

THE EFFECT OF JOB APPROVAL, TIME, AND
TERRORISM ANXIETY UPON DEFERENCE
TO THE PRESIDENT

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	6
Influence of Public Opinion on US Foreign Policy.....	6
US Press Behavior, US Public Preferences, and Foreign Policy.....	8
Structural and Psychological Elements of the Press and Presidential Deference....	9
Mini Culpas of the US Press after the Run-Up to Iraq.....	11
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	15
US Public Opinion and Foreign Policy.....	15
Public Mood.....	16
Public Knowledge of Foreign Policy.....	17
Foreign Policy Attitudes of the American Public.....	19
Public Opinion Constrains Decision Makers.....	20
Public Political Knowledge and Processing Ability is Varied.....	22
Media Agenda Setting and Individual Perception of Issues.....	27
Media Framing and Individual Perception of Issues.....	29
Indexing and the Creation of the News.....	31
III. METHODOLOGY.....	33
Theory and Hypotheses.....	33
Research Design.....	37
Dependent Variables.....	38
Independent Variables.....	46

Chapter	Page
IV. FINDINGS.....	49
Analysis.....	49
V. CONCLUSION.....	59
REFERENCES.....	62
APPENDIX.....	71

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Dependent Variable Descriptive Statistics.....	72
2. Independent Variable Descriptive Statistics.....	73
3. Question Complexity by Term- George W. Bush.....	74
4. Other Referencing Question Frames by Term- George W. Bush.....	75
5. Yes-No Questions with Preface Tilt by Term- George W. Bush.....	76
6. Negatively Formulated Questions by Term- George W. Bush.....	77
7. Preface Hostility by Term- George W. Bush.....	78
8. Correlations- Pearson's r.....	79
9. Group Independent Variables/Dependent Variable Multiple Regression.....	80

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Causality among Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Decision Makers.....	81
2. Public Psychological Responses to Terrorism.....	82

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Recent changes in the balance of power among foreign policy decision makers and an increasingly assertive and independent news media are well documented (Holsti, 2007; Foyle, 1999; Entman, 2004; Bennett, 1994; Sobel, 2001; Powlick and Katz, 1998; Zaller and Chiu, 2000). The balance of power became more reflective of the Cold War era after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US northeast. The news media retransmitted official government pronouncements, a shift in standard operating procedures common during national security crises (Bennett et al, 2007). The American news media were more deferential and supportive of government officials, aside from the traditional role as providers of essential information during crises. Under certain conditions, the US media cover executive branch generated foreign policy without sufficient analysis and skepticism. For example, the reaction of the American press to the Pearl Harbor event was supportive of the Roosevelt administration and supportive of military engagement against hostile countries. After 9/11, the Bush administration altered some basic US foreign policy strategy assumptions. Geographic isolation arguably offered no protection from terrorist acts, especially from suicide bombers with weapons of mass destruction. Containment of non-state actors was viewed as problematic and an

ineffective means of securing against a future domestic attack. A strategy of pre-emptive military action was seen as necessary to combat the emerging terrorist threat.

Deferential coverage of executives is also partly dependent upon the perceived efficacy of proposed foreign policy measures, the level of anxiety present within the public, and the presence of divided government. The effects upon the press of public psychological reactions to terrorism are of particular interest. *Will press coverage of presidents and their foreign policy agendas become more or less critical/deferential with the presence of heightened public anxiety regarding future terrorist actions?* Specifically, did White House Press Corps journalists use a more/less adversarial questioning style during presidential press briefings in the midst of national security crises like the period after 9/11?

The US news media act as the primary means of information exchange between the mass public and foreign policy decision makers. Some scholars have focused on the ability of elite publics and government officials to lead mass opinion and to constrain the media from full analytical and evaluative coverage, especially during a foreign policy crisis (Zaller and Chiu, 2000; Mueller, 1971; Galbraith, 2008). Others have pointed to the mass public's ability to alter some foreign policy decisions under certain conditions, finding that the public can constrain foreign policy decision-making (Foyle, 1999; Sobel, 2001; Holsti, 2006). At the same time elites and decision-makers will attempt to lead public opinion to support policy preferences. Many studies over the past 35 years have attempted to model and simplify this complex interrelationship among government, elites, the media, and the mass public (Baum and Potter, 2008.)

These models explain aspects of linkages between foreign policy, the US news media, and US publics. The media indexing model has received particular attention.. Media indexing assumes that the news media will index stories to the range of official opinion on a given issue such that foreign policy coverage will reflect the views of prominent officials and source of governmental power.

The model explains well facets of the foreign policy/media/public opinion link. Media indexing does not fully explain support within the US media for executive branch foreign policy preferences and actions during much of the post 9/11 period generally, and the period between September 20, 2001 and March 19, 2003 specifically. Indexing overlooks the effect of prevailing public mood on news media deference to the executive. Understanding more fully the interaction of foreign policy decision makers, the US news media, and the US public during foreign policy crises like the 2002 framing war that preceded actual war is important for three reasons.

First, reality may be perceived as a construction of rhetoric (Kelley, 2007; Schultz, 1970). Newsworthiness is partly dependent upon “prevailing political and social” ideologies at a given time, and upon what a particular society finds socially significant (Graber, 2006). The eventual meaning of mediated presentations will be influenced by these considerations also. The US government routinely utilizes news organizations to inform and lead public action in crisis situations through direct and mediated presentations of information supplied by the government to the media (Graber, 2006). The International Crisis Behavior website defines a foreign policy crisis by three criteria: “a threat to one or more basic values, along with an awareness of finite time for response to the value threat, and a heightened probability of involvement in military

hostilities (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 2000; Hewitt, 2003).” Bush administration rhetoric after the 9/11 crisis set the US on several foreign policy courses. One of the most controversial was to consider preemptive elimination of potential threats to national security. In a June, 2002 speech to cadets at West Point President Bush stated: “Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.” The conflation of the terrorist group al-Qaeda and Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein implicit in this statement was understood by some to signal a larger shift in priorities within the executive branch. Shared political beliefs allowed for the imposition of a series of familiar and culturally consistent frames and metaphors used to magnify support for war (Edelman, 1988; Hart and Hassencahl, 2005; Entman, 2004). The dubious veracity of some of these assertions and frames did little to alter their persuasiveness (Kull et al, 2004).

Some US news media coverage of executive branch generated foreign policy after 9/11 took a deferential tone. Whether due to rally effects felt within the US news media or a business decision to keep information suppliers (government officials) and consumers (the pre-sold public) happy, the US news media largely supported Bush administration positions on post 9/11 foreign policy (Zaller and Chiu, 2000; Baker and O’Neal, 2001; Chapman and Reiter, 2004; Baum and Potter, 2008). The media indexing model doesn’t fully answer why the US news media failed to provide sufficient critical analysis of Bush administration framing of the US/Iraq relationship in 2002-2003.

Second, public opinion has no single influence on policy. Interactions between elite and mass opinion, events, and decision contexts result in a variable effect of opinion

on foreign policy (Foyle, 1999). US citizens are largely uninformed on matters of foreign policy, and the demands of daily life preclude intellectual assessment of governmental policy problems for all but the most salient decisions (Almond, 1950; Lippman, 1965). For other less salient decisions, non-crisis foreign policy decisions for example, the public's plastic mood may influence preferences (Almond, 1950; Lippman, 1965). Also, individual affective experiences are diverse within the US public and within individuals over time (Rahn, 2000). Public anxiety measures that assess public mood related to the fear of future terrorism and presidential ability to mitigate terrorist action may explain why the media are often overly deferential to government sources during crisis periods.

Third, democratic theories hold that government officials should be accountable to the public. But the public must rely on mediated sources for information, especially foreign policy information (Holsti, 2004). When the news media are constrained by standard practices, or a desire to deflect bias charges as was the case for much of the 2001-2003 debate over war with Iraq, democratic accountability may be compromised (Baum and Potter, 2008; Graber, 2006). Foreign policy coverage of the US news media will ordinarily reflect the diversity of opinion among prominent officials and institutional factions (Bennett, 1990). During the months after 9/11 few official voices criticized the foreign policy pronouncements and directives of the Bush administration. The muted response may have been due to rally effects, or may illustrate the tendency of elected officials to modify actions in the face of activated public opinion.

