Iraq with 9/11 and the Bush administration’s allegations that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2003; McAllister 2006) may have helped sustain the ratings bump. More than mere partisanship, a tendency to attribute responsibility for the war to perceived threats from the pre-war Iraqi government and beliefs about US government motivations that were more favorable for Bush in his first than in his second term help to explain support for the Iraq war itself (Friese et al. 2009). Thus, Norporth and Sidman suggest that opposition to the war was not at a level that cost Bush support until after the election. Similarly, Gelpi et al. (2007) argue that Bush was able

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7 And part of John Kerry’s campaign strategy was to separate the war on terror from the war in Iraq in voters’ minds (Institute of Politics, 2006).
to insulate himself from losing support as US casualties mounted, winning in 2004 by persuading sufficient numbers of the electorate that the war was justified and that America was likely to succeed.

Other accounts of the 2004 election point to the benefits that a contentious policy decision had on perceptions of George W. Bush’s personal qualities (McAllister 2006). The war added to George W. Bush’s reputation as a strong and decisive leader and detracted from perceptions of John Kerry’s personal qualities. Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, 53) suggest that those who approved of the war seized on Bush’s personal qualities to register their approval, whereas those who disapproved of the war stuck with the policy domain to register their disapproval.

In Britain meanwhile, there is a consensus that the Iraq War cost the Labour party votes in 2005 and that it did so partly by diminishing perceptions of Blair’s character. Tony Blair did not enjoy the level of unity within his own party that George W. Bush did. According to Bennett et al. (2007) criticism of the Bush administration’s decisions in Iraq did not come until years after the conflict when the elite consensus had fractured. In contrast, from the outset there were “divisions bordering on turmoil within the Labour Party” (King 2006, 155) —clear signals of a lack of elite consensus, including the resignation of Cabinet member and former foreign secretary, Robin Cook, and the largest rebellion among the backbenchers of a majority party since the repeal of the Corn Laws in the mid-nineteenth century. In addition, there was willingness in the British media to question the justification for the war (Goddard, Robinson, and Parry 2008).

Bush was also viewed as less honest, intelligent, and knowledgeable than he had been in 2000 (McAllister 2007)—and less honest, intelligent, and knowledgeable than John Kerry (authors’ own analysis of the ANES).
Although there was a rally effect when the war began, even in these early days the war was only backed by 56 percent of the British public and opposed by 38 percent. This level of support was about equal to US backing in late January 2003, before the rally that followed the beginning of the conflict when it increased to more than 70 percent (Norpoth and Sidman 2007; Voeten and Brewer 2006). Britain had not yet been attacked. In contrast, America had been attacked and, after 9/11, had an administration that was constantly framing the war in Iraq as central to the war on terror.

As in the US with Bush, Iraq was very much associated with Blair as an individual:

“He was the person who, among other things, penned the foreword to the so-called ‘dodgy dossier’; repeatedly made the case for military action to the public during TV interviews, press conferences and parliamentary debates; and travelled to the Azores to take part in a pre-war summit. When it came to making the case for war, it was more often than not Blair who argued that all other options had been exhausted. In effect, this was Blair’s war” (McLean and Patterson 2006, 360).

As a result, “Blair spent much of the 2005 general election defending his decision-making over Iraq, and denying that he lied either to Parliament, his party or the public” (Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 221). According to Clarke et al. (2009, 53-4), “the interminable, bloody conflict in Iraq damaged Prime Minister Blair’s reputation as a competent and trustworthy leader … the damage inflicted on Blair’s image had important consequences for the decline in Labour support that occurred between 2001 and 2005.” The loss of trust appears to have been particularly pronounced, both for Blair personally and for his government (Bartle 2006; Quinn 2006; Stevens and Karp, forthcoming).

In sum, while the two incumbent leaders shared the fact of being at war during their respective elections, where the American public was more positive about the war on terror than

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9 Moreover, by 2005 there had already been two inquiries into events related to the war: the Butler inquiry into the use of intelligence and the Hutton inquiry into the suicide of David Kelly.
the war in Iraq, prevailing wisdom appears to be that the British public did not make the
distinction and thus the war cost Labour support. While Bush’s image was enhanced on key
dimensions of leadership, accounts of the 2005 election in Britain suggest that the war
undermined perceptions of Blair’s competence and trustworthiness (Clarke et al. 2009) without
any notion of offsetting improvements of Blair’s image as a strong and decisive leader. The
question is why? Studies such as Gershkoff and Kushner (2005) suggest that media framing may
be a key part of the explanation. We explore this possibility in depth.

**Hypotheses**

Accounts of the British election suggest that the campaign and media did not matter, at
least when it came to trust. Voters had already made their minds up about trust. This is somewhat
at odds with accounts of media effects, however. Stevens et al. have already shown that media
coverage of Iraq and of character primed the issue of Iraq and of trust, contrary to prevailing
wisdom about British election campaigns. One question is to what extent they were related.

Our initial hypotheses concern media coverage in the two countries. We then turn to
media effects.

*Hypothesis 1:* Media coverage in the US is less critical in its election coverage of military
interventions than in the UK.

*Hypothesis 2:* As part of its more sceptical approach, media coverage of military interventions in
the UK is more likely to make the link to negative aspects of a leader’s character than is
coverage in the US.

If Hypotheses 1 and 2 are correct, we would also expect media coverage of military
interventions to have a more negative effect on perceptions of the intervention in the UK, a more
negative effect on perceptions of the leader—even though the UK does not have a presidential system—and therefore ultimately have a greater negative impact on vote choice. However, Gadarian’s work on the US suggests that this should not be universal. If supporters of the more hawkish party weigh national security considerations more heavily we would expect these effects to be stronger for the Conservative media in the UK—newspapers that support the Conservative Party—than for the moderate and left-wing media (Hypothesis 3).

