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Coverage of the pre-Iraq War debate as a case study of frame indexing

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ABSTRACT

This study examined critical coverage, substantive news frames, and news sources in *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* coverage of the pre-Iraq War debate. This content analysis evaluated media coverage before and after Congress passed the resolution that authorized the use of military force in Iraq. Results demonstrated that Congressional consensus was related to diminished frequencies of critical and substantively framed paragraphs in coverage yet the ongoing international debate sustained relatively more intense levels of critical coverage after the resolution passed than before. Substantively framed coverage, however, declined across all source types and levels of measurement after the Congressional resolution. In sum, the observed increase in the level of consensus within the US government seemed to influence coverage of the pre-Iraq War debate as it continued within and among other groups, such that substantive news frames were indexed to this shift in the tone, intensity, and focus of the policy debate. These findings therefore suggest a level of integration between indexing and framing in which an increased level of official consensus may be predictive of not only certain tones of coverage but also certain news frames being adopted over others.

KEY WORDS • framing • indexing • Iraq War • policy debate • sources

Generally speaking, indexing and framing represent two main areas of scholarly inquiry into media coverage of policy debates. These theoretical frameworks have often been uniquely applied and re-applied by scholars to examine and explain media coverage of issues and events such as the Gulf War, September 11, the Iraq War, and Abu Ghraib, among others. Moreover, it is common for indexing and framing to be utilized in conceptually overlapping inquiries but each remains distinctly separated from the other though they are linked by a common factor: news sources.

Indexing research, based in large part on Bennett's (1990) formulation of a testable hypothesis, has identified conditions in a broad variety of circumstances where the level of critical coverage is limited in scope and in

perseverance (Mermin, 1999; Zaller and Chiu, 1996). The principal rationale for this consistent finding is that when covering policy debates, journalists construct a 'web of facticity' (Tuchman, 1978: 160) by relying heavily on officials who exhibit some influence in the policy-making process as news sources (Gans, 1979). Thus, the level of critical media coverage during policy debates is often indexed to the breadth, duration, and intensity of competing arguments advanced by officials and other elites (Powlick and Katz, 1998). The level of consensus among policy officials therefore anchors the parameters of the tone of coverage to a sphere of legitimate controversy (Hallin, 1986), even in a multigated model of news construction (Bennett, 2004).

Of no less importance, the study of framing has examined 'the ways in which mass media organize and present issues and events' (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005: 404) and found patterns in coverage that demonstrate how news frames that are structured upon the claims of official news sources can focus certain realities over others (Entman, 1991). In addition, the focus of coverage identified in news frames reifies ideologically grounded, prevailing sociopolitical relationships and viewpoints and as such their construction and adoption in the media tends to favor more powerful social actors (Entman, 2004; Lee and Craig, 1992). Furthermore, a growing body of scholarship has suggested that under certain conditions, news frames may transfer to audiences and influence their understanding, interpretation, and indeed, participation in the social and political environment (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1991; Valentino et al., 2001).

There are important theoretical distinctions between framing and indexing. Principally, indexing orients journalistic decisions as hierarchical and subordinate to the level of official consensus. This structure is, of course, a by-product of news routines based on 'objective' reporting and also incorporates the influence of official sources in such a way that the news gates continually narrow in terms of voices and viewpoints once official consensus is achieved and sustained (Bennett, 1990; Tuchman, 1978). Alternatively, framing is defined as 'the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation' (Entman, 2007: 164). Thus, framing affords a certain level of control and agency to not only journalists but also individuals in interpreting events.

These distinctions have implications for changes that may be observed in critical tone versus substantive framing. Specifically, changes in the level of critical coverage may be considered latent by-products of covering official sources that are believed to wield significant power over an issue or event (Page et al., 1987; Whitney et al., 1989). Changes in news frames are

typically perceived as active journalistic decision-making processes that are nonetheless influenced by the agenda-building process of elected leaders and appointed officials (Kioussis et al., 2006). Thus, changes in the tone of coverage may simply be part of the journalistic routine whereas changes in the focus of coverage can be controlled or dictated to some extent by journalists (Entman, 2004) but both are jointly necessary for the activation of public opinion (Powlick and Katz, 1998).

Conceptually, the tone of news coverage is generally a function of the official consensus level regarding a specific policy since it relates the amounts of criticism circulated amongst officials to that which is generated by news coverage. The 'tone' of coverage therefore concerns the amount of coverage that is at odds with official policy decisions (Hallin, 1986). Similarly, the focus of new coverage is typically represented by the frame of a news story that often originates from a negotiated process of news norms (Gans, 1979; Weaver, 2007). The 'focus' is thus constructed as descriptions or accounts of what policies and policy debates are about (Powlick and Katz, 1998), even if those debates extend to non-substantive issues that surround policy decisions.

Source reliance, at least conceptually, may be distinguished as a prevailing condition for producing news that is timely and relevant (Gans, 1979; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). Precisely because of this function, news gathering from prominent, official sources is also seen as a condition with far-reaching effects that structures the tone (pro or con) and focus (how or why) of news coverage. Thus, though all three areas of inquiry – tone, focus, and source reliance – are theoretically and conceptually unique, all are interrelated and provide the basis for a scenario in which news frames might also be indexed to the level of official consensus.