The creation of foreign policy news is affected by more than ranking the impact and importance of relevant events as they occur. This thesis examines the adversarial nature of US press questioning of the executive during presidential press conferences and

whether increases in adversarial questioning during the Bush administration were related to public terrorism anxiety. Findings include consistent, moderately strong positive correlations between public anxiety regarding terrorist actions, and overtly hostile and negative questioning of Bush administration press conferences; and strong positive correlations between executive approval and question types indicating press deference to the president.

The second section provides background information regarding the interdependent relationship between public opinion and foreign policy in general. The third section discusses relevant literature: public mood in the context of foreign policy debates; the role media deference and standard operating behaviors play in foreign policy debates; the psychological effects of terrorist actions upon public sentiments; and the role of the public in foreign policy decision making. A fourth section contains a theoretical explanation and several hypotheses intended to illustrate the causal relationships between independent and dependent variables. A methods section details the research design, unit of analysis, temporal context, and operationalized independent and dependent variables. The final section contains analysis of data, an assessment of theoretical expectations, and implications for future research.

Background

Influence of Public Opinion on US Foreign Policy

The influence of public opinion upon foreign policy is complex. A variety of causal links between public opinion, events, the press, and foreign policy decision-makers have been suggested by many authors (See Figure 1). The context of public opinion influence on US foreign policy has three layers. The first is US history and

processes of cultural/political socialization. Based upon representative democratic traditions and the American constitutional framework, American history provides the basis of public beliefs and values (Jentleson, 1992; Sobel, 2001; Holsti, 2004). The American political tradition and system of government require public interest and participation, as well as active information dissemination by the press.

[Figure 1 About Here]

Second, the political ideological and foreign policy beliefs of the public limit the actions of foreign policy makers (Jentleson, 1992; Sobel, 2001; Holsti, 2004). American values inform individual decision making and set the limits of acceptable foreign policy actions by government leaders. Decision makers find it advantageous to craft policy within an acceptable range so that segments of the public who would reject policies on the left or right ends of the continuum do not become activated allowing policy makers to act without constraint (Stimson, 1999).

Third, the fluctuating nature of public opinion means different foreign policy actors are presented with different sets of boundaries and differing constraints to action over time. Within the boundaries of American political ideology, fluctuations in public mood related to feelings of societal stability and political efficacy can constrain/free/alter the choices of decision makers. External events and/or the choices of decision makers may lead to individual or collective reassessment of societal stability (Huddy et al, 2005). In periods of economic distress, prolonged combat losses that were the result of military action, or when trust in governmental leaders has waned, the ability of decision makers to dominate the policy process diminishes regardless of public interest in specific policies (Foyle, 1999; Jentleson, 1992; Mueller, 1971; Holsti, 2006).

US Press Behavior, US Public Preferences, and Foreign Policy

One of the most important connections among foreign policy, the US news media, and the US public, is the information exchange network facilitated by the mass media. A variety of observations and interactions have been noted over time. News media organizations were viewed as able to control public thinking in the 1940s; but likened to a conveyor belt with limited independent influence in the 1950s-1970s. Media effects are now believed to be of variable nature and intensity depending upon a variety of factors, though it is accepted that the US news media can influence public opinion through agenda setting, priming, and framing abilities (Cohen, 1963; Zaller, 1992; Brody, 1991; Page and Shapiro 1992).

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 temporarily altered the political behavior of many individuals and groups. The news media, the Congress, the public, and individuals in the executive branch shared the tendency to rally-round-the-flag and to view opposition to the president's foreign policy agenda as unpatriotic. During the months after 9/11, few official voices criticized the foreign policy pronouncements and directives of the Bush administration. This may reflect rally effects, or the muted response may be an example of the tendency of elected officials to modify actions in the face of activated public opinion. For some, the deferential attitude may have lasted too long and may have occurred for less sound reasons than to rally-round-the-flag. The US press has a tradition of initially supporting US military engagements abroad (DiMaggio, 2008; Jentleson, 2007). The soft coverage of the Bush administration after 9/11 illustrates this tendency. The 9/11 attacks brought terrorism to the forefront of American political life. At the same time, terrorism against US interests was conflated with the continued

existence of intransigent US adversaries in Asia. After 9/11, a sizable portion of the public agreed with polling questions that asked if the US should respond militarily against Iraq whether or not that government had carried out the attacks. Elites took to the airwaves advocating removal of many world dictators, especially Saddam Hussein. This November 25th, 2001 ABC news excerpt quotes former CIA director James Woolsey, an early proponent of attacking Iraq whether or not the state was connected to the 9/11 attacks:

We don't start with the international community and take a vote and work backward to our policies. We find the people who have come after us, and Saddam has come after us on more than one occasion, and we cure the problem, and I think the time is right now, after we win Afghanistan, to begin to move against Iraq.

Woolsey's contention was undisputed by ABC's moderator or others present for the panel discussion. During the broadcast, this unchallenged explicitly supportive statement of belief stood as the final statement on the potential connection between Iraq and 9/11 terrorism, and the necessity of attacking Iraq. Many similar assertions went unchallenged by journalists in following months.

Structural and Psychological Elements of the US Press and Presidential Deference

Newsworthiness is partly dependent upon prominent political and social ideologies at a given time, and upon what a particular society finds significant (Graber, 2006). Individual perceptions as to the meaning of mediated presentations are also influenced by these considerations. The US government routinely utilizes the news media to inform and lead public action in crisis situations through direct and mediated presentations of information supplied by the government to the American press (Graber, 2006). The for-profit middleman status of the press must account for a portion of the

inaccurate portrayals within the range of criticism regarding the Bush administration's foreign policy decisions after 9/11. Economic concerns constrain press activity. Cost-benefit considerations, a lack of international relations expertise among US journalists, the high cost of creating substantive news reports from foreign countries, and producer-consumer issues can limit effective foreign policy journalism by the US press (Graber, 2006).

Journalists are often too close to, and too dependent upon, sources of official government information, especially during crisis situations like 9/11 (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007; Graber, 2006). Structural elements of the US press system promote deference to the president. Communications professionals shape a great deal of the raw information journalists craft into news (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007). Changes in government regulation of broadcasting led to the creation of niche markets for news, and a transition in content and coverage to include more deference to official government sources, more soft news, and infotainment stories (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007). Traumatic national events, especially in the foreign policy arena, strengthen deference to government officials.

Press deference during traumatic events has psychological and structural components. During crisis periods the news media function as both communications support for official government crisis control agencies and objective reporters of reality (Graber, 2006). This structural limitation of the US communication system means that broadcasters and journalists must, at times, suspend standard practices in order to convey government messages pertaining to public safety and emergency management. Crisis control in these periods takes precedence over objective and analytical coverage of

events. The news media must also react to the psychological effects of the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon (Mueller, 1971; Zaller and Chiu, 2000).

Journalists must contend with personal feelings of patriotism engendered by the temporarily unifying event and perform professionally under atypical circumstances that include suppressing information and conveying government messages directly (Graber, 2006). During the 9/11 period, media outlets whose coverage strayed too far from the range of current public opinion and officially sanctioned government opinion on the relevant issues were charged with biased coverage, “crusading for a cause,” or exhibiting a lack of patriotism (Graber, 2006).

To avoid these entanglements, the US news media tend to report only that range of discussion present in official government circles (Graber, 2006; Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007). These constraints result in a press system that restates executive branch foreign policy prescriptions and restates whatever criticism is leveled from members of Congress, but conducts insufficient independent critical assessment (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007). When official sources do not sufficiently contest executive branch foreign policy prescriptions, the US news media will not independently drive critical news coverage (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007; Schudson, 1992; Bannerman, 2004).

Mini Culpas of the US Press after the Run-Up to Iraq

Members of the US press faulted their own unprofessional behavior in the run-up to the Iraq war. The New York Times, The Washington Post, Slate magazine, and others published articles in 2004 that skirted and/or accepted minimal responsibility for failing to forcefully analyze Bush administration claims that Iraq sought to produce nuclear

weapons and possessed new weapons of mass destruction. The Times made no direct reference to Judith Miller, cheerleading for war, or over-reliance upon single dubious sources, but the article did find fault with the desire to ‘scoop’ competitors and be present for the BIG story. To get to the big story, the Times, the Post and dozens of other US press organizations routinely buried criticism of Bush administration assertions and glossed over contention regarding the veracity of administration claims on the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the true status of the Iraqi nuclear program. A series of common political beliefs also aided this tendency of the press to under-criticize officials on Iraq intelligence.