Data and Methodology

To assess the impact of media coverage of the war in Iraq in these elections we need data on media coverage during the elections and public opinion data that allow us to link media coverage with attitudes toward the conflict in Iraq, perceptions of the leaders, and voting behaviour.

UK

During the 2005 UK election, a team from Loughborough University analyzed election coverage from a range of national television and newspaper outlets (see Appendix). The Loughborough team coded all stories about the election on national television news broadcasts, and in newspapers from the front page, the first two pages of the domestic news section, the first two pages of any specialist section assigned to the coverage of the campaign, and the pages containing and facing a newspaper’s leader editorials for the duration of the campaign. Categories included the primary and secondary themes of each story, encompassing key issues such as crime, the national health service, and Iraq\textsuperscript{10}. Stories were also coded for tone, on a scale

\footnote{Where stories only concerned one theme coding was straightforward. Where an article contained more than one theme, the main theme was the most dominant one in the article, defined by: 1. the amount of space discussion of the theme occupied in the article, 2. the }
from “bad news,” through “mixed news”, to “good news” or simply descriptive for each of the parties.\textsuperscript{11} Given that the focus of this paper is on Tony Blair and the incumbent Labour government, we coded bad news stories for Labour as a -1, good news stories for Labour with a +1, mixed or descriptive stories as 0, bad news stories for other parties as +1 for Labour, good news stories for other parties as -1 for Labour, and mixed or descriptive stories for other parties as 0 (see Appendix). Finally, the Loughborough team also coded the main actor in each story, where appropriate, and up to four additional actors.\textsuperscript{12}

We take these indicators of news coverage and link them to the 2005 British Election Study (BES) rolling cross section survey by using the respondent’s self-reported readership of newspapers—the BES did not ask about other kinds of media. This survey involved a pre-campaign baseline survey, with respondents then re-contacted at random once during the

\textsuperscript{11} The elements of stories used to determine tone were: 1. whether there was a “clear directional steer” in the headline, subheadline, or introduction to the article (e.g., “Disastrous poll ratings derail Labour campaign”), 2. whether there were clear examples of political judgments from the author(s) of the article, 3. the political dispositions of quoted sources, (i.e., whether they were one-sided, balanced, or neutral). A story was coded as “Bad News” if “more than 50% of the article material that relates to the coded theme is focused explicitly on the negative implications of the topic for that political party”, “good news” if the opposite was the case, mixed news if there was roughly equal bad news and good news, and descriptive if the article had no evaluative content (from 2005 Media Coding Election Schedule, Loughborough University). Unfortunately we were unable to obtain intercoder reliability for these data but were assured that high levels of intercoder agreement were a fundamental element of coder training (personal communication).

\textsuperscript{12} An actor “is an individual or institution whose actions, opinions or existence is directly mentioned in a news item”, where that actor also has “some independent status within the piece”, i.e., they “are not simply mentioned or discussed by another actor”. Deciding on the main actor was based on: “(a) the prominence of the different sources in the article (i.e. the amount of space they occupy), (b) the nature of their news access (i.e. are they directly quoted or are their views and activities simply described), and their position in the article” (all quote are from 2005 Media Coding Election Schedule, Loughborough University)
campaign and then again after the campaign. Daily campaign samples varied from a low of 59 (one other day had less than 100 completions) to a high of 279, for a total sample of 6059.

We estimate exposure to newspaper stories on Iraq by calculating the number of stories on Iraq from the Loughborough data up to the day of the campaign interview. Thus our measure of exposure captures cumulative coverage in the newspaper a respondent claimed to read most often (see Appendix II). If a respondent read The Guardian, our measures of exposure are the total number of stories about Iraq in The Guardian up to the day of the campaign interview. Similarly, if she read the Daily Mail, our measures of exposure are the number of stories in the Daily Mail up to the day of the campaign interview, and so on. Sometimes there had been no stories on Iraq up to the day of interview, in which case the estimate of exposure for readers of the newspaper was zero. Similarly, respondents who claimed not to read newspapers are assumed to have been exposed to no stories. We distinguish between Labour, Conservative, and independent newspapers based on their editorial stance in the election (see Appendix II for coding). As Stevens et al. (forthcoming) point out, while some have noted a “dealignment” of the British press the empirical evidence shows that “Labour” and “Conservative” newspapers remain reliably different in their tone of coverage about the major parties.13

USA

Our analysis of US news media attempted to replicate where possible the Loughborough University dataset. Given the extensive number of major US national and regional newspapers as well as the institutional differences and resulting dissimilarity between the roles played by newspaper and broadcast media in the US and UK, we decided to instead direct our attention to major US national news program broadcasts including the main evening news shows offered by

13 There are insufficient numbers of respondents to examine individual newspapers separately and it would also render the analysis unnecessarily complicated.
the three major US networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) as well as the evening news equivalent on two additional news outlets including the Fox News Special Report with Brit Hume (which aired at approximately the same time as the major network news) and The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer on PBS.

While substantially smaller in viewership, the PBS and Fox news shows are known to appeal to particular and opposing US partisan demographics. Ironically, they are remarkably similar in their program design. Both Hume and Lehrer begin each 60 minute broadcast with a short news recap before turning to a series of segments (typically about 3) with panel, interview or discussion formats. Each segment focuses on a key storyline with some rotation of co-hosts and external guests. The big three network stations all followed the 30 minute, anchor-delivered-news format.

