News Norms, Indexing and a Unified Government

Reporting during the early stages of a Global War on Terror

by

Andre Billeaudeaux, David Domke, John S. Hutcheson and Philip A. Garland

Address correspondence to:

Andre Billeaudeaux
University of Washington
School of Communications
Box 353740
Seattle, WA 98195
FAX: (206) 543-9285/PH: (206) 510-9171
cgsardog@juno.com

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A number of journalists and popular commentators have suggested that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were defining moments in United States history (e.g., Gibbs, 2001a; Morrow, 2001; Zakaria, 2001). The terrorist attacks upon the United States began an unprecedented level of United States foreign policy news coverage.

This point is highlighted by public opinion data that indicated the "news interest" of U.S. adults was markedly high in the days, weeks, and months after the terrorist attacks. For example, well into December 2001 roughly half of randomly sampled U.S. adults indicated they were "very closely" following news about the September 11 attacks and subsequent U.S. campaign against terrorism, the highest level of sustained public interest in the news in more than a decade (Pew, 2001).

President Bush laid out his foreign policy strategy only nine days after the attacks in his address before the U.S. Congress and a national television audience on September 20, 2001. During this speech, he articulated his administration's plans for a "war on terrorism." Included in his address were claims that the conflict would be lengthy in duration and would not specifically target Muslims (Bush, 2001).

Over the next four weeks the President and his top aides routinely and aggressively emphasized specific and worst-case expectations for a pending global military campaign. Among the administration's popularly communicated themes, including those mentioned in his national speech, included the possibility of unfortunate-but-perhaps-unavoidable civilian deaths, probable U.S. military casualties, the challenges of defining an exit strategy and the challenge of rebuilding a post war Afghanistan. Indeed, administration-led discussion on these six topics, referred to as "war themes," appeared 58 times in Washington *Post* and New York *Times* news content between September 12 and October 7, 2001. These numbers, calculated in the days *before* the actual Afghan military

campaign, seem to give validity to what Maltese (1992) and Cook (1998) have termed the administration "line of the day," or the ability to control a message, keep it simple and consistently repeat it (p 135).

These elite communications, manifesting themselves within six distinct themes, are notable in that they seemed to be a part of a larger executive level strategy to engender post-September 11 confidence in the administration's wartime leadership and to assuage potential concerns that the United States and its military was headed toward an historically unwinnable "quagmire" (e.g. France/U.S. in Vietnam, U.S.S.R. in Afghanistan) This trend could be called an example of what Manheim (1991, 1994) termed "strategic political communication;" a practice in which leaders craft their public language and communications with the goal to create, control, distribute, and use mediated messages as a political resource. In particular, political elites have become adept at management of political and news environments (see Domke, Watts, Shah, & Fan, 1999; Herman, 1993; Pfetsch, 1998; Protess et al., 1991; Watts, Domke, Shah, & Fan, 1999; Zaller, 1992), a process which seems likely during a national crisis such as the events and aftermath of September 11, when political leaders expect citizens to look to them for guidance and vision. This U.S. government's strategic management of the information was recognized at the height of the Afghanistan military campaign in a November, 2001 New York Times article:

It is not just information that the Pentagon leadership is keeping under tight control. It is also expectations…The desire to keep information and expectations at a minimum stems directly from the experience of the Vietnam War, longtime military reporters and military historians say. The Johnson administration "oversold greatly the degree of success" of the war before the Tet offensive in 1968, said Don Oberdorfer, a former diplomatic and military correspondent for The Washington Post. The unrealistic expectations turned the Tet battles -- arguably a United States military victory -- into a massive public relations defeat.

Exploring the relationship between the administration and the press during the early stages of the war on terrorism (Sept 12 thru Dec 18) is important in that the mass media, through their professional norms of objectivity and neutrality (Bennett 1984, Cook 1998), not only had the potential, but an "institutional" responsibility, to offer counter opinion and criticism within the realm of a quickly unfolding and aggressive foreign policy.

Timothy Cook in *Governing with the News* offers support for the theory that newsbeat journalists can, and often do control elite instigated news by "weaving" in collected comments and quotes. He argues that this "weaving" process happens even when or if elite sources restrict journalistic access or attempt to focus attention on more favorable topics. He reasons that "the news media still has final say over the ultimate product – by raising other issues, interjecting doubts, questioning motives and seeking out critical sources for balance**." (**Cook 1998)

The level of press responsibility becomes heightened when one considers the relative lack of critical discourse being offered by Congress who, in support of the Bush administration's outlook for the war on terrorism, politically lined up behind the President. For example, votes by Congress authorizing military action against those responsible for the September 11 attacks (a joint resolution approved September 14) and the anti-terrorism USA Patriot Act (signed into law October 26 after roughly a month of debate in Congress) were overwhelmingly in the administration's favor: Only one vote across both houses of Congress was cast against the resolution, and only one senator voted against the Patriot Act.

This Congressional support is greatly contrasted by that given to President George Bush Sr. in the 1990 Gulf War. Congressional criticism of President George Bush Sr.'s Gulf policy became an important theme in reporting only seven weeks into the crisis. New York Times reporter R. W. Apple, Jr. wrote:

"Congressional criticism of the Bush Administration's policies in the Persian Gulf, nonexistent in the first days after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, then muted, is growing

louder on both sides of the aisle as lawmakers openly attack the President on several major points." (NY Times 1990)

Likewise, news media criticism of the Vietnam War emerged only when congressional sources began to raise doubts about presidential strategies. (Cook 1998)

From the early days following the terrorist attacks through the height of the U.S. military campaign, the president and his administration enjoyed a unique position with their substantial level of Congressional and public support that continued on into the military campaign in Afghanistan (Gallup 2001a). During this same period, the administration was able to concentrate their messages and war themes in selling the idea of a war on terrorism to the American people. With the unprecedented speed of moving to an overseas military campaign, near nonexistent Congressional criticism and the majority of the country rallying around the flag as a backdrop, the research presented here analyzed a census of news and editorial coverage of the New York *Times* and Washington *Post* between September 11 and the December 18th fall of Kabul, with the goal of examining the journalistic adherence of Tuchman (1972) and Bennett's (1990, 1996) "newsgathering norms." Specifically, we attempted to discover if there would be discernable patterns in news coverage relevant to not only Bennett's (1990) Indexing theory, but a host of other academic findings that have since constructed new rules and aspects to Bennett's original 1990 indexing theory.