Importantly, Entman's (2003) cascading activation model, Mermin's (1996) analysis of policy decision versus policy outcomes coverage, and Althaus' (2003) discussion of the critical ends frame have demonstrated that indexing and framing may intersect with one another. Specifically, because official sources play a vital role in the construction of news, increases in the levels of official consensus may precipitate the adoption of certain news frames over others and diminish periods of frame contestation (Bennett et al., 2006; Entman, 2004). What is missing, however, from this rich body of scholarship is an empirical inquiry that attempts to integrate indexing and framing precisely because both concepts are reliant on the very same actors and sources.

Thus, the overarching goal of this case study is to examine if substantive news frames are indexed to the level of government consensus since it is logically reasonable to presume that the same official sources who affect the critical tone of news stories will also exert some measure of influence on the

news frames that journalists use to describe policy debates. This analysis critically tests a tripartite conception of indexing that examines the influence of official consensus not just between critical coverage and news sources but also news frames by measuring differences and interrelationships in the three areas across an increase in the level of official consensus.

Indexing criticism and substance during the pre-Iraq War debate

Indexing research has consistently established that once US government officials achieve consensus on policy decisions, the amount of coverage that indicates or expresses criticism of that policy decreases significantly. In addition, the news gates narrow in such a way that the sources used to construct news stories diminish almost entirely to only elite, official individuals and viewpoints during such times (Bennett, 1990; Mermin, 1999; Zaller and Chui, 1996). These reciprocal processes reinforce one another in such a way that critical policy stories, pegged to meet a general standard of news values that emphasize balance and a conflict frame (de Vreese et al., 2001), often wither due to a lack of sustained dissensus and outspoken criticism among policymakers once a general consensus is reached.

In the context of investigating pre-Iraq War coverage as a case study, it is important to first examine this basic proposition of indexing. Specifically, as President Bush made a case for a unilateral preemptive war with Iraq and faced Congressional opposition, this debate would be writ large in news coverage. Once Congress reached a greater level of consensus in this policy debate by approving legislation, a decline in critical media coverage of the Bush policy should have been expected. A simple demarcation point, 11 October 2002, was used as an indicator of US government consensus in this study because on that date Congress passed (77–23 in the Senate and 296–133 in the House) the resolution that authorized the use of military force in Iraq.

The first hypothesis therefore predicts (as does previous indexing research) that critical coverage, which indicated opposition or criticism to the Bush policy or questioned an official justification for the policy, was influenced by the increase in official consensus as follows:

H1: Coverage critical of President Bush's Iraq War policy was more prevalent before Congress passed the resolution that authorized the use of force in Iraq than after.

In a study that detailed reporting in the time of government consensus, Mermin (1996) found that while the total volume of critical coverage diminished, journalists still abided by their long-practiced norm of objectivity

but simply shifted the frame of critical coverage. Instead of producing substantively framed coverage critical of the merits, goals, and rationale of the policy itself, journalists critically covered political actors and their ability to execute the process and implementation of the policy. This preliminary evidence of frame indexing is further supported by the work of Entman and Page (1994), who found that substantive criticisms of the Gulf War policy were linked to changes in governmental debate over time, where an *increase* in Congressional consensus was related to a *decrease* in the number of substantive criticisms that appeared in coverage.

More recently, Entman (2004: 10) has proposed a cascading activation model, in which journalists are apt to adopt news frames from more powerful actors while making their own 'contribution to the mix and flow (of ideas)'. Entman also described how journalists may introduce contradictory frames in this model, 'but the ability to promote the spread of frames is also highly stratified, both across and within each level' (Entman, 2003: 420) of the sociopolitical hierarchy. In other words, without a certain level of dissensus among officials or policymaking elites, there is little chance counterframes will be broadly adopted – even if there is a period of frame contestation. Thus, it is quite logical that certain news frames may be indexed to the level of governmental consensus.

In the study reported here, Congressional consensus of the pre-Iraq War policy debate increased, which is a time when 'the policy story often dries up' (Bennett, 1994: 24) though the '*political story* may not, even when open political conflict is not observed' (Mermin, 1996: 191, emphasis in original). Moreover, since Bennett et al. (2006) suggested that the framing of events 'followed the predictable pattern of indexing' (2006: 481) in the Abu Ghraib scandal, it is reasonable to expect that the framing of the pre-Iraq War policy debate was indexed to the level of Congressional consensus.

Therefore, Hypothesis 2 predicts a decline in substantively framed coverage that 'concerned policy options: specifically, whether war or sanctions should be preferred and the costs and justifiability of the policy' (Entman and Page, 1994: 87), as follows:

H2: Substantively framed coverage was more prevalent before Congress passed the resolution than after.

'Official' influence on the tone and focus of pre-Iraq War debate coverage

When considering the critical tone of coverage and the focus of coverage that is associated with the range of viewpoints in this case study, three types of

news sources can be readily identified: official American sources, non-official sources, and official non-American (international) sources.

The degree to which non-official sources are represented in media coverage has been shown to be an inverse function of the amount of consensus within the US government (Bennett, 1990; Entman and Page, 1994; Hallin, 1986; Livingston and Eachus, 1996). In addition, the research of Althaus et al. (1996), Althaus (2003), and Thussu (2000) suggests that journalists seek out a larger scope of elite opinion when reporting international affairs. In such cases, the news media have been shown to cover elite, official sources from other countries, and not only American government sources. It has therefore been argued that 'the concept of the "official debate" must be expanded to include foreign elites' (Althaus et al., 1996: 418).

Furthermore, because American foreign policy is subject to scrutiny from international organizations and US allies that may influence foreign policy decisions, journalists are likely to cover these sources during and after policy debates 'even when Washington leaders are not voicing much criticism' (Entman, 2004: 148). Specifically, in this case study, although Congress passed the resolution that authorized the use of military force in Iraq on 11 October 2002, the United Nations *never* ratified the use of military force in Iraq, and opposition to the Bush policy and subsequent war was widespread in the international community long after this date (Massing, 2004).