Because US elections are not initiated by the governing party as in the parliamentary system, but occur on established dates picking a date as the ‘start’ of the campaign is problematic. Conventional wisdom among US political observers generally holds that the majority of the US public only begins to pay attention political campaigns after Labor day. Our media sample covered the period of just over 60 days from September 1, 2004 until the day before the election. Since our intent is to explore the impact of Iraq-related news, we did not execute an expansive, multi-issue news collection effort in the manner of the Loughborough University team. Instead, we focused only on stories related to Iraq. During this time period, NBC had 134 stories. CBC had 159 (including a regular 'fallen heroes' segment). ABC had 111. Due to their format differences Fox News and PBS generated fewer stories than the anchor-style broadcasts tallying 83 and 68 respectively.
Our coding paralleled the Loughborough model. Stories were coded for tone, on a scale from “bad news,” to “good news” or “mixed” for each of the parties. News stories without a clear partisan link were coded as descriptive. We coded bad news stories for the Bush administration as a -1, good news stories for Bush with a +1. Bad news stories for the Democratic Party or for their candidate John Kerry were scored as +1 for Bush, good news stories for Kerry and the Democrats as -1 for Bush. Mixed stories for either party or candidate or descriptive stories were coded as 0.

We linked these indicators of news coverage to the 2004 American National Election Study (ANES) Time Series cross section survey using information on the date of the interview and the respondent’s self-reported national news watching frequency. This 2004 ANES time-series survey contacted respondents once during the campaign, with interviews beginning as early as September 7 and continuing until November 1, and then again after the polling date. Daily campaign samples occurred over 56 interview days with the number of respondents per day varying from a low of 4 to a high of 52. The total sample of the survey was over 1208.

We estimate exposure to broadcast news stories on Iraq by calculating the number of stories on Iraq from our US sample up to the day of the campaign interview. However, unlike the UK data which included information on preferred media outlet for newspapers. The ANES had no indicator of source preference. Since the UK media source information essentially acts as a proxy for potential partisan bias, our alternative approach was to allow each respondent’s declared ideological position (liberal, conservative or moderate) to define their likely news exposure with Fox defining the conservative source, PBS the liberal one and the three major networks the baseline (or moderate) exposure. However, because of the format-based disparities

in story frequency among our sources a simple story count would have practically meant that left or right leaning respondents would have lower exposure rates. We chose instead to generate three combined measures. For moderate respondents exposure is measured using a story count from the three major networks and represents the cumulative average story frequency each day for ABC, NBC and CBS up to the date of the ANES interview. Our liberal measure incorporated the mainstream data while also including PBS story counts in the average. The conservative exposure likewise incorporated the mainstream media while averaging in the Fox coverage. Although this did lead to marginally smaller average story counts for more ideological extreme respondents for any given interview date, this disparity was generally small and was offset by measured differences in tone. In contrast with the approach we used for the UK news data (which relies on source partisanship, thereby making story frequency likely representative of tone difference) for the US news data we tracked the total number of positive and negative (for Bush) story counts and retained these as separate indicators.

In addition to each respondent’s ideological leanings we also weighted their news exposure to reflect their news watching habits. ANES subjects were asked how many days out of seven they typically watched national news. We used this response to create a weighting variable (scaled 0 to 1) that modified the three exposure values (total, positive and negative) for each subject included in our models.

We begin with some descriptive analysis of media coverage of Iraq during the election campaigns to examine Hypotheses 1 and 2. We then examine five dependent variables in order to test the third hypothesis: perceptions of the war in Iraq and the broader battle against terrorism. For the war on terror these perceptions are of Labour’s handling of that war, whereas for Iraq they concern approval of the war. This difference is unfortunate but one we have to work with because the BES only asked about Labour’s handling of the war in Iraq in the pre-campaign
feelings toward Blair and Bush and comparative perceptions of leadership (including who would make the best prime minister\textsuperscript{16} and a Bush-Kerry comparison), and vote choice (including not voting in the UK case).\textsuperscript{17}

Our approach to estimation designed to test Hypothesis 3 is to examine each dependent variable in stages, gradually adding control variables to try to disentangle effects, e.g., the influence of media variables may be subsumed by partisanship. We thus begin by (1) estimating the influence of exposure to stories on Iraq including only the exposure variables. We then control for (2) pre-campaign perceptions (in the UK case), (3) partisanship, and, finally (4) for a number of other key variables. For the UK models these include interest in the campaign, gender, age, education, and social class. For the US models they are interest, gender, education, income and religiosity. We assume a path of influence from perceptions of the war in Iraq and the war on terror, to feelings about Blair or Bush as a leader, to vote preference. Thus, when we look at perceptions of each leader our models include the influence of perceptions of the war in Iraq and the war on terror and our models of vote choice include these two variables and perceptions of the incumbent candidates. We can therefore see the extent to which media influence was mediated by these perceptions and the extent to which there were also direct effects.

Analysis

i. How much media coverage and when?

\textsuperscript{16} We examine these indicators separately because respondents might perceive Blair positive or negatively while considering him the best prime minister or otherwise. Ideally we would look at perceptions of Blair’s character traits, such as trustworthiness, but these were only broached in the pre-campaign survey.

\textsuperscript{17} The exact question wording and estimation techniques are included in the details of each table.
Figure 1 shows the volume and tone of daily coverage of Iraq over the course of the 2005 campaign in Britain. Daily coverage of Iraq grew in the two weeks before the election and was at its peak on television and in newspapers about one week before Election Day. Figure 1 also shows that for all but a handful of days in the campaign the net balance of these stories was negative for Labour. While we do not display coverage of other issues, on nine of the last eleven days of the campaign there were more stories about Iraq than any other issue in national newspapers (on those other days it was the second most covered issue by one story); before that point other issues like asylum seekers and taxation frequently received more attention. Moreover, the war in Iraq received more negative coverage for Labour than any other issue in national newspapers on ten of the last eleven days of the campaign, having been covered like other issues before that in that it was rarely a positive for Labour. The pattern for the amount and tone of coverage was similar for television news but it dominated for somewhat fewer days at the end of the last ten days of the campaign.