Shared political beliefs allowed for the imposition of a series of familiar and culturally consistent frames and metaphors used to magnify support for war (Edelman, 1971; Hart and Hassencahl, 2005; Entman, 2004). The falsity of some of these assertions and frames did not alter their persuasiveness (Kull et al, 2004). The Bush administration telegraphed intent to democratize and remove from power the most oppressive regimes: Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Syria. The Bush administration continued to maintain relationships with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, undemocratic and repressive countries who *had* supplied the al-Qaeda group with men to carry out the 9/11 attacks. One psychological effect of 9/11 was an increase in black-and-white thinking among individuals at all levels of society. Black-and-white thinking is a form of cognitive simplification common during high stress periods (Glad, 1983). Reducing complex situations and actors to dichotomous classifications simplifies uncertain situations. One result of this cognitive style is a tendency to deprecate out-groups and idealize the familiar (Glad, 1983). This kind of perceptual rigidity is common in crisis and could be

seen in statements made by US officials after 9/11. Members of the mass public made statements indicating a similar rigidity of perception on the Iraq issue. The US news media were affected by rally effects along with the mass public (Zaller and Chiu, 2000). Press coverage increased informational disadvantages of the public relative to elite decision makers (Baum and Potter, 2008). Many assertions were repeated with little secondary verification. When contention between official and/or elite sources was found, criticisms were often buried in the back sections of newspapers or at the end of televised presentations. The excessive deference paid to official sources after 9/11 altered an important balance of power within American society.

The American political system separates government authority and power by constitutional design. The constitutional separation of power among legislative, executive, and judicial functions was perceived to be an important preventative measure to check the potential for accumulation of power and influence among factions or individuals within government. The press is an important equalizing component within the American political system. Three essential functions of the US press are to provide a forum to publicly discuss public issues, to report news, and to identify public problems. Citizens must have access to objective information regarding the actions and intentions of governmental decision makers in order to make rational voting decisions. Lacking the unbiased information transmitted by an objective press, the US public did not receive comprehensive analysis of administration claims on Iraq in much 2002 coverage. The necessary balance of power between official foreign policy information suppliers and the press did not exist after the 9/11 crisis and resultant psychological effects.

The American press feared public perceptions of biased coverage during the unprecedented national tragedy. The rally effects created an environment supportive of unilateral internationalist policies and amounted, in some cases, to blind support of any military target deemed by the president to have been a part of the terrorist actions. Even the opposition party was largely supportive of taking some decisive military action. Crises like 9/11 reveal a flaw in the media indexing model. Media indexing is standard operating procedure for the American press. The press will cover the range of official disagreement on a given foreign policy issue, thus reflecting the diversity of opinion of “prominent officials and institutional power blocs (Bennett, 1990).” As few prominent officials were inclined to explicitly criticize the Bush administration foreign policy agenda, explicit criticisms were often lacking in news media foreign policy coverage during 2001-2002. Without the objective information and critical analysis needed to rationally assess policy options during this period, citizen participation in public debate was limited.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

US Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

The effect of public opinion on policy has been called “awesome (Ericson, Wright, and McIver, 1993; Burstein, 2003, 35).” Others see public opinion as much less influential upon policy (Domhoff, 1998). Public opinion has the potential to constrain foreign policy choices (Markel, 1949). One long standing assertion is that foreign policy must have the “support of public opinion” to succeed (Markel, 1949). Absent that support, public opinion may be shaped with guidance and persuasion from knowledgeable elites (Holsti, 2007). Attempts to shape mass attitudes are justified and explained by two conflicting truths. Some measure of public support for foreign policy is necessary, but individual Americans are likely to be uninformed on specific and general points of foreign policy (Page and Shapiro, 1992).

In American politics, the conventional post-WWII wisdom has held that opinions of the mass public are too unstable, unstructured, and formed in an overly emotional manner to prudently inform foreign policy decisions (Almond, 1950; Markel, 1949; Lippman, 1922). Vietnam-era political research altered the conventional wisdom by suggesting that opinions of the mass public, while admittedly not well informed, are more stable and rational than previously believed (Page and Shapiro, 1992).

It has been argued that the public's relatively stable ideological orientations combined with elite education and guidance provide a rational and more or less coherent base from which to assess foreign policy options (Sobel, 2001).

Traditional theories regarding the connection between public opinion and policy were crafted decades ago (Almond, 1950; Rosenau, 1961; Page and Shapiro, 1983; Markel, 1949; Lippman, 1922). Most argued public opinion sets a normative range of acceptable foreign policy actions but individual members of the public were not well informed on relevant issues (Almond, 1950; Rosenau, 1961; Page and Shapiro, 1983; Lippman, 1965). Almond (1950), Markel (1949), and Lippman (1965) found the mass public to be uninformed on matters of foreign policy. The demands of daily life tended to preclude intellectual assessment of governmental policy problems in all but the most salient situations (Almond, 1950). For other less salient decisions such as those involving non-crisis foreign policy decisions, the public are more likely to rely on "plastic moods" and stereotyping instead of more rational means of assessment (Almond, 1950; Lippman, 1965).

Public Mood

Almond (1950) identified several public moods, which were a series of continua between the dispositions of withdrawal-intervention, optimism-pessimism, tolerance-intolerance, idealism-cynicism, and superiority-inferiority. When called upon to consider foreign policy, the relatively uninformed and unengaged public craft foreign policy preferences based on some combination of these moods. For example, before Pearl Harbor in 1941, Almond found the prevailing American public mood to have been one of

combined withdrawal tendencies: “cynicism about power politics,” intolerance of foreign cultures, and pessimism about the success of internationalist action (Almond, 1950).

Pearl Harbor effectively focused the mood of the public toward a more interventionist, idealistic, and optimistic stance. This state endured for a time until degrading relations between WWII allies influenced the public toward a less tolerant and optimistic position regarding foreign affairs. American attention (activation) to foreign policy appears to be “threat bound” and too dependent upon the individual value orientations of Americans (Almond, 1950). The public should, therefore, be educated to make US policies and goals clearly understood (Markel, 1949). Whether shaped by elites or self-formed, public opinion functions as directive (defining the limits of acceptable foreign policy), and as instrument (unity of public opinion results in political capital for decision makers) (Markel, 1949).

Public Knowledge of Foreign Policy

Rosenau (1961) Lippmann (1965) and Markel (1949) advocated public education on foreign policy matters. Lippmann asserted that individual reliance upon imperfect cognitive aids such as stereotyped assumptions that simplify decisions and allow general belief systems to guide individual action should be augmented by experts in political theory who should educate the public and formulate new means of perceiving foreign policy, and the place of the US in the world (Lippmann, 1965). Rosenau (1961) proposed that the mass public and opinion makers interacted (two-step flow) through a variety of primary and secondary channels of communication (speeches, media, political parties, informal information networks, etc.) and noted that, at various points, the “decision making, opinion-submitting, and opinion-making processes overlap.” Rosenau’s model

and theory could not identify the form and frequency of these overlaps, and was not designed to identify causal factors, but to describe the flows of information to/from mass public to opinion makers.

Markel (1949) also found the public to be uninformed on matters of foreign policy, but believed that foreign policy decisions must have the “full support of public opinion” to succeed. In Markel’s view, the three primary shapers of public opinion are the government, the press, and citizen groups with the government holding the most important role as educator of the other two groups who transmit the government’s message to the mass public. The federal government conveys foreign policy ideas through speeches and other public statements meant to influence and educate the public delivered by the president, congressmen, the military, and the Department of State (Markel, 1949).

The resultant conventional wisdom held that public opinion was too volatile to provide stable and effective policies, and lacked “coherence or structure,” and therefore should have little “impact on foreign policy (Holsti, 1992; Lippmann, 1965; Almond, 1950).” As a result of these difficulties, some have argued that it may be too much trouble to seek public approval for all foreign policy actions. Foreign policy decision makers may avoid activating public interest because public opinion is unpredictable on specific foreign policy issues and because “public scrutiny may raise the political costs” for failure (Baum, 2003).

Foreign Policy Attitudes of the American Public

Maggiotto and Wittkopf (1981) stress that traditional and non-traditional issues will likely affect public opinion in variable and counterintuitive ways as mass and elite publics often interpret non-traditional foreign policy decision-making contexts differently. The main difference between elites/decision makers and mass publics is centered on levels of comfort with internationalist policies including both cooperative and military variants (Sobel, 2001; Holsti, 2006; Foyle, 1999). According to Chittick, Billingsly, and Travis (1990), Maggiotto and Wittkopf (1981), and Holsti (2006), the belief schemas that shape American public opinion regarding foreign policy allow assessment of potential actions on at least three levels: identity (support for unilateralism or multilateralism), security (support for militarism or non-militarism), and prosperity (internationalism or isolationism).