Though this was a unique set of circumstances that differed from previous post-Cold War military interventions, it is nonetheless reasonable to expect that because of American journalists' dependence on official US sources, 'when no dispute is perceived, they let the official sources set the media agenda' (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005: 403) and effectively marginalize dissenting non-official sources (Herman, 1985).

Based on the formulations of sources and consensus described by Althaus et al. (1996) and indexing research in general, the following hypotheses expect a hierarchy of official and non-official news sources such that:

H3a: As a result of increased Congressional consensus, the use of official American sources was greater before Congress passed the resolution than after.

H3b: Likewise, because official consensus increased, more non-official sources appeared in coverage before Congress passed the resolution than after.

H3c: Since elite international consensus was never achieved, the reliance on official non-American sources was greater after Congress passed the resolution than before.

It is precisely because of the relationships between reporters and officials that critical coverage is explicitly linked to the level of official consensus. Once official consensus increases, indexing predicts that the amount of critical

coverage diminishes because official sources are no longer openly advancing dissenting viewpoints. In addition, the plurality of voices from unique outside or otherwise non-official sources is indexed to the level of official consensus such that critical non-official sources are rarely covered once official consensus is achieved. Crucially, a veritable host of alternative, substantive policy decision stories, arguments, and *frames* are likely marginalized in the coverage as a result of both of these conditions.

Thus, journalists that cover what has shifted to a political outcomes story after official consensus is reached often construct other, non-substantive frames based on information provided by official sources who have in large part moved on from the policy decision itself since that debate has been resolved. Moreover, events such as the passage of the resolution can not be discounted and 'political actors frame information given to the media according to their policy' (Kepplinger, 2007: 13), which reinforces the importance of the relationship between reporters and officials in framing decisions – and how this relationship might well contribute to substantive news frames being indexed to the level of official consensus.

In terms of the case study investigated here, Congressional consensus was generally reached by the passage of the resolution but international consensus was never even approximated. The final hypotheses therefore synthesized the expectations of indexing and framing and thus predicted that this well-established relationship between reporters, official sources, and the level of Congressional consensus in this case study interacted with both critical coverage *and* news frames as follows:

H4: There is an interaction between consensus and sources such that critical coverage citing official American sources and non-official sources decreases after the resolution passed whereas critical coverage citing official non-American sources increases after the resolution was passed.

H5: There is an interaction between consensus and sources such that substantively framed coverage citing official American sources and non-official sources decreases after the resolution passed whereas substantively framed coverage citing official non-American sources increases after the resolution was passed.

Method

A content analysis of coverage in *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* was conducted to test the hypotheses and examine the concept of frame indexing. These newspapers were selected because they have 'large foreign news staffs, high prestige and sophistication, and a proven record of willingness to take on the government' (Entman and Page, 1994: 84). These two elite newspapers

are also often considered generally representative of the mediated public sphere (Bennett et al., 2004) although the overall generalizability of this study is limited by not accounting for many other media types and geographical regions.

Timeframe and article selection criteria

The timeframe for the analysis ran from two weeks before Congress passed the resolution on 11 October 2002 that authorized President Bush to use military force in Iraq to two weeks after the vote: from 27 September to 25 October 2002. This timeframe can be considered inclusive of the most vigorous and intense pre-war policy debate, specifically within Congress, and thus should approximate the time when the policy debate was most heavily covered and most likely to include the widest range of voices and policy alternatives (Mermin, 1999).

Articles from the news sections of each newspaper comprised the sample of this study. This study focused on coverage understood to be unbiased, objective news coverage of the Bush administration's policy towards Iraq. The sample therefore did not include editorials, letters, and opinion pieces. Although this sample was purposively drawn, given the inter-media agenda-setting characteristics of the *NYT* and *WP* (Weaver et al., 2004), this sample can theoretically be considered representative of the population of articles similar to the ones analyzed here and thus inferential statistics were utilized to test the hypotheses.

Unit of analysis

The unit of coding was a paragraph of text. The unit of analysis was at both the paragraph and story level. Coding was done for the headline and first 10 paragraphs of each article, which was also purposively decided because most articles in the *Times* and *Post* are between 15 and 30 paragraphs long (Mermin, 1999). More importantly, because of the typical inverted pyramid style of reporting and readership patterns, information regarded as the most important appears there. These headlines and paragraphs are also considered more crucial framing elements than paragraphs near the end of the article (Pan and Kosicki, 1993).

Critical coverage

To test Hypotheses 1 and 4, each paragraph was coded as being either critical or non-critical. The measure of the critical tone was a generous, expansive one, 'as a source who questioned one justification offered for U.S.

intervention might have supported the policy on other grounds' (Mermin, 1999: 43). Simply, 'critical' coverage was determined from a closed-ended yes or no coding scheme. Since coverage may express criticism without indicating opposition and vice versa, the categories were: first, was criticism of President Bush's policy present in the paragraph and second, was opposition to President Bush's policy present in the paragraph. If the yes option was recorded for either or both categories, the paragraph was coded as critical.

All other paragraphs were considered non-critical. In this coding scheme, references were not required to be explicit in mentioning President Bush or his administration, so long as content was in some way critical of, or opposed to, the Iraq War policy. This type of categorical definition is common in similar studies, including those that employ a positive or negative valence to operationalize critical coverage (Bennett, 1990; Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005).