**Figure 1 about here**

Figure 2 shows the results of additional analysis, of stories where Iraq was the main theme and Tony Blair or the Labour government was an actor (note the different scale to Figure 1). It reflects two realities of the 2005 election. First, Blair was mentioned in more than half the stories whose primary theme was Iraq. While Figure 2 does not show other actors, Blair and the Labour government featured in stories on Iraq far more often than any other political figures, including the leaders of the opposing parties (combined), Michael Howard and Charles Kennedy. Second, there was a difference between television and newspaper coverage. The public service broadcasting remit of broadcast news—and the efforts to be neutral that come with it—remains salient in Britain. Blair was an actor in election stories about Iraq in roughly one-third of
television news stories and their tone was largely neutral. By contrast, the partisan British press, which had been largely sceptical about the war in Iraq to begin with, featured Blair in almost two-thirds of its articles about Iraq and the tone of those stories was predominantly negative toward Labour.

We can also look at their context more closely by examining the secondary theme of coverage of Iraq in which Blair or the Labour government were actors. In more than half these stories in the national media the theme beyond Iraq was about integrity or trust. For example, this includes an April 23\textsuperscript{rd} op ed in \textit{The Independent}, a centre-left broadsheet, by Richard Dawkins, in which he wrote:

He succeeded in scaring MPs into war by telling lies in the House of Commons, not lies about Saddam himself (a real bogeyman, for once), but lies about weapons of mass destruction. He even got away with the preposterous falsehood that Iraq’s weapons could directly threaten Britain within 45 minutes. His defence now is that he believed those falsehoods at the time, so they weren’t deliberate lies. To parody a rhyme, originally made for Lloyd George: ‘Count not his parliamentary lies a crime. He meant them, how he meant them, at the time.’

Some of the attention was also due to the fact that the father of a serviceman killed in Iraq chose to run against Blair in his Sedgfield constituency, which attracted articles such as this from \textit{The Mail on Sunday} on April 24\textsuperscript{th}:

Antiwar campaigner Reg Keys received a major boost in his attempt to oust the prime Prime Minister from his Sedgefield constituency when the Bishop of Durham publicly attacked Tony Blair’s handling of the Iraq crisis. Dr Tom Wright, the most senior Church of England bishop in the region, accused Mr Blair’s Government of an act of ‘unjustified aggression’.

\textbf{Figure 2 about here}

Figure 3 depicts the US media equivalent of Figure 2. Similar to Blair’s attention in the UK media, George W. Bush featured prominently as actor for most news stories related to Iraq while the Democratic candidate John Kerry appeared as an actor in a limited set of campaign stories. Several patterns relating to Hypothesis 1 appear as we compare these two
figures. First, US news coverage of Iraq was distributed much more evenly across the campaign period; Figure 3 lacks the distinctive story ‘spike’ or the long period of low coverage early in the campaign. As we anticipated, US news coverage tended to be considerably less negative than UK coverage (note the scale differences between the figures) and on occasion for each observed source actually moved into the ‘positive tone’ region of the figure at least once. Fox News was notable for its generally positive or neutral coverage (only once straying into a daily negative score).

**Figure 3 about here**

ii. **Perceptions of Iraq and the war on terror**

How did this kind of press coverage affect perceptions of the war in Iraq and each government’s record on terrorism? We examine this in Table 1 for the UK and Table 4 for the US via the approach described above in which we begin by examining the effects of coverage of the war in Iraq in column (1) of each model without any control variables and then gradually add blocks of control variables.

**Table 1 and Table 4 about here**

The analysis illustrates that there were effects of media coverage of Iraq during the election campaign for some types of media in both countries. These are robust to the introduction of pre-campaign approval—column (2) in the UK models—and party identification in column

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18 This pattern is, in part, exaggerated by the averaging across the major networks which was necessary to make the figure intelligible. However, even if each network were depicted with its own trend line, the absence of peaks would remain since the highest daily news story count for a single network was only 10.
(3) for the UK models and (2) for the US. Moreover, even accounting for these controls, the influence differs between the war in Iraq and the broader war on terrorism.\textsuperscript{19}

In the UK, more coverage of Iraq in Labour newspapers had no effect on approval of Britain’s involvement in Iraq but was associated with higher approval of Labour's handling of terrorism. This echoes findings in the US that to the extent people thought of the war in Iraq as part of the broader war on terror it redounded to the incumbent’s benefit. However, coverage of Iraq in Conservative newspapers also had a positive impact on approval of the war, which is unexpected (it had a negative impact on readers of independent newspapers but the relationship is not statistically significant). This may be an artefact of question wording. Approval of the war in Iraq does not refer to Labour’s handling of the war but to Britain’s involvement in the war. Consistent with Gadarian (2010) and Hypothesis 3, it may be that the more hawkish readers of Conservative newspapers did not approve of the way Britain got into the war but having done so were more supportive of the enterprise. Reminders of Labour’s association with the war did not damage that.\textsuperscript{20} This is also consistent with the positive coefficient for Conservative party identification for approval of the war in Iraq—showing that Conservative identifiers were more likely to approve of the war than were Liberal Democrats and identifiers with parties other than

\textsuperscript{19} Unfortunately, the ANES dataset lacks the pre-campaign opinion measure of the BES. The absence of this important endogenous indicator substantially reduces the explanatory power of the US models when compared to those generated using BES data.

\textsuperscript{20} As mentioned earlier, a question about Labour’s handling of the war in Iraq was only asked in the pre-campaign survey. While the relationship obviously cannot be causal because our measure of exposure comes after the pre-campaign survey was administered, more coverage in Labour and independent newspapers was associated with dimmer views of Labour’s handling of the war, while the exposure measure for Conservative newspapers is statistically insignificant. These results may indicate that these newspapers had been more critical throughout the war and that election coverage was a continuation. Regardless, it suggests that there is a difference between approval of involvement in the war and approval of Labour’s handling of involvement in the war.
Labour—and the negative coefficient for Conservative identifiers’ perceptions of Labour’s handling of terrorism.