The attitude of the American mass public can more often be described as supporting a more “restrained and selective” semi-isolationist role in international affairs, while elites tend to support an internationalist role in foreign policy generally (Maggiotto and Wittkopf, 1981). It may also be the case that mass public attitudes are more variable over time. Chittick, Billingsly, and Travis (1990) found noteworthy changes in mass public attitudes over a 12-year period from 1974-1986, while little change was recorded in the attitudes of elites for the same period. Jentleson (1992) noted similar changes in attitudes across a range of crisis-based situations in the 1980s and 1990s in which some situations received public support and some did not. The variation in public approval was explained as the centrist tendencies of a mass public that would support US military action to restrain aggressor states seeking to alter power relations outside its borders; but

who would not support military action that sought to impose “internal political change” upon states (Jentleson, 1992).

Researchers have described the constraining effects of public opinion upon foreign policy (Holsti, 2006; Foyle, 1999). Individuals within the mass public are generally more centrist and non-internationalist than elites (Holsti, 2006). One result is that foreign policy decision makers will at times seek to keep the public uninterested in foreign policy issues and/or to educate and persuade the public if the decision context permits (Holsti, 2006; Markel, 1949). The constitutional structure of US government, the nature of American public opinion, and the impact on public opinion of the decision context condition the effect of public opinion on decision makers. In addition, political knowledge among the American public is notoriously low (Graber, 2006; Holsti, 2006). As a result, the nature of public opinion makes it a bad guide for decision makers. Foreign policy decision makers often seek to lead the public or to educate them on foreign policy issues so that future public opinion will support official policies. Crisis periods make this easier as the public often “rally around the flag” to support decision makers temporarily. In spite of these problems, many have found that the public will affect policy outcomes in some circumstances (Page and Shapiro, 1983; Burstein, 2003; Shapiro and Page, 1988; Jentleson, 1992; Holsti, 2006; Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson, 1995).

Public Opinion Constrains Decision Makers

Many have noted the constraining effects of public opinion on government policy (Holsti, 2006; Foyle, 1999; Mueller, 1970; Canes-Wrone and Shotts, 2004). If the level of public support determines a president's ability to influence other decision makers and the

political environment, then understanding the determinants of public support is of crucial importance (Neustadt, 1980). Public approval of presidents has been shown to be partially cyclic in nature (Mueller, 1970). Campaigns, elections, and inaugurations have traditionally marked the high popular approval mark in any administration of the last 50 years (Brace and Hinckley, 1992). American voters tend to provide favorable or unfavorable appraisals of presidents based partly on their perceptions of those presidents (Neustadt, 1980; Mueller, 1970). These approval assessments motivate, as well as constrain presidential action (Mueller, 1970; Brace and Hinckley, 1992). The personal beliefs and values of presidents regarding public opinion and image management ability, the salience of issues for voters, as well as the impact of events are important determinants of public approval (Mueller, 1970; Canes-Wrone Shotts, 2004).

Popular presidential approval assessments are reached through some combination of character and job performance evaluations (Rahn, 1990). These assessments have been likened to political currency that the president may use to influence the public and others within government (Neustadt, 1980; Edwards, 1989). Circumstances (economic conditions, international events, and national crises), an administration's skill at compromise, negotiation, and image management, as well as the simple passage of time are important determinants (Brace and Hinckley, 1991; Mueller 1970; Gronke and Newman, 2003). Mueller identified four independent variables presumed to act upon the dependent variable presidential approval: 1. The "coalition of minorities" variable assumed that presidents would lose public support over time as presidential decisions alienated former allies; 2. The "rally round the flag" variable assumes that certain "specific, dramatic, and sharply focused" international crises (such as the outset of some

military conflicts or terrorist attacks like 9/11) directly involving the President and the U.S. will increase presidential approval ratings temporarily; 3. The “economic slump” variable assumes a negative correlation between the national unemployment rate and presidential approval ratings; and 4. The “war” variable assumes a fairly strong negative correlation between presidential popularity and US involvement in prolonged military engagements like Vietnam, Korea, or the current Iraq war (Mueller, 1970, 2005). Mueller found that these variables “significantly affected presidential approval,” noting that they explained nearly 86% of variation in presidential popularity across presidents when applied to a multiple regression model (Mueller, 1970; Gronke and Newman, 2003). Subsequent studies have investigated the effects of the media and the cognitive limitations of voters, along with changes to analytic methods and modeling to account for “the special characteristics of each administration (Mueller, 1973).”

Public Political Knowledge and Processing Ability is Varied

Attention to politics and individual information acquisition and processing capacities varies widely (Neustadt, 1980; Rubin, 1981; Ostrom and Simon, 1988; Canes-Wrone and Shotts, 2004). Individuals use various cognitive processes to derive political attitudes and choices. Several individual cognitive factors influence opinion on foreign policy issues. Political sophistication, the degree of political motivation, and the individual’s level of political knowledge will influence the cognitive processes utilized to reach conclusions. Lodge et al (1995) advocate an on-line model of evaluation over memory-based models. Their findings suggest that messages of political actors are integrated into an “affective on-line tally” that informs the voter’s opinion in a more cognitively efficient manner than would continuously weighing the many issue stances

and characteristics of candidates (Lodge et al, 1995). In addition, citizens with conflicted feelings towards a president or foreign policy may arrive at their opinion through focus on a variety “of considerations used to construct an opinion at a given time (Lavine, 2001).” Further, the opinions of ambivalent persons are less stable than those whose affective valences are more unified. The problem of ambivalence caused by simultaneously holding conflicting information may be reconciled through the simplest of cognitive heuristics: socio-demographic similarity and/or party identification (Lavine, 2001). Heuristic devices may be defined as consciously or unconsciously applied “problem solving strategies which serve to keep the information processing demands of tasks within bounds (Lau and Redlawsk, 2003).” Heuristic devices reflect an individual’s attempt to simplify some complex set of choices by using internally derived cognitive short-cuts.

The public draw from the same pool of mediated information to make a choice, but the processes by which decisions are made differ based on varying individual political knowledge, sophistication, strength of ideological orientation, and level of interest (Ansolabahere and Iyengar, 1997). Individual processing quality varies based on available information, level of interest, and education level (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson, 2003). Individuals may assess the relative weight of competing issue frames or they may simply use some heuristic device: personal likeability, gender, race, party id, or respect for tactics predicated upon an inference of competent and decisive behavior (Miller and Krosnick, 2000). Many individuals may expend very little energy or effort in arriving at some opinion preferring instead to use some cognitive short cut, or heuristic device.

It is widely accepted that people make political and foreign policy assessments within the constraints of our biological composition and political environment: we are cognitive misers with finite data processing abilities. Our various belief systems tend to affect our judgments, and the cognitive processes by which these judgments are made are themselves subject to the effects of various systematic biases (Conover and Feldman, 1984; Converse, 1964; Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh, 1989). It is also the case that individuals are constrained from fully rational political assessments given that voters have a limited amount of time and energy available to research policy positions and presidential actions while responding to the many other demands of daily life. Individual use of heuristics, while capable of producing less than optimal results, may function adequately within institutional constraints (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Jentleson, 1992).

The efficacy of heuristic short cuts seems to be facilitated by institutional constraints on choice. Options are systematically limited through social and political institutions that simplify choices and issue alternatives. Essentially, “we do not have our choice of choices; we have to choose from the alternatives on offer (Sniderman, 2000).” This abbreviation of public choice from a “conspicuously complicated decision-theoretic task” to a simplified either/or decision between “fixed ideological elements” accommodates the “approximate rationality” of heuristic short cuts (Sniderman, 2000). Heuristic devices in conjunction with other institutional constraints allow individuals to make political assessments with imperfect information and also allow presidents and subordinates to influence the public through argument and image manipulation (Waterman et al, 1999).

The use of heuristic short cuts in this manner has been widely discussed and accepted as a reality of individual political behavior. Taking cues from elite political actors is one such heuristic device. Individuals may simply assess the likeability of the messenger (the actor delivering the information) or may perform a more complicated assessment of the veracity of the message itself, in addition to that of the messenger (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994). This process works differently for individuals of varying political sophistication and knowledge, logical capacity, and motivation, ranging from a simple affective assessment of the individual delivering some political message to a “detailed processing of message content” itself (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994). Optimal use of this device is further dependent upon: the honesty of the argument presented by the political elite, unity of elite’s political messages on a given issue, and correctness of elite’s political assessment of issues. Problems arise when elites use less than fully truthful arguments and issue frames, as well as opponent communication suppression strategies to persuade the public to adopt elite positions as their own (Mondak, Mutz, and Huckfeldt, 1996; McGraw and Hubbard, 2007; Cobb and Kuklinski, 1997).