Substantive frames

To examine Hypotheses 2 and 5, paragraphs were coded in terms of substantive framing. This categorization followed a framework where substantively framed paragraphs described *why* the policy is or is not desirable. Specifically, this included coverage that identified 'policy options: specifically, whether war or sanctions should be preferred and the costs and justifiability of the policy' (Entman and Page, 1994: 87) and concentrated 'on the debate of facts, issues, context, policies, and institutional policy issues' (Nacos et al., 2000: 48). Thus, this coding scheme identified descriptions of the policy as well as the merits and goals of the policy (Lawrence, 2000) that were present in coverage.

All other paragraphs that did not meet these criteria were considered non-substantive. Given that there are many other potential frames that could be identified and in the same paragraph, coding was done on a majority basis, whereby paragraphs were only coded as being substantive if it was the prevailing frame of the paragraph. The substantive framing categorization used here mirrored the substantive conceptualization that has been used in a variety of applications by Cappella and Jamieson (1997), Nacos et al. (2000), and Patterson (1993) in analyzing policy debates similar to the one under investigation here.

Sources

For Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 sources were divided into official American sources, official non-American sources, and non-official sources. One primary source type was identified for each article. Official government sources were those individuals cited in the coverage as being current or former members

of the US government in any capacity, including military officers and policy experts. Official non-American (international) sources included those referenced in the coverage as past or present foreign government officials as well as current or former representatives of international organizations such as the UN or NATO. Finally, non-official sources were those identified in the coverage as university professors, anti-war demonstrators, and ordinary citizens.

Consensus

Another variable used to test all hypotheses was the level of consensus in the United States government. This level of consensus was considered to generally be 'low' before Congress passed the resolution on 11 October that authorized the use of force against Iraq, and 'high' after the resolution passed. This is demonstrated by the raw number of items in the *Congressional Record* that referenced Iraq over the course of this study, which dropped from 148 before the resolution to 50 after the resolution passed. This common measure of Congressional consensus (Althaus et al., 1996; Zaller and Chiu, 1996) suggested a modest level of consensus prior to the passage of the resolution and a rather robust level of consensus afterward.

Even if this simple demarcation point may be a somewhat imprecise indicator of full consensus, it at the very least demonstrates that Congressional consensus was greater after the resolution passed than before, if only for the very fact that the *policy decision* was no longer on the floor for debate. Indeed, criticism may well have continued from members of Congress (and several reports indicate this in the *Congressional Record*), but because the resolution passed, it can be safely assessed by most conventional standards that Congressional consensus increased – or at the very least that the debate shifted away from the policy decision itself.

Reliability

The author of this study chose and coded all of the articles that met the selection criteria. Approximately one-quarter of the sample was also coded by two independent coders (both high-performing undergraduate Communication majors) trained only in the category definitions. Training consisted of several practice coding sessions of similar stories in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

The sub-sample used to measure the reliability of the sample in this study comprised coding decisions produced by the author and each coder for the same random 50 articles drawn from the study sample, which totalled 550 paragraphs. Intercoder reliabilities were calculated for critical, substantive,

and source categories using Holsti's formula and were established above the minimum 0.70 level outlined by Frey et al. (2000). These figures included acceptable agreement scores among the author and each of the two coders as well as satisfactory levels of agreement between the coders.¹

It is worth noting that coders were only asked to identify sources cited in critical coverage. The author was solely responsible for source coding decisions in 36 cases in which no critical coverage was identified in an article.

Findings

A total of 191 articles were coded, which included 2101 paragraphs and headlines. The total number of stories dropped from 129 articles (1419 paragraphs) in the two weeks before Congress passed the resolution to 62 articles (682 paragraphs) in the two weeks after.

The first hypothesis predicted coverage critical of President Bush's Iraq War policy was more prevalent before Congress passed the resolution that authorized the use of force in Iraq than after. This hypothesis was supported by the fact that 442 paragraphs coded as critical appeared on or before 11 October 2002 when the resolution was passed compared with only 279 critical paragraphs in the coverage after the resolution passed. In addition, the average level of critical paragraphs per day dropped from 29.47 before the resolution was passed to 19.93 paragraphs per day afterward. As shown by the distribution of these paragraphs and their averages over the timeframe of the study in Figure 1, it is clear that the frequency of critical coverage declines in a manner that seems distinctly related to 11 October.

However, when these observations were measured with inferential statistical tests, a different pattern emerged. First, a simple difference of proportions revealed a statistically significant difference in the *opposite* direction of that predicted: $Z = -4.41, p < .001$. Even though the number of critical paragraphs dropped by almost half after the resolution (from 442 to 279), critical coverage represented 40.91 percent of the 682 post-resolution paragraphs. This compares to 442 critical paragraphs that accounted for 31.15 percent of the 1419 paragraphs printed on or before 11 October.

A second test of H1 produced a similar, statistically significant result that was not in the direction expected. In a *t*-test that compared the average amount of critical coverage per story before and after the resolution, the results indicated a greater average intensity of criticism once the resolution passed ($t(189) = -2.28, p < .05$). Specifically, the mean level of critical paragraphs per story before the resolution was 3.43 and actually *increased* to 4.50 after the resolution passed. Interestingly, both of these statistical analyses did

not support the basic proposition of indexing as outlined in H1 regarding an increase in official consensus, which was represented in this case by Congressional consensus. These results are summarized in Table 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that substantively framed coverage was more prevalent before Congress passed the resolution than after and was supported by the results of all analyses. A total of 432 substantively framed paragraphs were identified in the coverage on or before 11 October. This figure diminished to 102 in the equivalent two-week time period after that date. Likewise, the average amount of substantive coverage decreased from 28.80 paragraphs per day before the Congressional resolution to just 7.29 substantive paragraphs afterward. A graphic of this distribution of substantive paragraphs over time is also shown in Figure 1.