Literature Review

The genesis of most studies of media -- government interactions stem from a concern about the media's function within the democratic process; assuming the duty of reporting requires reporting as independently as possible from government sources (Entman et al, 1996). One of the primary findings in political communication research is that official sources consistently dominate the viewpoints of political stories (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981; Brown et al., 1987; Sigal, 1973, Bennett 1996). Other findings suggest that dominance of executive branch sources is more pronounced in national security stories

than in the news as a whole (Hallin, Manoff, Weddle, 1990) and that official sources are able to dictate what is newsworthy (Cohen 1963). Leon Sigal (1973) summarized this idea succinctly:

> *Even when the journalist is in a position to observe an event directly, he*
> *remains reluctant to offer interpretations of his own, preferring instead to*
> *rely on his news sources. For the reporter, in short, most news is not what*
> *has happened, but what someone says has happened.*

Bennett (1990, 1996) and Cook (1998) argue that media reliance on officials is firmly rooted in three types of journalism norms: the professional virtues of objectivity and balance; the obligation to provide some degree of democratic accountability; and the economic realities of news business. Tuchman's (1972) "Objectivity Norm" requires that journalists present "both sides" of a story. Cook (1998) builds on this argument such that, through the routine use of these norms, the press has become a political institution. Bennett (1995) supports Cook's notion in that the result of the press push to "get an official reaction" is formally institutionalized among national news organizations that operate within a news beat system. It is this institutionalized system Bennett says "that links reporters with officials who are presumed to occupy powerful or authoritative positions in decision-making or policy-implementation processes."

Through a consideration of these and other media/press relationships, Bennett (1990) formulated the theory of indexing:

> *Mass media news professionals, from the boardroom to the beat, tend to*
> *"index" the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials*
> *according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government*
> *debate about a given topic.* (p 106)

Bennett further surmised that "other non-official voices fill out the potential population of news sources included in news coverage and editorials when these voices express opinions already emerging in official circles" (p 106); essentially that government elites,

not the press, set the range of argument with lesser actors offering viewpoints within this accepted range. Bennett's indexing hypothesis appears in a wide body of political communication scholarship. From the original 1990 indexing theory a number of key foreign policy studies has emerged that offered further nuances, conditions and limits for indexing.

In Zaller and Chiu's (1996) examination of U.S. news coverage of foreign policy crisis, they refined indexing theory by providing "narrower" and more "situational rules" for news trend coverage during foreign policy crisis, or emergency situations. These situations defined and predicted how journalists would slant foreign policy coverage as either "hawkish" in favor of aggressive foreign policy action or "dovish" representing a more cautious approach for foreign policy. These measurements were found to happen at key points in foreign policy conflicts, leading Zaller and Chiu to hypothesize that the press indexes its coverage to the views of different actors at different points in a crisis: to the president at the first emergence of a crisis, to the Congress as events begin to settle down and to the opinion of non-politicians (such as experts or the public at large), in cases in which the crisis persists over a long period of time.

Livingston and Eachus (1996) support the notion of indexing theory in news and editorials particular to news concerning U.S. foreign policy goals and practices. They further the notion, with comparative case studies, that the press, in a post cold-war environment without a clearly galvanizing or conceptual foreign policy consensus, has greater latitude in including once "marginalized" dissident voices or ideas. Further, studies have shown that dissident voices, when recognized in the news, are contextualized with symbolic cues that can diminish or bolster their salience or credibility for news audiences (Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Gitlin, 1980). Bennett (1996) suggests that "off beat" viewpoints and the introduction of cues about their credibility or importance suggest the existence of underlying rules or guidelines for making these symbolic decisions. Marginalization of dissident voices was operationalized in Althaus et al's (1996) study involving the 1985-86 Libya Crisis. They advanced the notion that

some voices were marginalized and others overemphasized via their amount of front-page coverage.

Althaus et al (1996) and Bennett (1996) argued that, under certain conditions, journalists appear to seek out foreign sources to provide counter opinions to the dominant U.S. policy position. The authors called this coverage by the press power indexing, essentially, following the voices of those who are able to control the outcome of a situation despite the nationality. These results demonstrated much higher levels of foreign voices than previous indexing studies. Bennett (1996) and Zaller et al (1996) supported these findings with Bennett offering a follow up journalistic "rule" pursuing a complex developing story: "follow the trail of power."

Research Questions

It is our view that in the weeks immediately following September 11, 2001, President Bush and members of his administration publicly engaged in strategic political communication to build support both domestically and abroad for the "war on terrorism." In doing so, his administration maintained a consistent and aggressive perspective and public discourse on at least the six "war themes," themes that are the basis for this study. The administration, for a variety of reasons, maintained healthy public and Congressional support through a military buildup and an eventual campaign in Afghanistan. In this unique communication environment, and with a lack of elite dissident voices in Congress available to "index," we propose the following four research questions:

> RQ1: Were non-administration (e.g. lesser government official or foreign) voices carried in the news able to introduce this paper's "war themes" into news coverage before the administration was able to establish their position.

Our first research question revolves around the original indexing hypothesis (Bennett 1990) that non-official voices are covered only when they express opinions already emerging in official circles. With the high level of bi-partisanship for the war on terrorism fostering "one-sided" discourse among U.S. government elites, the news media

would have few alternative viewpoints to choose from within official U.S. circles. U.S. government debate was markedly similar to the early stages of the Gulf War build-up when official sources were largely in agreement about deployment of U.S. troops to Kuwait (see Zaller, 1994a). As a result, journalists who follow the established routine of "indexing" their coverage and language to that of U.S. elites, under classic indexing, would have little choice but to adopt the range of voices offered.