An example of one such suppression strategy is the elite unity model in which a unified elite “uphold a clear picture of what should be done” that is adopted by the larger public primarily because other perceptions and policy prescriptions are obscured (Paul and Brown, 2001). If a unified elite frame issues in a one-sided manner, the public “tend to see the issue similarly (Paul and Brown, 2001).” As a consequence, mass perceptions of elite opinion alone may be an unreliable heuristic device in many cases. The effects of elite manipulation may be undone by an individual’s crosscutting deliberations and interactions through intermediate collectives (Druckman and Nelson, 2003; Mondak,

Mutz, and Huckfeldt, 1996). The divergent views expressed in these environments may help to mitigate the external framing effects of elites so that voters may use internally derived heuristic devices in a more accurate fashion (Druckman and Nelson, 2003; Mondak, Mutz, and Huckfeldt, 1996, 2000). Mondak et al. (2000) assert that the perceptions gained by individuals through interaction with various “intermediate collectives,” within society can act to inform the process of candidate and issue evaluation by voters and minimize the effectiveness of elite issue frames.

For some, the formation of political views is facilitated through the use of heuristic devices (source credibility, candidate traits, likeability) that allow individuals to approximate rational choice by taking advantage of the wealth of elite cues to be found in media content. Taking political cues from elite political actors is one such heuristic device wherein the voter may simply assess the credibility of the messenger, or may perform a more complicated assessment of the veracity of the message itself in addition to the congruity of that message with the messenger (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994; Iyengar and Valentino, 1994).

Optimal use of heuristic devices is dependent upon the honesty of the argument presented by elites; the relative salience of political messages on a given issue; and the correctness of the individual’s issue assessment (Kuklinski and Hurley, 1994). Some of the persuasive function of the media upon popular opinion may be explained by this reproduction of strategic frames, sometimes resulting in insubstantial and factually questionable issue coverage (Barker and Knight, 2000). Presidents attempt to build political capital by influencing the public who provide the approval ratings (Neustadt, 1980; Edwards, 1990).

Media Agenda Setting and Individual Perception of Issues

Political scientist Joseph Klapper saw the media's persuasive effects as limited to reinforcement of ideas already held by the public, acting less often as a true "agent of change (Klapper, 1960)." More recently, Zaller has described media persuasion effects as very strong, but of contradictory and "offsetting effects," while Kinder described the ability of the media to influence the public through selective framing and organization of facts which provide "decisive cues" that are able to persuade individuals effectively (Zaller, 1992; Kinder, 2003). Framing allows the media to simplify and organize an immense volume of information through selective emphasis and presentation of information and/or perspectives (Kinder, 2003). The ability of the media to "define the essential problems underlying some political issue" and outline some aspect of it "in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment evaluation" implies indirect persuasion of the public (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson, 1997). Other research has suggested that the media has some ability to persuade the public through agenda setting. Priming is another facet of indirect media persuasion. Priming occurs when opinions and/or behavior change due to an "alteration of the relative weight given to various considerations making up the ultimate decision (Mendelsohn, 1996)."

The media has significant agenda setting ability as well as the ability to persuade the mass public indirectly. Lasswell described three functions of the media: "surveillance of the world" to describe global events; interpretation of those events; and "socialization of individuals into their cultural settings (Graber, 2006)." In recent years, a fourth has been added: the "deliberate manipulation of politics" by media organizations (Graber,

2006). Depending on the type of medium (print or televised) and the perceived level of threat surrounding an issue, the media may oversimplify, over-dramatize, or sensationalize their coverage. Boorstin (1964) noted that image had become more important than substance, and that the public had developed unreasonable expectations for the presidency. In spite of the image-over-substance argument, Beck (2002) claimed that mediated coverage of political events has little effect on most Americans, except for a small percentage who perceive a hostile media bias and tend to consequently solidify their pre-existing notions. Finkel (1993) agrees with this assessment: “The media probably play a crucial role in reinforcing pre-existing dispositions...and may play a crucial role in influencing voters” with incongruent dispositions, ideological orientations, and political preferences.

The claim that mass communications exert a “cumulative effect on cognition,” is bolstered by very strong correlations between the “media’s ranking of issues” and the voter’s ranking of the same issues (Weaver, Graber, McCombs, and Eyal, 1981). As the media “confer status on public issues, persons, organizations, and social movements,” these have a greater likelihood of salience among the public (Weaver, Graber, McCombs, and Eyal, 1981). This is especially true if mediated presentations of information prove to be resonant and congruent with “preexisting beliefs about a political actor’s strengths or weaknesses (Iyengar and Valentino, 1994; Kinder, 2003).” Through framing, the media focus attention, airtime, and resources upon some issues at the expense of others, often resulting in significant persuasive effects for audiences (Barker and Knight, 2000).

Media Framing and Individual Perception of Issues

Framing effects distinguish between framing and persuasion via belief change: traditional persuasion involves a source that presents a message about an attitude object to an audience (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson, 1997). If the message is understood by the audience and credible to the audience, if new message is discrepant from prior attitudes of audience, then the attitude should change in the direction implied by the new message. The goal is to change audience beliefs about an attitude object. Framing does not introduce new information separate from the audiences existing belief or knowledge structure.

Frames operate by activating information already in audience memory. Framing increases the subjective weight (the perceived relevance of some idea, information, or attitude) of some information (people may support or oppose nuclear power, though both groups see potential benefits, due to difference in subjective weight of risk assessments, or environmental impact related to nuclear power) frames tell people how to weight various issues. Crosscutting deliberations that result from interaction with “intermediate collectives,” within society can inform individuals and minimize the effectiveness of issue frames (Mondak, Mutz, and Huckfeldt, 2000; Druckman and Nelson, 2003).

Framing provides a method by which the media, and consequently the public, can simplify and organize an immense volume of information through selective emphasis regarding the type of information presented and perspectives conveyed (Kinder, 2003). The ability of the media to “define the essential problems underlying some political issue” and outline some aspect of it “in such a way as to promote a particular problem

definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment evaluation” implies indirect persuasion of the public (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson, 1997).

Persuasive effects are the result of media limits to the range of potential information an individual will consider in a given period of time. Essentially, “the news” will depict an incomplete snapshot of daily events, including and excluding events and perspectives according to market forces, narrative and technical constraints, as well as the personal evaluations of production and editorial staffs. When covering events in news broadcasts or newspapers, the media “confer status” on some public issues and events, while simultaneously excluding other issues through a lack of coverage (Kinder, 2003). As such, the media may not tell us what to think, but certainly tell us what to think about (Cohen, 1963; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Scheufele, 2000).

The news media reinforce individual standing beliefs and perceptions. Mediated presentations alter the subjective weight receivers of information give to aspects of issues. Frames operate by activating information already in audience memory. Framing increases the subjective weight (the perceived relevance of some idea, information, or attitude) of some information (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson, 1997). Primed by the media and the rest of their environment, individuals form opinions, processing their options according to conditional criteria (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson, 1997). Mediated accounts selectively focus on some aspects of issues over others effectively persuading individuals that their preexisting beliefs on some issue are relevant to an informed decision. News media priming occurs when “coverage of an issue makes some information particularly available in people’s memories,” information which “comes to mind automatically when people search” for evaluative information (Miller and Krosnick, 2000).

Indexing and Creation of the News

The theory of media indexing assumes that the range of press coverage on a given foreign policy issue will reflect the diversity of opinion of “prominent officials and institutional power blocs (Bennett, 1990).” Media coverage often mirrors the range of elite opinion as indexing theories suggest. Crisis periods do activate temporary rally-round-the-flag effects that elicit deference to the executive branch from journalists, elites, and mass public alike (Mueller, 1971). The Iraq war case represents this phenomenon but may be less reflective of media foreign policy coverage generally. The 2001 terrorist attacks on US civilian targets and the initial US military success in Afghanistan facilitated a profound and prolonged deferential elite and news media response, despite noteworthy levels of criticism from both groups (Mueller, 1970; Gronke and Newman, 2003; Baum and Groeling, 2003; Entman and Page, 1990). Partisan differences related to varying deference to executive branch policies elicited from rally effects, and a media propensity to cover critical assertions of presidents’ likely affected decisions regarding inclusion/exclusion of media content as well (Baum and Groeling, 2003; Zaller and Chiu, 2000). It may also be the case that different forms of indexing exist and work in combination.