Unlike H1, statistical significance testing demonstrated full support for this hypothesis that tested frame indexing. A difference of proportions test resulted in a statistically significant relationship ($Z = 7.64$, $p < .001$) in the direction predicted. Substantively framed coverage (432 paragraphs) represented 30.44 percent of the 1419 paragraphs that appeared before the resolution but only 14.96 percent (102 paragraphs) of the 682 paragraphs that were printed after the resolution. Furthermore, a t -test that measured the average amount of substantive framing per story was also statistically significant ($t(189) = 3.38$, $p < .001$) and followed the expectations of H2. Indeed, the mean number of substantively framed paragraphs before the resolution was 3.35 and only 1.65 afterward, thereby indicating that substantive framing fell after Congressional consensus rose, which is summarized in Table 2.

Hypothesis 3a, in keeping with source relations described by indexing, expected to find that the use of official American sources was greater before Congress passed the resolution than after. As projected, the percentage of

Table 1 Distribution of critical coverage before and after passage of the congressional resolution authorizing the use of military force in Iraq

Level of analysis	Hypothesis 1: Critical coverage	
	Before 11 October 2002 ($n = 1419$ paragraphs)	After 11 October 2002 ($n = 682$ paragraphs)
Percentage of paragraphs in coverage	31.15 ($n = 442$ paragraphs)	40.91*** ($n = 279$ paragraphs)
Mean number of paragraphs per story	3.43 ($n = 129$ stories)	4.50* ($n = 62$ stories)

* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

Note: Figures are in percentages and averages, as reported. Patterns of coverage are consistent across levels of measurement.

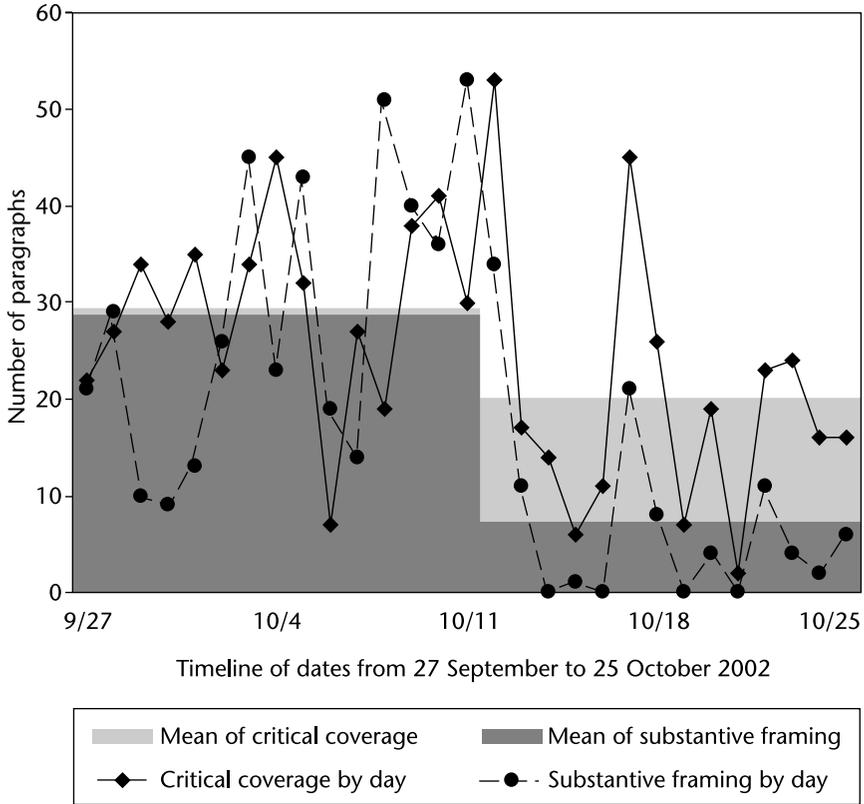


Figure 1 Observed frequencies of critical coverage and substantive framing by day plotted over mean levels of critical coverage and substantive framing before and after the Congressional resolution was passed on 11 October 2002.

Table 2 Distribution of substantive framing before and after passage of the Congressional resolution authorizing the use of military force in Iraq

Level of analysis	Hypothesis 2: Substantively framed coverage	
	Before 11 October 2002 (<i>n</i> = 1419 paragraphs)	After 11 October 2002 (<i>n</i> = 682 paragraphs)
Percentage of paragraphs in coverage	30.44 (<i>n</i> = 432 paragraphs)	14.96*** (<i>n</i> = 102 paragraphs)
Mean number of paragraphs per story	3.35 (<i>n</i> = 129 stories)	1.65*** (<i>n</i> = 62 stories)

*** $p < .001$

Note: Figures are in percentages and averages, as reported. Patterns of coverage are consistent across levels of measurement.

official American sources at the story level fell from 56.59 percent of all sources before the resolution to just 24.19 percent after the resolution was passed, which was a statistically significant shift that supported H3a when examined with a difference of proportions test ($Z = 4.21, p < .001$). These results are summarized in Table 3.

Similarly, because of the increase in official consensus described by indexing, H3b predicted that more non-official sources should be expected to appear in coverage before Congress passed the resolution than afterward. As expected, the presence of non-official sources in the coverage decreased from 10.08 percent before the resolution to 8.06 percent afterward but this relationship was not statistically significant ($Z = 0.45, p > .05$) when analyzed with a difference of proportions test. H3b was therefore not supported, which is also reported in Table 3.