Several scholars (e.g. Bloom, 1990; Cottam & Cottam, 2001; Hutchinson, 1994; Niebuhr, 1967) highlight the ability and motivation or U.S. government leaders to manipulate national discourse and symbols in order to engender and mobilize support among the mass public for specific political goals. Further, some scholars (Bloom, 1990; Calabrese & Burke, 1992; Deutch & Merritt, 1965 and Zaller, 1994) theorize that elites exert their greatest influence over news coverage and, ultimately, public opinion during moments of crisis when greater-than-usual numbers of citizens pay attention to politics and news coverage. It would seem reasonable then, at the early stages of mobilizing support for the "war on terror" Americans would look to the President and his administration for leadership early in the crisis with lesser elites gaining voices as the crisis becomes routine. With the unprecedented support of Congress through the Afghan military campaign, it becomes an important point of theoretical departure to investigate which news group would follow the President in Zaller's hybrid (1996) indexing hypothesis.

> RQ2: How closely will news coverage of the war on terrorism follow Zaller's (1996)indexing-influenced hypothesis that the president will be featured primarily at the emergence of a crisis followed by Congress and finally to the opinion of non-politicians.

Bennett (1994) found that even though the news media covered dissenting congressional opinions of George Bush Sr.'s Gulf War buildup, White House positions received the most prominent news displays even at the height of debate. As the president is the central newsmaker in American politics today (Cook 1994) it would make sense to find the majority of front-page news featuring him and his administration. But, without Congress

offering critical voices, the press is forced to find other voices to index. And, in an environment of nationalistic reporting following the terrorist attacks (Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeaux and Garland, 2002), the relative placement of dissident voices within news coverage becomes increasingly worthy of study. Thus, our third research question:

RQ3: What level of prominence was given to foreign/dissident voices in front page war on terrorism news coverage?

Althaus et al (1996) and Bennett (1996) further refined indexing theory by arguing that when a political situation arises that is not easily solved by domestic elites, journalists will seek out players in other contexts that appear to be shaping the outcomes; thus perceptions of power a key factor in a journalist's decisions to seek out alternative sources. With the international scope of the war on terror context, understanding the relationships between journalists and foreign voices becomes key, thus, our final research question.

RQ4: Will there be evidence of "power" indexing, through the use of foreign sources, in coverage of the war on terrorism?

Method

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First: is to identify emergent and consistent war themes discussed and attributed to the President and his top advisers in the weeks following the terrorist attacks of September 11. Second, we explore whether this communication was followed by discernible patterns along the same themes in news coverage by a variety of lesser government officials, journalists and a variety of foreign sources.

To study these strategies, we content analyzed a census of news coverage in the *New York Times* from September 12 to December 18, 2001. These dates incorporate three specific and important periods within the Bush administration's "war on terror." From the terrorist strikes through October 7th, 2001 we call the "selling of the war" phase. The period encompassing October 8th thru November 9th represents the start of the military campaign through the defeat of the Taliban at Mazar-i-Sharif, a key battle that represented the first significant U.S. military led victory in the campaign. We call this

the "fighting" phase. And our final phase, from November 10th thru December 18th we call our "victory" phase as the Taliban presented little military resistance during this period.

For this analysis, the coders read all news coverage in the front section and dedicated "war on terrorism" sections that ran daily beginning in late September, as well as editorials and op-ed pieces.

In undertaking this analysis, we adopted the approach of using the source as the unit of analysis, rather than the story. We did this because we were interested in (a) identifying the specific sources within and outside the Bush administration that might have been presented engaged in our "themed" discourse and (b) systematically distinguishing the valence — i.e., directionality — of language used by the sources measured against that used by Bush administration sources. This approach allowed for examination of whether sources appeared to support, criticize or simply reflect upon the administration's public "wartime" stance. To be specific, as explained below we were interested in *what* potential challenges to the war on terrorism were discussed in news content, *who* was talking about them, *when* the challenges were discussed, and *how* they were discussed. Only sources that discussed at least one of the pre-identified challenges to the military campaign were coded. Each source quoted or paraphrased was coded separately, and the entirety of each source's statements in an article was taken into account when applying the coding categories.

Several source categories were identified in the broader project of which this research is part, including a range of U.S. sources, foreign sources, and journalists themselves. In this study we focus on three source categories:

• Bush administration leaders: This category consisted of comments in news content by President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Attorney General John Ashcroft;

• Other U.S. government or military: This category consisted of comments in news content by any other federal government or military spokesperson such as a Congress member or U.S. Army spokesperson;

• Other U.S. quoted sources: This category consisted of comments in news content by non-government American leaders and regular civilians.

• Foreign Source: This category consisted of comments in news content by foreign voices. This category was broken down among Allies (Great Britain, Saudi Arabia), enemy (Taliban), neutral (Afghan/Iraq civilian) or United Nations spokespersons.

The content analysis focused on source discussion of six distinct "challenges or concerns" about the U.S. military campaign. These six were selected because they emerged in the Bush administration's public discourse between September 11 and October 7. Specifically, sources were coded for the presence and accompanying valence of comments and language measured against the administration's position of the six (*U.S. casualties, Afghan Civilian Deaths, War on Islam, Duration of War, Exit Strategy and Rebuilding of Afghanistan*) themed topics related to the U.S. military campaign. The administration's stance is always considered a 4.

Sources were coded as "1" on the variable if they were explicitly critical about the theme or administration's stance on the theme; as "2" if they expressed concern or questions about potential/actual theme or the administration's discussion of the theme; as "3" if they neutrally presented factual information about potential/actual theme or the administration's discussion of the theme; and "4" if they were explicitly supportive or positive about potential/actual theme or the administration's discussion of this subject. Sources who did not mention potential/actual loss of U.S. life or the administration's discussion of this subject did not receive a code on this variable.

For instance if a Taliban source was quoted: "It will be an American bloodbath if they attack," that source (coded as foreign/enemy) would receive a 1 (critical) as it

countered the administration's established stance that the U.S. military campaign would require sacrifice but, that it was necessary to rid the world of evil.

Three people conducted, two masters and graduating BS student, the content analysis coding. As a check of the inter-coder reliability, a fourth coder coded a selection of 33 articles, which included 83 coded sources. For the source coding, this coder agreed on 76 of 83 codings, yielding a .92 reliability coefficient. For the six "war challenges" variables, all of which had the same coding scheme, this coder agreed on 445 of 498 codings, yielding a .89 reliability coefficient. In the case of disagreements, codings were assigned after a re-reading of the article. There were a total of 1336 sources coded between the Washington *Post* and New York *Times*.