In the US situation, Table 4 shows that, once controls are included, general exposure to broadcast news coverage of Iraq had virtually no effect on responses to the question of whether the war in Iraq was worth the cost. A higher level of exposure to positive news stories was a significant contributor to an affirmative response even with control variables included. Echoing the results from the UK models, overall news exposure emerged as a significant factor explaining approval of each leader’s handling of the war on terror. However, it served to strengthen opinion only when it was skewed toward positive news for the leader or his party (in the UK by a pro-Labour source, in the US by pro-Bush news story exposure which was more likely but by no means isolated to Fox viewers). Compared to the positive coverage, overall news coverage had a surprisingly negative influence on assessments of Bush’s handling of terrorism while negative news coverage appeared to have no impact in any of the models. This result suggests that the US public might not have completely conceptually disentangled the Iraq War from the War on Terror and that among those with high—but not overly positive—news exposures the results from Iraq were diminishing perceptions of Bush’s handling of terrorism.

For perceptions of Tony Blair’s character, shown in Table 2, we see clear negative effects of coverage of the war in Iraq among readers of Conservative newspapers and weaker negative effects for readers of independent newspapers. The effects for readers of independent newspapers disappear when we control for approval of the war in Iraq and the war on terror and individuals’ characteristics such as age and education. \(^{21}\) However, even controlling for pre-

\(^{21}\) There is no model (2) for who would make the best prime minister because this question was not asked in the pre-campaign survey. Controlling for lagged feelings toward Tony Blair as a proxy does no change the results.
campaign feelings toward Blair and party identification, readers of Conservative newspapers were affected by coverage of Iraq. The results in model (4) for feelings toward Blair indicate that the difference in feelings toward Blair for an individual who was exposed to no stories about Iraq during the campaign compared to the maximum number of stories about Iraq in Conservative newspapers was 2.4 points on a 0-10 point scale, a substantial impact far in excess of that of party identification. Similarly, more coverage of the war in Iraq during the campaign appears to have diminished perceptions of Tony Blair as the best prime minister, by roughly 10% at its maximum. It is worth reiterating that these are the additional direct effects of newspaper coverage of Iraq; there are also indirect effects via approval of the war in Iraq and the war on terror.

Table 2 and 5 about here

Perceptions of George W. Bush’s character follow a similar pattern to that for Blair in the UK. The slight negative impact of overall news coverage of Iraq on feelings towards Bush disappears in the presence of control variables related to partisanship and Iraq and WOT approval while positive news coverage has a consistent positive effect on feelings toward the president. Assessment of the leadership difference between Bush and Kerry appears to likewise be influenced only by positive Iraq news exposure. When compared to the impact of media on the feeling measure, even this result is comparatively diminished. In contrast with the relatively weak media impact, “support for Iraq” and “approval of Bush’s handling of terrorism” have powerful effects that seem consistent with our earlier discussion of perceptions of leadership in the 2004 campaign. Again, we note that these weaker media effects are the additional direct

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Based on a calculation using prvalue in Stata 11.0 in which cumulative coverage of Iraq in Conservative newspapers was allowed to vary from its minimum to its maximum (with exposure to coverage in other newspapers set at zero) and all other variables were set at their means, using the model in column (4) of the results.
effects of news coverage of Iraq which exists in addition to indirect effects via approval of the war in Iraq and the war on terror.

Finally, we turn to the question of vote choice. For the campaign in the UK we present results from multinomial logit models in which the dependent variable has four categories: voting for Labour, the Conservatives, another party (the Liberal Democrats or others), or did not vote. In the US case, a binary logistic regression is explored because of the absence of third parties and the fact that the number of self-reported non-voters was comparatively small. For this part of the analysis we display two sets of model estimates, one with the media exposure variables and party identification, the other with those variables and the four dependent variables—perceptions of the war in Iraq and each leader or party’s handling of terrorism, feelings toward Blair or Bush and whether or not he would be the best prime minister or a better leader than his challenger—from Tables 1 and 4 and 2 and 5 respectively as independent influences on vote choice.

Model (1) of Table 3 shows two effects of coverage of the war in Iraq in the UK: readers of independent newspapers were more likely to vote for a third, fourth, or fifth party than to vote for the incumbent government with more coverage of Iraq, and readers of Conservative newspapers were also increasingly likely to vote Conservative rather than Labour with more coverage of Iraq. There was no equivalent effect on readers of Labour newspapers, however. Indeed, the general lack of influence of coverage in Labour newspapers in the analysis shown in Tables 1-3 suggests that readers of Labour newspapers had already made up their minds on these issues prior to the election campaign, consistent with Clarke et al.’s (2009) account. On the other hand, other members of the public were still susceptible to campaign influences. When we control for the dependent variables that were the subjects of Tables 1 and 2, the effects on
Conservative newspaper readers for the Labour/Conservative choice retain their sign but the size of the coefficient is reduced by half, while the effect on readers of independent newspapers for the Labour/Other party choice remains weakly significant, while still showing that more exposure to coverage of the war in Iraq made a third or fourth party choice more likely.

In sum, we see few direct effects of media coverage in Britain once we control for their influence on perceptions of the war in Iraq and war on terrorism and on perceptions of Tony Blair. The signs on these coefficients are interesting, however. On the one hand, approval of the incumbent government’s handling of terror, perceiving Blair as the best prospect for prime minister, and more positive feelings toward Blair all have the expected effects, making individuals more likely to vote Labour. On the other hand, approval of the war in Iraq is associated with a higher likelihood to vote Conservative, all else equal, than is disapproval.