Since elite international consensus was never achieved, H3c expected – on the basis of formulations advanced by indexing (Althaus et al., 1996) – that the reliance on official non-American sources would be greater after Congress passed the resolution than before. When analyzed with a difference of proportions test, the percentage of coverage primarily attributed to official international sources more than *doubled* from 33.33 percent before the resolution to 67.74 percent after the 11 October resolution, which was statistically significant ($Z = -4.48, p < .001$). This hypothesis was therefore supported, which is likewise indicated in Table 3.

Hypothesis 4, on the basis of the convergent model of framing and indexing described in the study reported here, expected an interaction between consensus and sources such that critical coverage citing official American sources and non-official sources decreases after the passage of the resolution whereas critical coverage citing official non-American sources increases

Table 3 Distribution of sources by percent before and after passage of the Congressional resolution that authorized the use of military force in Iraq

Percentage of coverage primarily attributed to:	Consensus level and Congressional resolution	
	'Low' consensus before 11 October 2002 (<i>n</i> = 129 articles)	'High' consensus after 11 October 2002 (<i>n</i> = 62 articles)
Official American sources	56.59 (<i>n</i> = 73 articles)	24.19*** (<i>n</i> = 15 articles)
Non-official sources	10.08 (<i>n</i> = 13 articles)	8.06 (<i>n</i> = 5 articles)
Official international sources	33.33 (<i>n</i> = 43 articles)	67.74*** (<i>n</i> = 42 articles)

*** $p < .001$.

after the resolution. Because this hypothesis was limited only to critical coverage, the sub-sample size was reduced to 721 critical paragraphs.

Critical coverage cited as originating from official American sources (260 paragraphs) dropped from 58.82 percent of critical coverage prior to the resolution to just 29 paragraphs that comprised only 10.39 percent of critical coverage after the resolution, which yielded statistically significant results when analyzed with a difference of proportions test ($Z = 12.92, p < .001$). Somewhat surprisingly, the percentage of critical coverage attributed to non-official sources rose from 12.90 percent before to 16.13 percent after the resolution was passed despite the frequency of such paragraphs falling from a count of 57 to 45. This statistically non-significant finding did not follow the expectations of the hypothesis ($Z = -1.21, p > .05$). As expected, however, official international voices made up 73.48 percent of critical post-resolution coverage (205 paragraphs) compared to just 28.28 percent of critical pre-resolution coverage (125 paragraphs), which was a statistically significant difference of proportions ($Z = -11.86, p < .001$).

A second analysis of hypothesis 4 was a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) that identified a statistically significant interaction between sources and consensus ($F(2, 189) = 9.32, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .091, \text{observed power} = .977$) at the mean level of critical coverage per story. Before the resolution, critical coverage attributed to official US sources averaged 3.56 paragraphs per story, which dropped to 1.93 paragraphs per story after the resolution. Unexpectedly, critical coverage cited to non-official sources actually increased from a per story mean of 4.38 before Congressional consensus to 9.00 once the debate in the US government died down after the resolution. On the other hand, the average amount of critical coverage originating from official international sources increased from 2.91 paragraphs per story before the resolution to 4.88 afterwards as was predicted.

Taken together, the results of these examinations support the predictions advanced in Hypothesis 4 that critical coverage attributed to official American sources decreased after the resolution whereas coverage citing official non-American sources increased after the resolution. However, the expectation that critical coverage citing non-official sources declined after the resolution was not supported in either test. These findings are summarized in Table 4.

The final hypothesis predicted that there exists an interaction between consensus and sources such that substantively framed coverage citing official American sources and non-official sources decreases after the resolution passed whereas substantively framed coverage citing official non-American sources increases after the resolution. Since this hypothesis examined only substantively framed coverage, this sub-sample comprised 534 paragraphs.

Table 4 Relationships between critical coverage and sources before and after passage of the Congressional resolution

Percentage of critical coverage that primarily cited:	Hypothesis 4: Critical coverage and sources	
	Before 11 October 2002 (<i>n</i> = 442 paragraphs)	After 11 October 2002 (<i>n</i> = 279 paragraphs)
Official American sources	58.82 (<i>n</i> = 260 paragraphs)	10.39*** (<i>n</i> = 29 paragraphs)
Non-official sources	12.90 (<i>n</i> = 57 paragraphs)	16.13 (<i>n</i> = 45 paragraphs)
Official international sources	28.28 (<i>n</i> = 125 paragraphs)	73.48*** (<i>n</i> = 205 paragraphs)
Mean of critical paragraphs per story that primarily cited:		
Official American sources	3.56 (<i>n</i> = 73 stories)	1.93** (<i>n</i> = 15 stories)
Non-official sources	4.38 (<i>n</i> = 13 stories)	9.00** (<i>n</i> = 5 stories)
Official international sources	2.91 (<i>n</i> = 43 stories)	4.88** (<i>n</i> = 42 stories)

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

The frequency of substantively framed claims originating from official American sources (315 paragraphs) dropped from 72.92 percent of substantively framed pre-resolution coverage to only 50 paragraphs that represented 49.02 percent of substantively framed post-resolution coverage, which was a statistically significant decrease ($Z = 4.67$, $p < .001$) when analyzed with a difference of proportions test. The relative percentage of substantively framed claims associated with non-official sources (50 paragraphs) also dropped from 11.57 percent of coverage before the resolution to 11 paragraphs that accounted for 10.78 percent of such coverage after the resolution, but this change in relative amounts was not a statistically significant difference of proportions ($Z = 0.23$, $p > .05$). As expected, however, the percentage of substantive framing attributed to international sources increased from 15.51 percent of pre-resolution coverage to 40.20 percent of post-resolution coverage, though the frequency of such paragraphs actually declined from 67 to 41, respectively. This relationship was also statistically significant ($Z = -5.58$, $p < .001$).