Althaus et al (1996) identified three types of media indexing: source indexing, power indexing, and political indexing. The first of these, source indexing, the idea that media coverage mirrors the range of legitimate elite opinion, was examined in this paper. Power indexing holds that journalists are more likely to publish voices of those in power: executive branch officials who are able to implement US foreign policy, and foreign governments whose opinions may constrain US foreign policy. Political indexing refers

to the tendency of journalists to publish the story that “political authorities want to have reported (Baum and Groeling, 2003).” Increased independence of journalists in the post-cold war period, and the decreased effectiveness of the Communism frame may lessen the tendency of journalist to employ political indexing. The 2001 attacks on US civilian targets may have reactivated the habitual deference of the media elicited by the Communist frame (Entman, 2004). Various types of indexing may be used in different combinations during different types of foreign policy events. In spite of some divergent findings, this research tends to echo conclusions that the media do index coverage of foreign policy events to the range of elite views. Media outlets provide coverage of foreign policy events conditioned by issue salience, competition with other news sources, and the ability of elites to frame issues to the advantage of decision makers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Theory and Hypotheses

Americans experienced a variety of emotional responses to the 9/11 attacks. Many were profoundly and immediately affected by the event, while others were not. Individual perceptions of threat to national stability and anxiety over the possibility of future terrorist attacks were two common emotional responses to the event. When coupled with perceptions of mortal terror, these responses primed different reactions among the public and American press. For those whose primary reaction was one of perceived threat, mortality salience increased nationalism and deferential attitudes towards the president (Huddy et al, 2005; Willer, 2004). Individual perceptions of anxiety primed isolationist and accommodative preferences in response to terrorism; these individuals in the press and general public would have been less supportive of Bush foreign policy during this period (See Figure 2) (Huddy et al, 2005; Holsti, 2004; Herman, Tetlock, and Visser 1999).

Social identity theory and research into the psychological effects of terrorism help to explain the effects of these emotional responses upon press deference to the president. Social identity theory provides explanation for some discrimination among groups within society (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner 1971; Willer, 2004).

[Figure 2 About Here]

The theory holds that individuals will categorize others and themselves in terms of opposites, forming many in-group/out-group pairs across a range of social and political contexts. Many group memberships lead to many perceptions of social identity within individuals. We are all simultaneously family members, citizens, members of some profession, etc. Context and the perceived relevance of out-groups increase in-group favoritism. The 9/11 attacks and the accompanying feelings of mortal terror provided a context which magnified the salience of national identity among Americans in 2001 (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski, 1997; Willer, 2004; Huddy et al, 2005). Political psychology literature asserts that perceived threat and anxiety in the wake of terrorist attacks are related, but distinct reactions to external threats and feelings of mortal terror (Jervis, 1976; Huddy et al, 2005; Jentleson, 1992; Herman, Tetlock, and Visser, 1999). The situational details of unique events as filtered through individual social identity and dispositional frameworks drive the policy preferences of individuals (Herman, Tetlock, and Visser, 1999). Terrorist actions designed to prompt governments to make “political concessions” are often effective because they manipulate perceptions of anxiety among members of the public (Huddy et al, 2005; Long, 1990).

When affective reactions are centered on perceptions of threat, individuals are more likely to support some aggressive foreign policy action, as threat perceptions are

more likely to elicit animosity towards enemies and a desire to retaliate (Loersch, 2001; Jentleson, 1992; Herman, Tetlock, and Visser, 1999). Perceived threats of terrorism or threats from out-groups in general can facilitate aggressive authoritarian policy responses and out-group mistrust (Sales, 1973; Doty, Peterson, and Winter, 1991; Staub and Bar-Tal, 2003). Individual perceptions of threat are a “powerful determinant” of inter-group intolerance and aggression (Duckitt, 2003). Real or perceived threats from out-groups to resources, power, well-being, values, and group identity can result in animosity and hostility (Duckitt, 2003; Brown, 1995; Brown et al, 2001; Huddy and Sears, 1995; Reynolds and Turner, 2001). Acts of terrorism can easily be viewed as threats to in-group security, values, resources, and power.

When anxiety is the pervasive reaction to terrorism, a different set of dispositions tend to prompt risk-avoidance behavior (Huddy et al, 2005). Perceptions of anxiety have different antecedents and act on human cognition differently than perceptions of threat. The effects of the anxiety response include impaired cognitive function due largely to preoccupation with threatening stimuli and a preference for reducing future anxiety by supporting foreign policy options perceived to impose the lowest degree of personal risk (Huddy et al, 2005; MacLeoud, Williams, and Bekerian, 1991). Anxiety increases feelings associated with risk aversion and prompts an affective state consistent with less support of military action and other aggressive internationalist foreign policy goals (Huddy et al, 2005). Individual perceptions of anxiety are more often accompanied by isolationist and accommodative preferences, while individual perceptions of threat tend towards assertive internationalist policies (Holsti, 2004; Herman, Tetlock, and Visser, 1999).

This thesis combines research previously described to form a novel approach to answering the question of press adversarialness and builds upon existing research in three important ways, all of which essentially amount to a greater focus upon the effects of public opinion. Determining the relationship between dependent variables and executive job approval and incorporating this relationship more directly into assessments of press/president relations integrates more fully a great deal of research that highlights the importance of public opinion, events, and time (Mueller, 1970; Stimson, 1976; Brace and Hinckley, 1992; Baum and Potter, 2008). This approach augments existing theory by incorporating assessments of public opinion into the press indexing theory.

This thesis builds upon the theory of press indexing, or the idea that the range of press coverage on an issue will index the degree of disagreement present among official sources of power, and less official voices will receive less coverage. Press indexing does explain well the relationship between press and president in normal times that are free from large-scale crises. These crises can act to activate and galvanize public opinion into some sort of consensus or near consensus that can then affect the manner in which press indexing of sources of power will occur. Explicitly stated, this research adds to current knowledge and understanding of press indexing by providing a better accounting of the effect of public opinion upon the indexing process undertaken by journalists and others in the press. The literature reviewed suggests a series of hypotheses.

Hypotheses

H 1: Adversarial questioning of the president will increase throughout the term of office in accordance with theories linking the decay of presidential approval to the passage of time.

H 2: Press deference will decrease/increase as presidential job approval ratings fall/rise.

H 3: Press deference to the president will decrease/rise as public terrorism anxiety increases/falls.

Research Design

To examine these hypotheses, this thesis analyzes White House Press Corps questioning of the president during presidential press conferences to determine whether increases in adversarial questioning during the Bush administration occurred, and if these increases were related to the length of time spent in office, public terrorism anxiety, and executive job approval changes. Dependent variables were drawn from a sample of 16 Bush administration press conferences from 2001-2008. Two news conferences were chosen per year for each year of the Bush presidency. The presidential press conference is the unit of analysis. Press conferences were chosen from the spring and autumn of each year to mitigate the effects on “president-press relations” of mid-term elections, of the cyclical nature of presidential approval, as well as unique events that occur during administrations (the effects of 9/11, a stalled economy, or domestic terrorism) (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Mueller, 1970; Brody, 1991). The design of press questions were analyzed and coded for fit with eight variables that illustrate four general dimensions of adversarialness: initiative, directness, assertiveness, and hostility (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bannerman, 2004). These variable counts were compared by term of office to determine whether adversarial question forms increased significantly over the two terms of office.

These dependent variables were then evaluated using correlation and regression analysis to determine relationships, if any, to the passage of time, the presence of united

or divided government, and Gallup poll data measuring public presidential job approval and public anxiety over the possibility of an imminent terrorist attack in the US. A dummy variable was utilized to account for changes in adversarialness in periods of divided government. Divided government was defined as the situation in which the executive branch is controlled by one party and at least one house of Congress is controlled by the opposition party. Data points for all measures were recorded to coincide with samples of presidential press conferences taken in the spring and fall from 2001-2008.