Findings/Results

In order to establish a foundation to examine theoretically driven indexing arguments, we located common themes within the war on terrorism news discourse. From this point, news sources were compared in relation to these common war themes. We first examine the patterns that George Bush and his administration established in the "selling of the war" phase. This figure is important in that it represents the administration's redundant themes, what academics Maltese (1992) and Cook (1998) have termed the administration's "line of the day," or the ability to control a message, keep it simple and consistently repeat it. The most discussed category by the administration was the potential duration of the military campaign (24 times over 15 separate days), followed by Afghan civilian deaths (9 times over 6 days), war on Islam (9 times over 5 days), U.S. casualties (7 times over 5 days), U.S. exit strategy (5 times over 4 days) and Rebuilding of Afghanistan (4 times over 4 days). Further, President Bush was the primary administration source publicly discussing these concerns during these days: He was present 25 times, compared to a total of 11 appearances by his top aides (Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, and John Ashcroft) and 21 by other government/military officials.

Table 1 about here

We also were interested in how *consistently* these challenges were addressed — ranging from rarely to occasionally to most days — by the Bush administration during this nearly month-long prelude to the U.S. military campaign. To examine this, we constructed a variable that indicated the *daily sum of challenges addressed* by the President, his top aides, and other U.S. government and military leaders. We then plotted this variable on a daily basis from September 12 through October 7 (see Figure 1).

<u>**Figure 1 about here**</u>

From here, we examine our first research question; RQ1, Were non-elite officials or foreign voices carried in the news and editorials able to introduce war themes into news coverage before the administration established discourse or position? To answer this question, we provide six tables covering each of the six war themes. According to the original indexing theory (Bennett, 1990), we would expect to find the administration establishing the range of debate from which lesser elites would be expected to derive circles of discussion. But our range of debate does not set up within a "traditional" context as official-level debate was experiencing an unprecedented level of bi-partisanship. Nonetheless, our data demonstrate, on five of six of the themes the President and administration were first to set the range of debate within all U.S. government sources reaching the news. In an interesting representation of non-official voices carrying a role that might have once been reserved for Congress, the "other" U.S. sources category beat the administration to news coverage in discussing the potential for Afghan civilian deaths, the potential for a war on Islam, U.S. military casualties and the rebuilding of Afghanistan. Additionally, in two of the six categories, the administration followed the lead of foreign sources; that of rebuilding Afghanistan and Afghan civilian deaths.

<u>**Graphs 1 through 6 about here**</u>

Our second research question is measured over the entire period of the "selling of the war" phase through to the "victory" phase. A key issue here is how news is indexed after once a crisis is turned into a routine and reporters look to fill the next day's news hole (Bennett, 1984; Cook, 1998). Many academics place initial leadership for foreign

policy crisis and accompanying news coverage squarely in the lap of the president, but of interest to this study is how coverage plays out when dissident voices are not coming from official sources, a question that leads us to research Zaller's (1996) hypothesis.

RQ2: How closely will war on terrorism news coverage follow Zaller's (1996) indexing-influenced hypothesis that the president will be featured primarily at the emergence of a crisis followed by Congress and finally to the opinion of non-politicians.

Indeed, the initial prediction made in RQ2, that the president will be featured primarily a the emergence of a crisis is easily seen in Table 2, with the expected drop off happening through the "fighting" and "victory" phases. With the lack of indexing available at the Congressional level to fill out Zaller's model, we identify "fighting" phase percentage jumps of "other U.S. government/military" and "foreign" news sources as being the primary news sources during this period. The president and "non-government U.S. sources," on the other hand, fall significantly in coverage during this period. During the "victory" phase (November 10th though December 18th) the presidential coverage continues to fall as expected, but the opinion of non-politicians, the expected news filler at this point, also falls. Gains among the president's top aids and "other U.S. government/military" are notable during this phase.

<u>Insert Table 2 about here</u>

We can see by the large cross-phase representations in Table 2 that "foreign" voices make up a substantial amount of news coverage. A similar finding of "dissident" voices by Livingston and Eachus (1996) posit that the press, in a post cold-war environment without a clearly galvanizing or conceptual foreign policy consensus, has greater latitude in including once "marginalized" dissident voices or ideas – an idea contrary to traditional indexing. Certainly not all of the foreign voices in our study represent dissident voices, quite the contrary. But with this unusually large number of "foreign" voices present, it becomes important to see how coverage compares to that of U.S. elites, hence our third question:

RQ3: What level of prominence was given to foreign/dissident voices in front page war on terrorism news coverage?

To be sure, our numbers, like those of Bennett (1984) and Cook (1998) suggest that indeed the president and his administration should receive the most salient coverage during the "selling of the war phase" with nearly 45% of presidential news appearing on the front pages with foreign voices finding the front pages 26.4% of the time and non-government sources taking the least with 17.6%. Looking at the this phase is important in that it is most likely to represent the rally-round-the-flag effect (Hallin, 1989) that would marginalize foreign voices, but the indexing argument could find support in that 37.7% of "other U.S. government/military" voices found their way onto the front pages – offering a potential "range" of elite voices, albeit all positive toward the prevailing foreign policy.

Insert Cross Tab 1 about here

In contrast to findings of which voices are marginalized, it is important to consider our last research question dealing in power:

RQ4: *Will there be evidence of "power" indexing, through the use of foreign sources, in coverage of the war on terrorism?*

This dynamic plays out very significantly in the data. Surely, the early stages of the "war on terror" contained many key foreign players, persons in power who could make the war much more difficult for the United States (e.g. the Taliban's Supreme Leader Mullah Mohammed Omar) or much easier (e.g. Tony Blair British Prime Minister, Pakistan's Gen. Pervez Musharraf). In these roles, they certainly fall into Bennett's 1996 journalism rule of "following the trail of power." Certainly the findings and associated tables of RQ2 hold support along this line of reason in that foreign sources on two of the six war themes found U.S. news voices *before* those of the administration. The findings and associated tables of RQ3 also give support to this "rule" in that, even during the height of patriotism in the days prior to a military campaign more that one quarter of foreign

voiced news found its way to front pages. Additionally, in looking at Table 3, we can see that foreign ally sources dominated coverage across all three phases as compared to the voices of the foreign enemy – essentially giving those voices with "power" (i.e. American allies such as Blair) decisional voices in the American press over those who wouldn't make a difference in U.S. foreign policy.