Another examination of H5 was conducted with a univariate ANOVA that identified a non-statistically significant interaction ($F(2, 189) = .21$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$, observed power = .083) of average substantive framing per story by sources and consensus. The rather obvious explanation for the lack of

significance here is that the average level of substantive framing per story decreased in every instance among all three source groups analyzed.

Specifically, the average level of substantively framed coverage attributed to official US sources was 4.32 before the resolution and 3.33 after the resolution. The same pattern of diminished levels of substantively framed coverage following the Congressional resolution was also present in coverage attributed to non-official sources, where such coverage fell from an average of 3.85 paragraphs per story before the resolution to just 2.20 afterward. Similarly, and contrary to expectations, the average number of substantive pre-resolution framing per story citing official international sources decreased from 1.56 before the resolution passed on 11 October to an average of 0.98 paragraphs per story after this date. These findings represent a main effect between the level of consensus and substantively framed coverage that is statistically significant at the $p \leq .10$ level ($F(1, 189) = 2.71, p \leq .10, \eta_p^2 = .014$, observed power = .374).

When considering the results of these examinations, robust support for Hypothesis 5 is limited to the frequency, relative percent, and average level of substantively framed coverage attributed to official American sources that declined in a statistically significant fashion after the Congressional resolution as projected. Though substantive framing of coverage associated with non-official sources did decline in terms of average level per story, frequency, and proportional percent of coverage after the resolution, as expected, the changes in the latter two measures were not statistically significant.

Finally, the relative percent of substantively framed coverage citing official international sources increased in a statistically significant manner after the Congressional resolution according to the predictions of this hypothesis, but the frequency of such paragraphs dropped after the resolution. The average level of such coverage per story was statistically significant ($p \leq .10$) in its *decline* after the resolution for all types of sources, which is entirely the opposite of what was expected. These results are summarized in Table 5.

Together, these results make a case that news frames may well be indexed to the level of (in this case) Congressional consensus even when critical coverage was not, which was true across several levels of analysis. In other words, the focus of news coverage in this study was indexed more potently to the level of official consensus than the tone of coverage. This unique finding suggests that increased Congressional consensus may have had ripple effects that influenced how debates within and among other groups were indexed not necessarily just in terms of critical coverage and news sources, but also in the application of certain news frames.

Table 5 Relationships between substantive framing and critical sources before and after passage of the Congressional resolution

Percentage of substantively framed coverage that primarily cited:	Hypothesis 5: Substantively framed coverage and sources	
	Before 11 October 2002 (<i>n</i> = 432 paragraphs)	After 11 October 2002 (<i>n</i> = 102 paragraphs)
Official American sources	72.92 (<i>n</i> = 315 paragraphs)	49.02*** (<i>n</i> = 50 paragraphs)
Non-official sources	11.57 (<i>n</i> = 50 paragraphs)	10.78 (<i>n</i> = 11 paragraphs)
Official international sources	15.51 (<i>n</i> = 67 paragraphs)	40.20*** (<i>n</i> = 41 paragraphs)
Mean of substantively framed paragraphs per story that primarily cited:		
Official American sources	4.32 (<i>n</i> = 73 stories)	3.33 [#] (<i>n</i> = 15 stories)
Non-official sources	3.85 (<i>n</i> = 13 stories)	2.20 [#] (<i>n</i> = 5 stories)
Official international sources	1.56 (<i>n</i> = 43 stories)	0.98 [#] (<i>n</i> = 42 stories)

[#]*p* ≤ .10; ****p* < .001.

Conclusion

With the results of Hypothesis 1, it can be observed that the relative overall amount of critical coverage did, indeed, decline after the Congressional resolution, as did the average amount of critical coverage per day. This follows a long line of indexing research that supports this basic idea (Bennett, 1990; Mermin, 1999). However, the relative percentage of critical coverage actually rose after Congressional consensus increased with the passage of the resolution, which was also true of the average intensity of critical coverage per story after the resolution. Given the nature of this case study, in which official international consensus remained inchoate, such conditional support for a basic premise of indexing is familiar (Althaus, 2003; Althaus et al., 1996).

Testing of Hypothesis 2 found that substantive framing declined precipitously in overall frequency, daily average, relative proportion, and average amount per story after the Congressional resolution was passed, though official international consensus was never achieved. Thus, substantive news frames appear to have been overwhelmingly and disproportionately indexed to the level of Congressional consensus and accompanying changes in the nature of the ongoing debate, though some members of Congress and international

officials were still advancing substantive arguments (CR, 2002; Massing, 2004). Importantly, this finding seems to suggest that shifts in the Congressional debate were central to a decrease in substantive framing of the *policy decision* debate that continued in the official international community after the Congressional resolution.

These findings point toward the importance of news sources in influencing an index not only of critical coverage but also of substantive news frames. The results of testing H3a, H3b, and H3c clearly suggest that once Congressional consensus increased with the passage of the resolution, journalists sought out elite voices in the international community where consensus was not reached and to where the debate ostensibly moved.