This takes us back to the point we made earlier about the question referring to approval of what was ongoing involvement in Iraq rather than of, say, Labour’s rationale for that involvement. Nevertheless, it points to an interesting difference between the British and American cases. While our analysis, particularly Table 1, suggests that perceptions of the war in Iraq and the war on terror played out differently in Britain, as they did in America, the effects of approval of Iraq did not. In the US, approval of the war benefited George W. Bush; in the UK it had the opposite effect on Labour. This may have been the consequence of two factors: the loss of trust in Blair and Labour and that Blair led the traditionally more dovish party in British politics whereas Bush led the traditionally more hawkish party in the US, i.e., Conservatives felt that a government led by them would be more apt to finish the job in Iraq. Media coverage of Iraq, even though it was primarily negative, was negative toward Tony Blair and the original case for war rather than arguing that Britain should withdraw.
Table 3 and 6 about here

Table 6 shows that in the US case media exposure of any sort (overall, positive or negative) had no direct effect on vote choice. As model 3 depicts, the impact of comparative assessments of Bush and Kerry’s leadership had a very strong impact on how respondents voted. Approval of Bush’s handling of the WOT and support for Iraq were additional positive influences that increased the likelihood of supporting the incumbent. Interestingly, after controlling for leadership and policy position, feelings toward Bush had no direct effect on vote choice.

Finally, we summarize the analysis of Tables 1-3 in Figure 4 by presenting the “maximum effects” of exposure to stories on Iraq in Conservative newspapers, where we have seen much the most consistent effects, for each statistically significant relationship. This permits a better sense of the substantive import of the results via the direct and indirect effects of media. We calculate maximum effects by varying exposure to stories in Conservative newspapers from their minimum to maximum while holding exposure to stories in other newspapers at zero and setting all other variables at their means or modes. Figure 3 shows that the fact that readers of Conservative newspapers became more likely to approve of the war in Iraq during the campaign and that approval of the war was positively associated with Blair provided a small boost in perceptions of him and thus of the probability of voting for him—multiplying through the paths the boost is one of about 2 percent—but this is cancelled out by the direct path from approval of Iraq to vote choice, which shows a 2 percent lower likelihood of voting Labour with greater approval. More substantial are the effects via perceptions of Blair. In combination, Figure 3 indicates that the fact that coverage of Iraq rendered Conservative newspaper readers less likely

\[23 \text{ We use prvalue in Stata 11.0. Clarify is an alternative but still appears to be unstable with model estimates with robust standard errors.}\]
to feel positively toward Blair and less likely to see him as the best PM made these readers about 12 percent less likely to vote Labour than Conservative. Thus the impact of media coverage of Iraq during the British election campaign appears to have been primarily among Conservative newspaper readers, as Hypothesis 3 predicts, and occurred via diminished perceptions of Blair more than via perceptions of the war in Iraq or the war on terror. And it is worth reiterating that these are only media effects during the campaign: we control for pre-campaign evaluations of Blair which were likely already influenced by media coverage.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper has used the unique context of the war in Iraq and the re-election campaigns of George W. Bush (2004) and Tony Blair (2005) to examine the impact of media coverage on a conflict, comparing media effects in two different institutional contexts. We began with the puzzle of why the war in Iraq unequivocally cost Blair votes while having a much more ambiguous, or possibly positive, impact on support for Bush. We developed three hypotheses about the nature and effects of media coverage of the war, all of which were supported: the British media were more critical in coverage of the war during the election campaign, more negative in coverage of Tony Blair particularly with respect to the war. Media coverage of the war and Blair’s role in taking Britain to war ultimately cost Blair’s party votes.

Our findings also have additional implications. We have demonstrated again that foreign policy can have an important impact on US elections. The extent to which foreign policy affects British elections, or indeed British public opinion, is not as obvious as in the US case, yet we have shown not only that foreign affairs influenced the British public in 2005 but also that it did so in part as a result of the campaign and election campaign coverage. Campaign communication, not solely events that had unfolded over a much longer time period influenced
voter choice. Our findings indicate that the asymmetry in left-wing and right-wing concern about foreign policy that has been noted in the US (Gadarian 2010) may extend to Britain and also plays out in the nature of media influence.

In Britain it was readers of the Conservative press who were most affected by coverage of Iraq. In a single country study this finding could have been explained as a function of incumbency in a narrative, for example that said Blair’s constituency knew him best and was the least changeable. However, the comparison with the US suggests otherwise. In the US, the evidence is more indirect, but we find that positive news had the most effect on perceptions of the war and of Bush. In the US, too, conservative media offered the most positive coverage of both. Also in the US as in the UK a conservative audience was most affected by coverage of Iraq. Thus the puzzle of the difference in the effects of the war in Iraq on Bush and Blair appears to be explained as a function of variation in their bases of support—Blair representing the more dovish party in British politics and Bush the more hawkish in US politics—and of conservative media coverage that moved conservative members of the public in different directions in the two countries.
Table 1: Media Influence on Perceptions of the war in Iraq and the war on terror in Britain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to stories on Iraq</th>
<th>Approval of the war in Iraq (0-1)</th>
<th>Approval of Labour’s handling of terrorism (0-1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader of Labour newspaper</td>
<td>-0.00 (-0.000)</td>
<td>-0.00 (-0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader of Conservative newspaper</td>
<td>0.02* (0.000)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader of Independent newspaper</td>
<td>-0.08** (0.002)</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval at t-1</td>
<td>0.84 (0.001)**</td>
<td>0.83 (0.001)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour identifier</td>
<td>0.05 (0.001)**</td>
<td>0.05 (0.001)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative identifier</td>
<td>0.02 (0.001)**</td>
<td>0.02 (0.001)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to the campaign</td>
<td>-0.003 (0.001)*</td>
<td>0.01 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.00 (0.00)*</td>
<td>-0.00 (0.00)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.01)**</td>
<td>0.01 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education to school level</td>
<td>0.02 (0.01)*</td>
<td>0.02 (0.01)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education beyond school level but not to university degree</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.01)*</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.01)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.55 (0.01)**</td>
<td>0.55 (0.01)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N                          | 5257                             | 5257                                          | 5257                                          | 5552                                          |
| Adjusted R²                | 0.03                             | 0.70                                          | 0.70                                          | 0.50                                          |