<u>Insert Table 3 about here</u>

<u>Discussion</u>

That the communication about impending war engendered public confidence in government and military leadership is certainly suggested by public opinion polls in the weeks and months after September 11 that indicated high levels of approval for President Bush (Gallup 2001a), high levels of support for the U.S. military campaign against terrorism (Gallup, 2001a), and a willingness among the American public to commit to the military campaign even if it meant significant U.S. casualties (Gallup, 2001b). The goal of this paper was to examine news coverage of the "war on terror" with respect to the varied and supplemental aspects deriving from (and including) Bennett's 1990 "indexing" hypothesis within the New York *Times* and Washington *Post*. To justify our use of newspapers for our study, given that few Americans generate their daily news information from them, we argue that the prestige press, particularly the New York Times, likely builds the agenda for many of the nation's other mass media outlets. This work becomes especially noteworthy due to the significant backdrop of post 9/11 cultural cohesiveness, patriotism, political bi-partisanship and the potential for a media-driven "rally around the flag effect." How would indexing arguments hold up under this, the latest political crisis?

First, it was apparent that, as Bennett predicted in (1990), the president and his administration indeed set the boundaries and circles of discourse among all lesser or non-elite government sources. Yet at the same time foreign (2 of 6) and other U.S. sources (4 of 6) were present in news and editorial coverage before the administration was able to generate discourse. This news was generated in an atmosphere where not only government, but also social elites and academics offered very few diverse or conflicting elite governmental viewpoints from which news media could "index" their news

coverage. This in an interesting finding given that historically and theoretically (Bennett, 1996), we would have expected some level of Congressional dissent and debate to be present effectively nullifying the early collection of "lesser" voices that appeared. Notable here are the parallels between post September 11 findings and those of Althaus et al (1996) in that their indexing-based findings were also culled at a time of relatively low Congressional opposition to the Regan administration's desire to bomb Libya. In our findings, Tuchman's norm of objectivity, that journalists seek opposing views, seemed to hold up.

Our second research question is guided by Zaller's (1996) hypothesis that news coverage will primarily feature the president at the emergence of a crisis followed by Congress and finally to the opinion of non-politicians. Our findings did supported the first portion of this hypothesis that the president would be featured primarily at the beginning of a foreign policy crisis, but certainly, without Congressional debate to fill in the second portion, journalists were forced to look elsewhere. An issue to consider here is that, through early November 2001, the president had not scored a measurable battlefield victory in Afghanistan. This issue is reflected in public opinion data through early November that indicated only 27 percent of U.S. adults were "very satisfied" with the U.S. military campaign's progress, and a full 18 percent expressed dissatisfaction (Gallup, 2001) – certainly a condition worthy of note in that it could have launched extensive Congressional debate.

A notable consideration here is a postulation made by Bennett (1994) that, when official opinion is not focused or is scattered, it would be expected that routine journalistic process, or newsbeats, would decrease as well. Essentially, chaos introduced at the official level would cripple the "familiar official narrative structure." But, it would seem this same newsbeat chaos manifests itself in the condition we see when testing RQ2, that being one of almost no-chaos at the official opinion level – indeed, quite the opposite. This issue, according to our findings (when measured against Zaller's 1996 offerings) does, in effect, force news-beat journalists to look elsewhere thus, allowing for "non-standard" narratives to be introduced into the process much earlier than would have been expected. But, considering the charged political atmosphere, one must consider choices the media had at this juncture. Political communication research has found that

news reporting exercises caution to avoid violation of often unspoken but assumed political taboos (Chomsky, 1985; Herman & Chomsky; Rachlin, 1988). This very domestic news "taboo" issue was tested on September 17th, via Bill Maher's comment on his ABC television program "Politically Incorrect." He stated that the Clinton administration's approach of long-range bombing had been a "cowardly" response to previous terrorist attacks. This comment prompted staunch criticism, loss of major advertisers, and denunciation from the White House ("After the attack," 2001). This representation of a dissident voice is certainly extreme, but, when looked at as a domestic "muffler," it might help explain the very high levels of "foreign" voices present throughout the period of analysis. In other words, the lack of availability of countering domestic viewpoints, perhaps due to revitalized cultural patriotism, likely lead journalists to index foreign oppositional voices to fill this model.

In finding foreign substitutes, it becomes important to look at *which* foreign voices were being allowed into discourse. We found that foreign allies were featured much more often that those of the foreign enemy. Both groups, nonetheless, received far less front-page coverage than that of U.S. sources. In this respect, through RQ3, we find further validation of Livingston and Eachus' (1996) marginalization measure is in effect here. Across all front-page conditions, both regular and special section, foreign enemy sources were carried in a front-page story only 5% of the time. Moreover, by the measure of marginalization suggested, we would also assume these voices carried far less situational influence as well. We can see that in the "victory phase" (November 10th through December 18th), when the enemy was retreating and less organized, coverage (from among the 5% total) of enemy sources was only 1.0%, down from a relatively robust 8.2% in the previous phase (October 8th through November 10th).

Bennett (1996) suggested that political views derived from opinion polls, interest organizations, social movements or protest groups, may or may not get reported. Whether or not these sources appear is based less on *the mere existence* of such views than on journalistic judgments about their political legitimacy or their impact on decision makers. It was this type of finding that led Althaus et al (1996), Bennett (1996) and Zaller (1996) to suggest that journalists appear to be "power" indexing, or providing a range of foreign policy debate among those, foreign or domestic sources, that maintain

some influence upon a decision. Additionally, "power" indexing seems to support Communications scholar Grace Ferrari Levine's (1977) findings that show the more power sources have, the more likely they are to be shown as making events happen and thus, arguably, more newsworthy. Contrastingly relatively powerless sources are portrayed as victims where events have happened to them.