Dependent Variables

Eight variables act as indicators of press adversarialness and/or presidential deference during questioning of President Bush (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bannerman, 2004). Initiative, or the degree of energy put into question composition, is measured by question complexity and the inclusion of prefatory statements. More complex questions are considered to be less deferential as they require more energy and effort to answer generally. Directness, the degree of straightforwardness in a question, is measured by the inclusion of references to the president's ability and/or willingness to provide answers to questions. Assertiveness, the degree to which questioners attempt to "suggest, imply or push for a particular response," is measured by the number of negatively formulated questions and the presence or lack of a hostile prefatory tilt (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bannerman, 2004). Hostility, the degree to which a question is "overtly critical" of a president and/or administration, is measured by the presence or lack of hostile prefatory statements and questions that presuppose the truth of the hostile prefatory statement (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bannerman, 2004).

Initiative refers to the energy evident in question composition. Questions may be composed simply and be answered easily with minimal personal energy expenditure (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). Questions may also be constructed in a more complex fashion, in an attempt to force an answer or limit the scope of an answer.

The question complexity variable describes questions in terms of composition: simple, prefaced, multiple questions, or super questions. Simple questions are generally composed of a single unit of talk and require the least energy to answer (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). During the May 11, 2001 president's news conference Jim Angle asked this question: "Do you believe it's time for a more sweeping look at what is going on at the FBI?" Mr. Angle referenced irregularities in the FBI's role in the Timothy McVeigh case and the 2001 arrest of FBI "double agent" Robert Hansson, charged with supplying sensitive information to agents of foreign countries. The answer may have indirectly challenged President Bush politically, but the composition of the question was not complex. Journalists may also ask more elaborate questions.

Multiple questions from a single questioner may be more difficult to answer and therefore less deferential to the president. This example from the September 15, 2006 president's news conference illustrates multiple questions asked in a single questioning turn. Robert Hillman from the *Dallas Morning News* asked: "What do you say to the argument that your proposal is basically seeking support for torture, coerced evidence, and secret hearings? And Senator McCain says your plan will put troops at risk. What do you think about that?"

Prefatory statements are often included to provide contextual information and to frame potential answers. As such, prefatory statements may be innocuous, hostile, or

contextual. Ron Fournier of the Associated Press asked this prefaced question in the March 13, 2002 president's news conference: "The Pentagon is calling for the development of low-yield nuclear weapons that could be used against China, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Russia, and Syria. Can you explain why the United States is considering this new policy, and how it might figure into the war on terrorism?"

The most complex kind of question (supercomplex) combines one or more prefatory statements and multiple questions in a single questioning turn. During the October 5, 2005 president's news conference Adam Entous asked this supercomplex question about the nomination of Harriet Miers to the US Supreme Court: "Some conservatives have said that you did not pick someone like Scalia and Thomas because you shied away from a battle with the Democrats. Is there any truth to that? And are you worried about charges of cronyism?"

Directness or the straightforwardness of a question is measured by the inclusion of references to the president's ability and/or willingness to answer. Questions composed using willingness and/or ability frames are the least direct and the most deferential question forms. Indirect questions that ask, for example, "Are you willing to answer..." or "Are you able to answer..." act to lessen the imposition of a question and potentially facilitate more complete answers (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Brown and Levinson, 2004).

Assertiveness is the dimension of adversarialness that captures attempts to "suggest, imply or push for a particular response (Clayman and Heritage, 2002)." The assertiveness dimension is composed of negatively formulated questions and questions with a hostile prefatory tilt. Negatively formulated questions are those that seek some

politically damaging admission from the president, and/or whose initial phrasing begins “Aren’t you, or Don’t you...” Coding reflected the presence of a negative formulation in press questions. Negatively formulated questions epitomize assertiveness and may be treated not as though they prompt some yes or no answer, but as though they are “assertions and not questions (Clayman and Heritage, 2002).” This follow-up question from Hearst newspapers journalist Helen Thomas during the October 11, 2001 president’s news conference illustrates the negative formulation: “Mr. President, on that note, we understand that you have advisers who are urging you to go after Iraq, take out Iraq, Syria, and so forth. Do you really think that the American people will tolerate you widening the war beyond Afghanistan?”

The second example (president’s news conference on October 4, 2005) from John Roberts of CBS news illustrates the thematically negative formulation: “A couple of weeks ago you stood here in the Rose Garden with Generals Abizaid and Casey, and you cited the accomplishments regarding the standing up of Iraqi troops there. You said that there were 12 battalions that were working out of Fallujah and the western part, 20 in Baghdad, 100 across the nation. And then that afternoon, Abizaid and Casey went up to Capitol Hill and said, ‘Well, there is one battle ready battalion,’ which led some Republican Senators to say, ‘Well the situation is getting worse.’ So the question is, sir, it appears, between what you said and what they said, something is not adding up here.” The question was coded as thematically negative due to contradictory statements of President Bush and Generals Abizaid and Casey, and also referenced perceptions from Senators within the Republican Party that the Iraqi situation was deteriorating.

Questions with a hostile prefatory tilt may damage the public perception of a president or damage his political agenda. The preface frames a question emphasizing a particular interpretation and implies or suggests a preferable answer to the question. The most assertive and adversarial prefatory questions are those most damaging to the interests, character, and/or policy agenda of a president (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Pomerantz, 1988). Some prefatory statements are relatively innocuous. The preface implies a preferred answer, but the answer and preface are not damaging to the political interests of the president. Questions were coded as having no tilt (prefatory statements that contextualize a question without suggesting a preferred response), an innocuous tilt, or a hostile tilt. The following prefatory statement from the president's July 15, 2008 news conference was coded as having no tilt: "Following up on the question about oil, in the past, when oil prices have gone up a lot, they've wound up going down a lot afterward. But I wonder if you're able to say that oil prices in the future are going to come down a lot?"

Prefatory statements with an innocuous tilt imply a preferred answer, but the answer and preface are not damaging to the political interests of the president (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). Washington Times journalist Bill Sammon asked the following question during the president's March 16, 2005 news conference. The prefatory statement was coded as having an innocuous tilt: "Mr. President, you faced a lot of skepticism in the run-up to the Iraq war and then a lot of criticism for miscalculating some of the challenges of postwar Iraq. Now that the Iraq elections seem to be triggering signs of democratization throughout the broader Middle East, do you feel any sense of vindication?"

A hostile prefatory tilt is detrimental to the public perception of a president and damaging to his political agenda. The preface frames a question emphasizing a particular interpretation and implies or suggests a preferable answer to the question. The following prefatory statement from Cox News journalist Ken Herman during the president's March 16, 2005 news conference was coded as having a hostile tilt:

“Mr. President, earlier this year you told us you wanted your administration to cease and desist on payments to journalists to promote your agenda. You cited the need for ethical concerns and the need for a bright line between the press and the Government. Your administration continues to make use of video news releases, which is prepackaged news stories sent to television stations, fully aware that some or many of these stations will air them without any disclaimer that they are produced by the Government. The Comptroller General of the United States this week said that raises ethical questions. Does it raise ethical questions about the use of Government money to produce stories about the Government that wind up being aired with no disclosure that they were produced by the Government?”

Hostility, the degree to which a question is “overtly critical” of a president and/or administration, is measured by the presence or lack of hostile prefatory statements and questions that presuppose the truth of the hostile prefatory statement. The coding for variables on the hostility dimension assessed thematic content of the question. Questions with a hostile preface, one which is overtly critical of president, policy, or administration, were coded as containing a hostile preface (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bannerman, 2004). The following prefatory statement from the president's September 15, 2006 news conference was coded as having a hostile preface: “Thank you Mr. President. On another

of your top priorities, immigration, leaders of both parties have indicated that any chance of comprehensive immigration reform is dead before the election. Is this an issue you would like to revisit in a lame-duck session after the election? Or would it be put off until the new Congress?” This question was coded as hostile as it must have been somewhat embarrassing for the president to answer. The preface correctly identified comprehensive immigration reform as a top priority of the president’s domestic policy agenda in 2005-2006. The preface also correctly identified the president’s inability to persuade members of Congress, that bipartisan reluctance to further activate negative public opinion on the issue had stalled any possibility of Bush’s desired immigration reforms before the 2006 elections. But the questions asked did not build upon the hostile preface. Instead the questions addressed tactical concerns about timing and reintroduction of the immigration issue to Congress and the public.

Questions with a hostile preface presupposed to be true build on the hostile preface to lessen the impact and credibility of refutation (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bannerman, 2004). The following question from Knight Ridder journalist Ron Hutcherson during the president’s September 15, 2006 news conference was coded as having a hostile tilt presupposed to be true: “On both the eavesdropping program and the detainee issues you’re working with Congress sort of after the fact, after you established these programs on your own authority. And Federal courts have ruled in both cases, you overstepped your authority. Is your willingness to work with Congress now an acknowledgement that that is a fact?” The hostile tilt and factual supposition of the preface extends an inference that Bush had failed to understand the Constitutional limits of his authority as President (See Table 1).