**p<.01 *p<.05 #p<.10 (two-tailed test)

Notes: Estimates are OLS regression models. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering by day of interview. Coefficients and standard errors are rounded to 2-3 decimal places. Dependent variables are from the campaign surveys and have been rescaled from 0 to 1. Question wording: “Please tell me whether you strongly approve, approve, disapprove, or strongly disapprove of Britain’s involvement in Iraq.”, “How well do you think the present government has handled the risk of terrorism in Britain?”
Table 2: Media Influence on Perceptions of Tony Blair

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to stories on Iraq</th>
<th>Feelings toward Blair (0-10)</th>
<th>Best PM (0,1=Blair)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4)</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader of Labour newspaper</td>
<td>.041 (.008)**</td>
<td>.043 (.007)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.009 (.003)**</td>
<td>.009 (.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.001 (.003)</td>
<td>-.004 (.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.000 (.004)</td>
<td>(.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader of Conservative</td>
<td>-.094 (.017)**</td>
<td>-0.045 (.013)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newspaper</td>
<td>-.024 (.005)**</td>
<td>-.024 (.014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.017 (.005)**</td>
<td>-.015 (.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.017 (.005)**</td>
<td>-.017 (.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader of Independent</td>
<td>.016 (.021)</td>
<td>.001 (.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newspaper</td>
<td>-.007 (.008)</td>
<td>-.023 (.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.016 (.008)</td>
<td>-.014 (.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.003 (.008)</td>
<td>(.012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feelings toward Blair at t-1

| Labour identifier           | .90 (.01)**                 | .83 (.01)**         |
|                             | .66 (.06)**                 | .61 (.06)**         |
| Conservative identifier     | -.42 (.06)**                | -.47 (.07)**        |
| Approval of the war in Iraq | .72 (.09)**                 | 1.72 (.17)**        |
| Approval of Labour on terror| 1.02 (.10)**                | 3.25 (.15)**        |
| Attention to the campaign   | -.04 (.01)**                | .04 (.02)**         |
| Age                         | -.006 (.002)**              | -.00 (.00)          |
| Female                      | .19 (.05)**                 | -.24 (.08)**        |
| Education to school level   | .12 (.05)**                 | -.16 (.13)          |
| Education beyond school level| .08 (.04)                  | -.20 (.13)          |
| Middle class                | -.02 (.06)                  | .12 (.07)**         |
| Constant                    | 4.08 (.04)**                | 4.6 (.03)**         |
|                             | .62 (.04)**                 | .56 (.10)**         |
|                             | -.58 (.03)**                | -1.33 (.05)**       |
|                             | -.349 (.20)**               | (.28)               |

| N                           | 5676                        | 5676                |
|                             | 5676                        | 5262                |
|                             | 5750                        | 5750                |
|                             | 5298                        | 5298                |

Adjusted $R^2$/Pseudo $R^2$

| .01                        | .79                          |
| .80                        | .81                          |
| .01                        | .28                          |
| .42                        |                             |

Notes: Estimates are from OLS (feelings toward Blair) and logit (best prime minister) models. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering by day of interview. Coefficients and standard errors are rounded to 2-3 decimal places. Dependent variables are from the campaign surveys and have been rescaled from 0 to 1. Question wording: “Now, using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about Tony Blair?”, “Who would make the best Prime Minister? (Tony Blair, Michael Howard, Charles Kennedy, Don’t know)”
Table 3: Vote Preference in Britain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to stories on Iraq</th>
<th>Lab/Did not vote</th>
<th>Lab/Other party</th>
<th>Lab/Con</th>
<th>Lab/Did not vote</th>
<th>Lab/Other party</th>
<th>Lab/Con</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reader of Labour newspaper</td>
<td>.021 (.014)</td>
<td>.002 (.008)</td>
<td>.018 (.013)</td>
<td>.021 (.015)</td>
<td>.008 (.011)</td>
<td>.019 (.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader of Conservative</td>
<td>.004 (.019)</td>
<td>.041 (.023)*</td>
<td>-.046 (.021)*</td>
<td>.021 (.025)</td>
<td>.063 (.027)*</td>
<td>-.020 (.023) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newspaper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader of Independent</td>
<td>.026 (.025)</td>
<td>-.062 (.018)**</td>
<td>.015 (.041)</td>
<td>.045 (.052)</td>
<td>-.047 (.026)*</td>
<td>.017 (.043)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newspaper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Labour identifier          2.45 (.14)**  2.82 (.13)**  3.16 (.21)**  1.68 (.15)**  1.96 (.14)**  1.99 (.25)**
Conservative identifier    -.63 (.25)*  .32 (.25)  -3.22 (.22)**  -.47 (.24)*  .68 (.24)  -2.67 (.21)**
Approval of the war in Iraq -.49 (.28)*  .37 (.17)  -.77 (.29)**  -.74 (.23)**  1.00 (.16)**  1.06 (.27)**
Approval of Labour on terror -.47 (.24)    .32 (.25)  -3.42 (1.22)**  -.88 (.14)**  1.09 (.15)**  1.42 (.17)**
Feelings toward Blair       .17 (.03)**  .21 (.03)**  .39 (.04)**  .88 (.18)**  1.09 (.15)**  1.42 (.17)**
Blair best PM               -.45 (.09)**  -1.45 (.08)**  -.04 (.10)  -1.71 (.17)**  -3.47 (.15)**  -2.24 (.15)**

N                          4687 4250
Pseudo R²                   .28  .36

Notes: Estimates are from multinomial logit models. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering by day of interview. Coefficients and standard errors are rounded to 2-3 decimal places. The dependent variable is from the post-election survey. Question wording: “Talking to people about the General Election on May 5th, we have found that a lot of people didn’t manage to vote. How about you – did you manage to vote in the General Election?” If yes, “Which party did you vote for in the General Election?”
Table 4: Media Influence on Perceptions of the war in Iraq and the war on terror in the US