Conclusion

This study endeavored to investigate how the indexing theory and its follow up findings would work within news coverage gathered from thousands of news stories featured during the first tumultuous weeks preceding and into the war on terrorism. The patriotic zeal and determination demonstrated by most Americans in the autumn of 2001 hadn't been experienced in this country since the weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 – a war most Americans know only from stories or movies. Arguably, these conditions offered a most unique position from which to investigate how, when and where a myriad of mediated voices would ultimately find themselves within the elite media's foreign policy discourse.

Some of our findings, such as early and dominant presidential coverage, easily met the expectations offered by indexing theory, while others did not. Without dissident Congressional voices or much if any official debate journalists scrambled to meet their news norm of objectivity. We found lesser elites and foreign voices filling this objectivity hole in the resultant news void. But these "other" voices, when featured, were unlikely to see front-page coverage and, as their ability to make a difference in U.S. foreign policy was reduced, so too was their opportunity to break into U.S. news coverage at all. Although findings to our research questions remain interesting, the authors of this study believe it is important to remember the rallying, nationalistic public and governmental atmosphere that was operating during this period. This atmosphere, we argue, could have muffled potential dissident voices available to journalists (e.g. spiral of silence or fear) as much keeping journalists themselves, concerned for their careers, far from any taboo, controversial or nationalistic issues. Certainly hypothesizing

about nationalism in regard to indexing theory was not the goal of this work, but does offer an interesting variable to keep in mind when looking at these results.

The war on terror has eclipsed its first anniversary and the administration is, as this paper is being written, setting its military sights on Iraq. But, unlike the campaign against the Taliban, Congressional dissent and criticism exists. It is the goal of at least one of the authors of this paper to conduct a follow up comparative analysis that will include the current, more controversial period of the war on terrorism, conditions well suited to the practice of traditional indexing.

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Tables, Figures, Graphs, Crosstabs

Table 1
**Discourse in News Content by U.S. Government and Military Leaders
About Potential Challenges of "War on Terrorism," September 11-October 7, 2002**

Potential Challenge	Times addressed	Days Addressed
U.S. casualties	7	5
President Bush	1	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft	2	
Other govt./military officials	4	
Afghanistan civilian deaths	9	6
President Bush	4	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft		
Other govt./military officials	5	
Duration of campaign	24	15
President Bush	13	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft	6	
Other govt./military officials	5	
U.S. exit strategy	5	4
President Bush	1	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft	2	
Other govt./military officials	2	
Rebuilding of Afghanistan	4	4
President Bush	2	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft	1	
Other govt./military officials	1	
War on Islam?	9	5
President Bush	5	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft		
Other govt./military officials	4	

	TOTALS	58	
President Bush		25	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft		11	
Other govt./military officials		21	

Figure 1
**Sum of Discourse in News Content by U.S. Government and Military Leaders
About Potential Challenges of "War on Terrorism,"
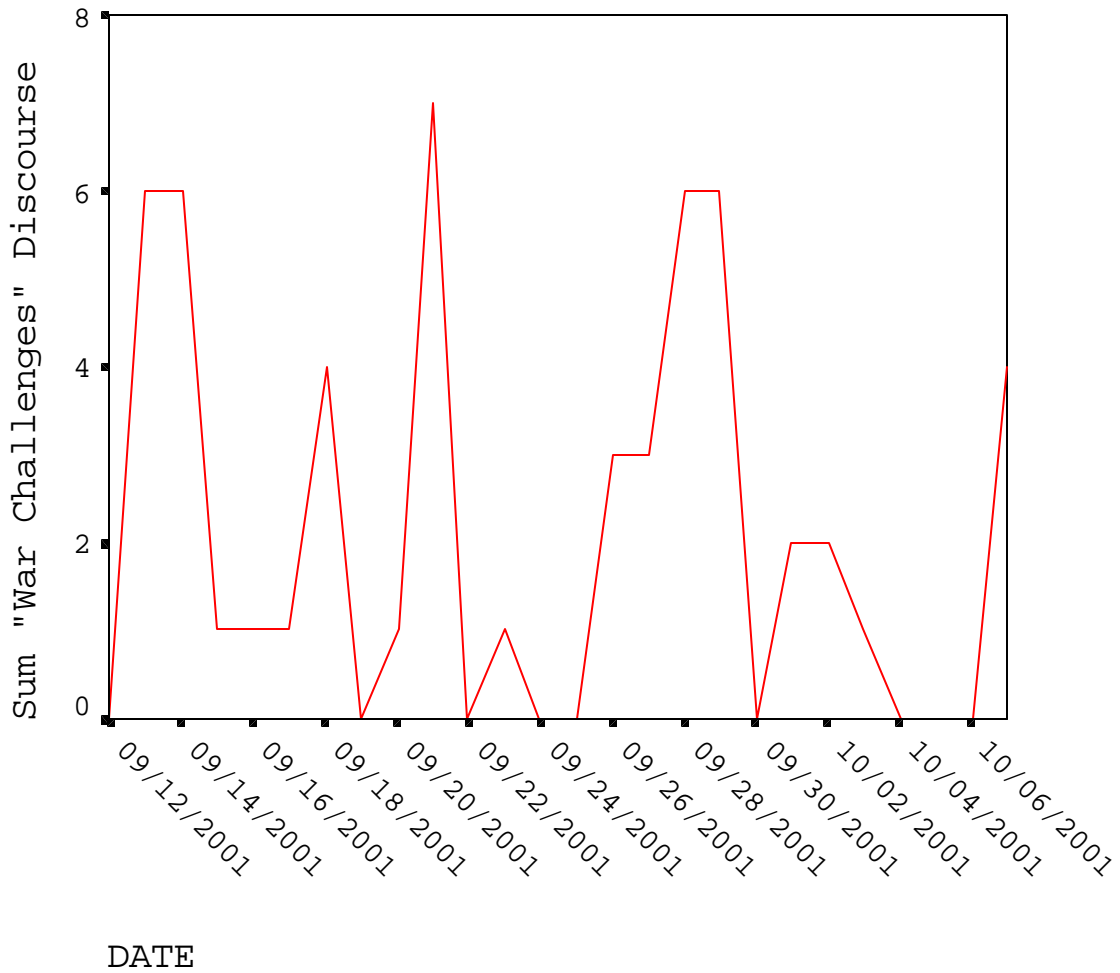Plotted Daily for September 11-October 7, 2002**