It is also worth noting that the news gates were most restricted for non-official sources in terms of frequency and relative percent both before and after the resolution, which is similar to the conclusions of Page (1996). Perhaps more importantly, though, the news gates (as measured by the difference in the proportional distribution of non-official sources) remained as marginally open to non-official sources after the Congressional resolution as before, most likely because of the vigorous official international debate that continued after 11 October 2002.

More evidence of this circumstance was found in the results of Hypothesis 4. Here, critical coverage attributed to non-official sources did not decline by a statistically significant degree after the Congressional resolution. In fact, the average intensity of critical coverage per story associated with non-official sources more than doubled after the resolution, though it is important to keep in mind that the frequency of non-official sourced stories was limited to only five stories after the resolution. Nonetheless, as Althaus et al. (1996) found, these results suggest that Congressional consensus alone may not be predictive of the parameters of mediated debate when there is robust dissensus in other elite, often international circles of power.

Specifically, in this case study, the presence of official non-American sources in critical coverage dramatically increased after the resolution passed, thereby filling the void left by official American sources, who no longer openly demonstrated much opposition in coverage – even though the coverage attributed to non-official international sources was largely non-substantive. These conditions also seem to have inflated the amount of coverage citing critical non-official sources more than was expected.

Further analyses of Hypotheses 4 and 5 revealed a specific frame indexing phenomenon unique from that of critical coverage. After the Congressional resolution was passed and substantively framed coverage citing official American sources diminished, ongoing official international debate failed to sustain substantive framing in a manner similar to that of critical coverage in

this case study and previous research (Thussu, 2000; Zaller and Chiu, 1996). The projection of this 'frame index' is quite pronounced when observing that official international sources averaged the lowest level of substantively framed coverage (either critical or non-critical) per story.

Indeed, substantive framing associated with non-official sources was unchanged (not statistically significant) in terms of the relative percent of coverage but clearly declined in terms of frequency and per story average after the Congressional resolution. This is unlike indexed critical coverage of non-official sources, which has been shown to stabilize in the event of other, non-American governmental debate and in this case actually increased on a per story basis. Thus, frame indexing is even more sensitive to the level of Congressional consensus than critical coverage, precisely because shifts in the nature of the debate and sources used in the coverage affect how debates within and among other groups are framed, even when the index of critical coverage extends beyond that of the US government.

Taken as a whole, the findings reported here provide preliminary evidence of a tripartite version of indexing that incorporates the influence of official consensus not just between critical coverage and news sources, but also on substantive news frames. That is, indexing provides a rationale for when certain news frames might be adopted over others, and framing provides an explanation for the voices and viewpoints that are prevalent in coverage once official consensus is achieved. And both factors are obviously crucially linked to news sources, which are influenced, at least in part, by the level of official consensus (see Powlick and Katz, 1998).

To some extent, indexing research has tracked an overarching conflict news frame as it has been manifested in critical coverage and competing news sources across varying levels of official consensus and dissensus. The presence of this conflict frame is a crucial general news value that is dependent upon news sources airing criticisms of competing groups (de Vreese et al., 2001). Moreover, this conflict frame is not far removed from critical news coverage and focuses on the disagreements and points of separation among parties, individuals, or countries in conflict (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993), and a well-developed body of indexing research has consistently shown that conflict framing, as is evidenced by critical coverage, indexes the level of debate among official news sources, which also influences the presence of other news sources in coverage.

Given this perspective, it is logical to presume that other news frames, not just conflict frames, might be indexed to the scope and type of debate that occurs among officials. Since media framing is commonly defined as a means 'to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient

in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation' (Entman, 1993: 52), it seems only reasonable that such frames could act as defining characteristics of the 'range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials' that are indexed 'according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic' (Bennett, 1990: 106).

Moreover, since both critical coverage and news frames are largely dependent upon official news sources to construct the facts of a story and many journalists adhere to a conception of objectivity based on balance in coverage (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005), the consequential by-product of this confluence of factors could very well be an index of not only critical coverage but also of news frames.

As shown in this case study, even when the policy decision debate was ongoing among other officials in international bodies (Massing, 2004), coverage was in large part indexed to the number of substantive frames advanced by American officials. Notably, once Congressional consensus was achieved with the resolution, relatively little coverage from any source addressed *why* the policy should or should not be implemented. Even when the critical coverage evaluated here was buoyed by the official international policy decision debate, that coverage was not often framed in such a way that might have informed and activated public opinion as to what the policy was *about* (Powlick and Katz, 1998). Consequently, the same concerns originally raised by indexing are echoed by these findings, which also build upon Entman's (2003) cascading activation model.

In conclusion, the level of Congressional consensus observed in this study was related to shifts in critical coverage *and* news frames in such a way that these concepts appear to be interrelated with one another through news sources and official consensus. Therefore, it can be argued that indexing and framing are integrated with one another and often produce duplicitous effects. The next step is to test this conclusion and the concept of frame indexing using other media in unique situations, debates, and time periods, specifically those in which official consensus are more uniform and frame indexing can be presumed to be even more pronounced.

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Note

- 1 The coefficients of intercoder reliability (CIR) were calculated using Holsti's formula and are as follows for critical coverage, substantive framing, and source categories. Between the author and coder 1, CIR equaled 0.81 for critical coverage, 0.78 for substantive frames, and 0.90 for sources. Between the author and coder 2, CIR equaled 0.81 for critical coverage, 0.72 for substantive frames, and 0.73 for sources. Between coder 1 and coder 2, CIR equaled 0.78 for critical coverage, 0.78 for substantive frames, and 0.75 for sources.

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