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to stories on Iraq</th>
<th>Was the War in Iraq Worth it?</th>
<th>Approval of Bush’s handling of terrorism (0-1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Iraq News Exposure</td>
<td>-.047* (.022)</td>
<td>-.017 (.022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Iraq News Exposure</td>
<td>.327 (.070)*</td>
<td>.109 (.066)#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Iraq News Exposure</td>
<td>-.022 (.076)</td>
<td>.009 (.084)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican identifier</td>
<td>1.66 (.17)**</td>
<td>1.71 (.24)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic identifier</td>
<td>-.143 (.01)**</td>
<td>-.141 (.24)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to the campaign</td>
<td>-.135 (.16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-.144 (.17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>-.52 (.16)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion Important</td>
<td>.42 (.21)#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.03 (.01)#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.472 (.091)**</td>
<td>-.58 (.130)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1125</td>
<td>1125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo /Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Estimates for the “Iraq Worth it?” models are logistic regression results. Approval model values are OLS regression results. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering by day of interview. Coefficients and standard errors are rounded to 2-3 decimal places. Dependent variables are from the campaign surveys and have been rescaled from 0 to 1. Question wording: “Taking everything into account, do you think the war in Iraq has been worth the cost or not?”, “Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the War on Terrorism?”
Table 5: Media Influence on Perceptions of George Bush

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to stories on Iraq</th>
<th>Feelings toward Bush (0-10)</th>
<th>Bush Leadership Advantage over Kerry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Iraq News Exposure</td>
<td>-.151</td>
<td>-.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.036)**</td>
<td>(.025)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Iraq News Exposure</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>.484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.110)**</td>
<td>(.081)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Iraq News Exposure</td>
<td>-.176</td>
<td>-.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.171)</td>
<td>(.095)*(P&lt;11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican identifier</td>
<td>3.00 (.330) **</td>
<td>1.31 (.27) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic identifier</td>
<td>-.197 (.29) **</td>
<td>-1.09 (.39) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War in Iraq worth it</td>
<td>1.32 (.31) **</td>
<td>.26 (.03) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of Bush on terror</td>
<td>4.57 (.49) **</td>
<td>.26 (.03) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to the campaign</td>
<td>-.16 (.36)</td>
<td>-.02 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.36 (.30)</td>
<td>-.01 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>-.32 (.19) #</td>
<td>-.00 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion Important</td>
<td>.19 (.49)</td>
<td>-.01 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.05 (.04)</td>
<td>-.00 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.49 (171)**</td>
<td>5.34 (.28)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.62 (.04)</td>
<td>-.57 (.01)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.57 (133) **</td>
<td>-3.34 (.03)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>1150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Estimates are from OLS models. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering by day of interview. Coefficients and standard errors are rounded to 2-3 decimal places. Dependent variables are from the campaign surveys and have been rescaled from 0 to 1. The feelings model employed the ANES feeling thermometer question, the leadership question the wording: “Think about George W. Bush. In your opinion, does the phrase 'he provides strong leadership' describe George W. Bush Extremely well, Quite well, Not too well or Not well at all? This value was compared to a parallel question for Kerry and the difference calculated and rescaled.
Table 6: Vote Preference in US

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to stories on Iraq</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Iraq News Exposure</td>
<td>-.048 (.024)*</td>
<td>-.003 (.021)</td>
<td>.023 (.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Iraq News Exposure</td>
<td>.044 (.072)**</td>
<td>.205 (.073)**</td>
<td>.061 (.085)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Iraq News Exposure</td>
<td>-.036 (.088)</td>
<td>-.092 (.104)</td>
<td>-.013 (.011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Republican identifier 2.31 (.17)** 1.41 (.21)**
Democratic identifier -1.45 (.26)** -6.3 (.28)**
War in Iraq worth it .63 (.22)**
Approval of Bush on terror 1.17 (.43)**
Feelings toward Bush .01 (.04)
Bush Leadership Advantage 3.38 (.62)**
Constant -.76 (.07)** -1.22 (.12)** -4.52 (.43)

N 1150 1150 1051
Pseudo R² .06 .32 .43

**p<.01 *p<.05 #p<.10 (two-tailed test)

Notes: Estimates are from binary logistic regression models predicting vote for Bush. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering by day of interview. Coefficients and standard errors are rounded to 2-3 decimal places. The dependent variable is from the post-election survey. Question wording: “Talking to people about the General Election on May 5th, we have found that a lot of people didn’t manage to vote. How about you – did you manage to vote in the General Election?” If yes, “Which party did you vote for in the General Election?”
Figure 1: Volume and Tone of Media Coverage of Iraq in 2005

Volume of coverage

Net tone of coverage

Days until election

-20
-10
0
10
20
30
40
29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

41
Figure 2: Volume and Tone of Stories on Iraq where Tony Blair/Labour Government was an Actor in 2005

- Volume of coverage
- Net tone of coverage
- Days until election

- Newspaper
- Newspaper2
- TV
- TV2
Figure 3: Volume and Tone of Stories on Iraq where George W. Bush was an Actor in 2004
Figure 4: Maximum Effects of Direct and Indirect Influence of Exposure to Stories on Iraq in Conservative Newspapers

Exposure → Approval of Iraq (0-1 scale) → Feelings toward Blair (0-10 scale) → Lab/Con vote preference (0,1 scale)

Exposure → Approval of Iraq (0-1 scale) → Blair best PM (0,1 scale)

Exposure: +0.018
Approval of Iraq (0-1 scale): +0.34
Feelings toward Blair (0-10 scale): +0.71
Lab/Con vote preference (0,1 scale): +0.42
Blair best PM (0,1 scale): +0.34

Effects: -0.24, -0.10, +0.02, +0.20
References


Bennett, W. Lance, Regina Lawrence, and Steven Livingston. 2007. When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina. Chicago: Chicago University Press.


Stevens, Daniel, and Jeffrey Karp. Forthcoming. “Leadership Traits and Media Influence in Britain.” *Political Studies*.