DATE

Table 2
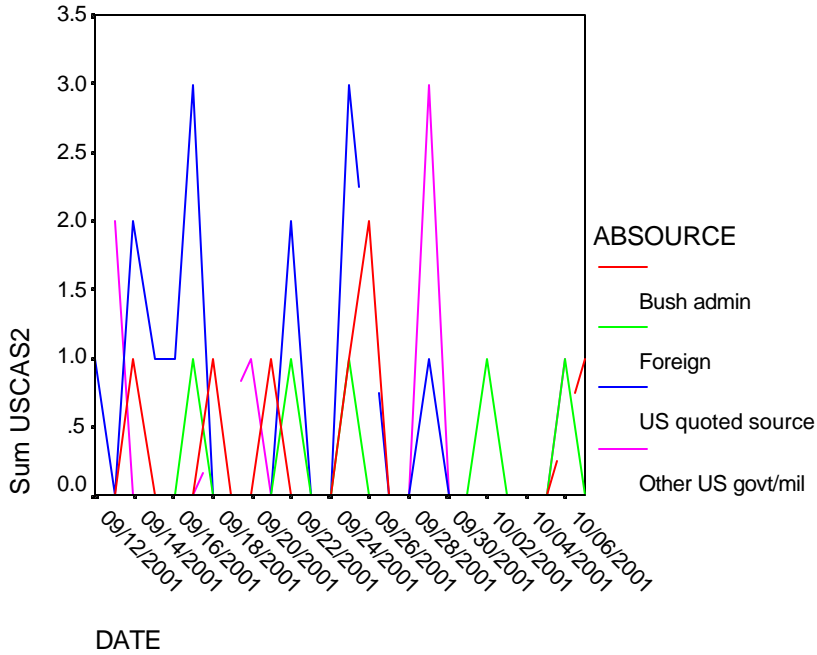Source distribution by dates of analysis

Source	Date 9/12 to 10/7	10/8 to 11/9	11/10 to 12/18
President Bush	15.7%	10.9%	6.9%
Powell/Rumsfeld	6.7%	8.0%	11.6%
Other US govt/mil	17.7%	24.5%	37.0%
Non-govt. US source	24.7%	11.9%	9.4%
Foreign	35.2%	44.6%	35.1%
Totals	100% ($n = 344$)	100% ($n = 587$)	100% ($n = 405$)

Table 3
Source distribution by dates of analysis, with foreign sources broken out
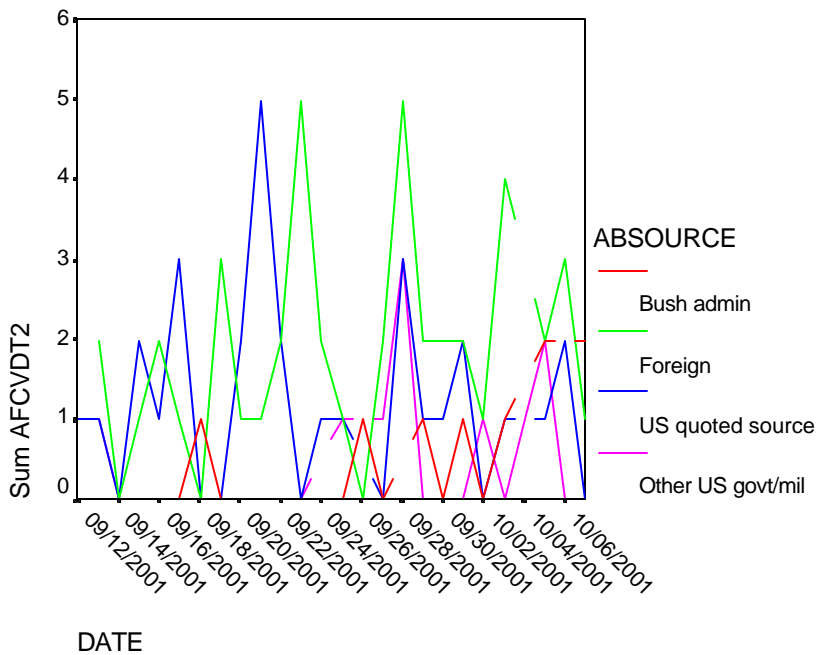
	Date		
Source	9/12 to 10/7	10/8 to 11/9	11/10 to 12/18
President Bush	15.7%	10.9%	6.9%
Powell/Rumsfeld	6.7%	8.0%	11.6%
Other US govt/mil	17.7%	24.5%	37.0%
Non-govt. US source	24.7%	11.9%	9.4%
Foreign/US ally	12.5%	12.4%	15.6%
Foreign/Enemy	6.7%	8.2%	1.0%
Foreign/other	14.2%	21.1%	12.6%
Foreign/UN folks	1.7%	2.9%	5.9%
Totals	100% ($n = 344$)	100% ($n = 587$)	100% ($n = 405$)

ALL 6 TOPICS FOR FIRST MONTH

Graph 1

Graph 2

Graph 3

Graph 4

Graph 5

Graph 6

 FIRST MONTH SOURCE PLACEMENT

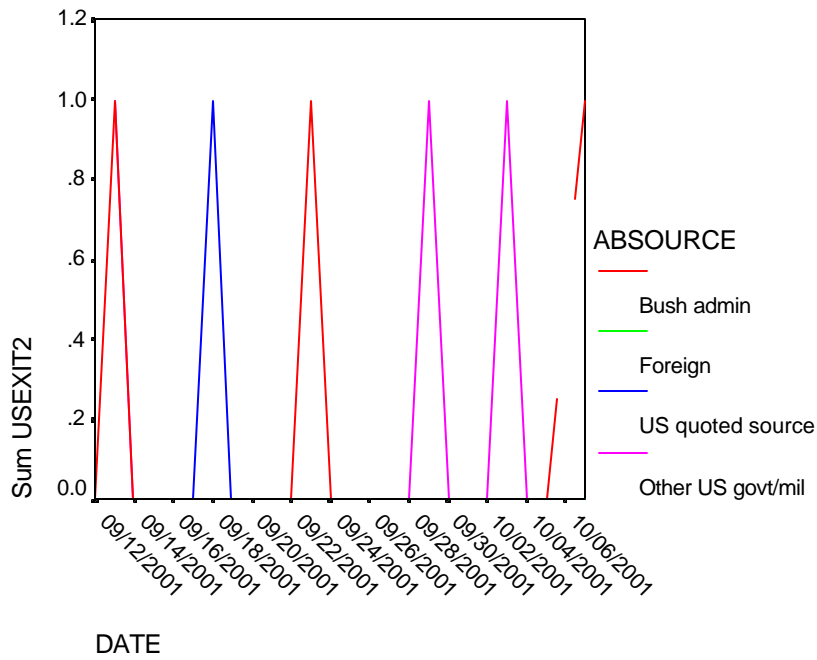## Crosstab 1

```
        PLACEM   Placement of article * ABSOURCE Crosstabulation

                                    ABSOURCE
                                                      4.00
                              1.00              3.00  US    Other
                              Bush    2.00     quoted  US
                              admin   Foreign  source govt/mil  Total
PLACEM         0      Count     44      89       70      38      241
Placement      Not    %
of article     front  within  57.1%   73.6%   82.4%    62.3%   70.1%
               page   ABSOURCE
               1      Count     33      32       15      23      103
               Front  %
               page   within  42.9%   26.4%   17.6%    37.7%   29.9%
                      ABSOURCE
Total                 Count     77     121       85      61      344
                      %
                      within  100.0%  100.0%  100.0%   100.0%  100.0%
                      ABSOURCE
```
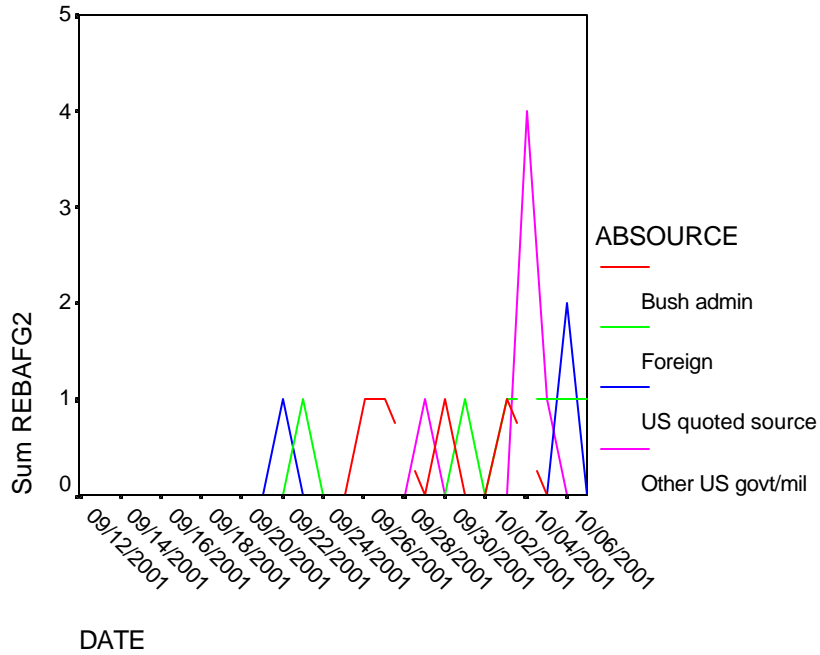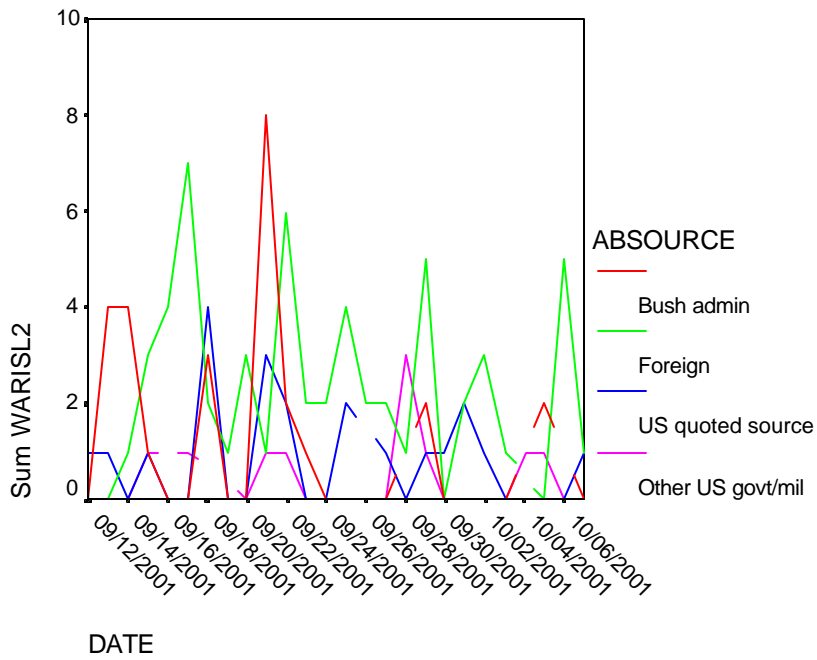
Crosstab 2

ALL THREE MONTHS SOURCE PLACEMENT

PLACEM　Placement of article * ABSOURCE Crosstabulation

| | | | ABSOURCE | | | | |
			1.00 Bush admin	2.00 Foreign	3.00 US quoted source	4.00 Other US govt/mil	Total
PLACEM Placement of article	0 Not front page	Count	144	362	152	188	846
		% within ABSOURCE	54.8%	69.0%	78.8%	53.0%	63.3%
	1 Front page	Count	119	163	41	167	490
		% within ABSOURCE	45.2%	31.0%	21.2%	47.0%	36.7%
Total		Count	263	525	193	355	1336
		% within ABSOURCE	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%