Factor analysis was performed to determine whether the dependent variables are influenced by common underlying factors. The optimal number was determined according to the Kaiser criterion and scree test (DeCoster, 1998). Factor analysis of the dependent variables showed three such components. To facilitate interpretation, factors were rotated using orthogonal varimax rotation. Varimax rotation produced a rotated factor matrix with correlation scores between each variable and underlying factor (DeCoster, 1998). The three factors were defined by theoretical constructs potentially responsible for the pattern of positive and negative loadings (DeCoster, 1998). The factors conform to three of the four general dimensions of adversarialness defined by Clayman and Heritage (2002): hostility, accommodation and press initiative. Reliability tests were performed to insure that dependent variables measure press adversarialness. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .800 was obtained for dependent variables.

It should be noted that several variables are subsets of other dependent variables. For example, five variables measure the presence and/or content of prefatory statements. Two of these, the preface and super variables measure the inclusion of prefatory statements in all questioning turns. The total number of prefatory statements will be reflected in the combined scores of the variables preface (measures presence of preliminary statements preceding a single question) and super (measures super-complex questions with prefatory statements and multiple questions). Prefatory statements are further divided to reflect the tilt of questions. Question prefaces may be tilted to suggest some preferred answer or not. The variable notilt indicates the presence of prefatory statements that are merely contextual. The variable innoc indicates the presence of prefatory statements that are not damaging to the president and may help the president's

agenda. The variable hostile indicates the number of prefatory statements that are potentially damaging to the political interests of the president.

The three variables notilt, innoc, and hostile equal the total number of prefatory statements indicated by the dependent variables preface and super (85 prefaced questions during the first term, and 117 total prefaced questions during the second term). Hostile prefatory statements are further divided with the hospref and hppresup variables. The hospref variable indicates the presence of overtly critical prefatory statements, and the hppresup variable indicates that the questioner assumes the hostile preface is factual and accurate. As such, the variables measuring the hostility dimension of adversarialness are subsets of larger variables and represent the most adversarial exchanges between journalist and president.

[Table 1 About Here]

Independent Variables

The creation of foreign policy news is affected by much more than ranking the impact and importance of relevant events as they occur. The rally effects of 9/11, a Republican president and US journalists and corporate press elites eager to avoid charges of 'liberal bias' led to overly deferential coverage of the executive branch and the 'war on terror.' A model accounting for power relations among the US news media, public, and decision makers during this kind of crisis event is lacking (Bennett, 1990; Bannerman, 2004). This study examines the impact of public deference to the president upon the adversarial nature of US press corps questioning of the president during presidential press conferences (See Table 2).

[Table 2 About Here]

Presidential Job Approval

It is assumed that press deference to the president will decrease as George W. Bush's public job approval decreases. American voters provide favorable or unfavorable appraisals of presidents based partly on their perceptions of job success (Neustadt, 1980; Mueller, 1970). These approval assessments can motivate, as well as constrain presidential action (Mueller, 1970; Brace and Hinckley, 1992). These public assessments have been likened to political currency that the president may use to influence the public and others within government (Neustadt, 1980; Edwards, 1989). The presidential approval data were drawn from the Gallup organization's monthly average presidential job approval ratings for president George W. Bush. For decades the Gallup organization has asked the question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [the incumbent] is handling his job as president?" Data points represent the percentage of respondents who answered the question negatively.

Public Anxiety

It is assumed that press deference to president George W. Bush will decrease as public anxiety over terrorism increases. Individuals whose most prominent reaction to terrorism is anxiety often support cautious foreign policies (Huddy et al, 2005). Anxiety increases feelings associated with risk aversion and prompts an affective state consistent with less support of military action and other aggressive internationalist foreign policy goals (Marcus and MacKuen, 1993; Huddy et al, 2005). Individual perceptions of anxiety are more often accompanied by isolationist and accommodative preferences, while individual perceptions of threat tend towards assertive internationalist policies (Holsti, 2004; Herman, Tetlock, and Visser, 1999). Individual expressions of anxiety due to

terrorist actions and future terrorist threats are consistent with foreign policy preferences of risk aversion and isolation from threatening entities (Huddy et al, 2005; Long, 1990).

The public anxiety data were drawn from Gallup organization polling data. The Gallup organization asks the question: “How worried are you that you or someone in your family will become a victim of terrorism—very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, or not worried at all? The anxiety responses in the “very worried” and “not too worried” categories were combined to give an average rating of public anxiety over potential terrorism during each year of the Bush administration. The variable was recoded so that higher numbers indicate increasing public cynicism towards the executive branch (Lavine, 2001).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Analysis

This thesis examines the composition of US press questioning of the president during presidential press conferences to determine whether increases in adversarial questioning during the Bush administration were related to public terrorism anxiety. After the 9/11 attacks many Americans were profoundly affected by the event. Perceptions of threat to national stability and anxiety over the possibility of future terrorist attacks were two common emotional responses to the event. When coupled with perceptions of mortal terror, these responses primed different reactions among the public and American press (Huddy et al, 2005; Willer, 2004). Several theoretical expectations follow from the reviewed literature.

The first hypothesis addresses the question of whether the Bush administration experienced increasingly adversarial relations between the White House Press Corps and the president over time. Recent scholarship suggests that over time the White House Press Corps has become more adversarial and less deferential as measured by question composition (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bannerman, 2004).

This assertion is wholly consistent with theories of presidential approval that claim the passage of time is an important explanatory variable for presidential support in general and press deference in particular (Mueller, 1970; Brace and Hinckley, 1992; Clayman and Heritage, 2002). The change has also been attributed to factors ranging from strategy-over substance campaign coverage to a focus on scandals in Congress (Rozell, 1994; Sabato, 1991; Patterson, 1993; Clayman and Heritage, 2002).

H 1: Adversarial questioning of the president will increase throughout the term of office in accordance with theories linking the decay of presidential approval to the passage of time. This hypothesis is supported by the data collected.

Adversarial questioning of President Bush did increase during his second term of office. Question complexity increased for three of four variables measuring journalistic initiative ($\chi^2 = 10.2$; $p=.038$). Data collected show that adversarial questioning during the Bush administration increased for nine of the variables used to measure adversarial press questioning of George W. Bush.

Initiative, or the degree of energy put into question composition, is measured by question complexity and the inclusion of prefatory statements (See Table 3). More complex questions are considered to be less deferential as they require more energy and effort to answer generally (Clayman and Heritage, 2002).

[Table 3 About Here]

Journalists became less inclined to compose questions simply during the term of George W. Bush. Simple question composition allows the president the maximum degree of flexibility in providing an answer. This was expected for three reasons. The data reflect a general trend towards more negative press coverage of political affairs and more hostile

coverage of Congress (Rozell, 1994; Robinson, 1981; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bannerman, 2004). Mediated news presentations have become more subjective and interpretive, often featuring aspects of coverage perceived to be biased in some way (Capella and Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993; Clayman and Heritage, 2002).

Interactional norms regarding encounters between the press and the president, as well as other high level government officials, have likely changed over time as well. Clayman and Heritage (2002) found substantially less deferential treatment of the president by the press from 1953-1988. The press during the Bush administration followed this trend as question formulations became more adversarial in nature during the second term of office.

The directness of questions as measured by journalist use of referencing frames during presidential press conferences indicates an increase in adversarial formulations during the Bush administration. Directness, the degree of straightforwardness in a question, is measured by the inclusion of references to the president's ability and/or willingness to provide answers to questions. Questions composed using willingness and/or ability frames are the least direct and the most deferential question forms. Indirect questions lessen the imposition of a question and potentially facilitate more complete answers and are perceived as more polite (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Brown and Levinson, 1989).

The data support the assessment that journalists were less polite and deferential in terms of the employment of indirect question frames during the second term of the Bush administration. Both variables measuring the dimension of adversarialness termed directness show that this type of referencing frame decreased considerably (43% and 77%

for the ability and willingness frames respectively). The data show that fewer questions were framed in this manner and the Chi-square statistic surpasses the upper boundary of the .05 threshold ($\chi^2 = 10.4$; $p=.016$). This suggests that journalists were less disposed towards posing deferential questions, especially the most deferential form, willingness framed questions. Willingness frames are more deferential than ability frames because they give the president a greater discretion in providing an answer. Non-answers or non-responsive answers in reply to ability-framed questions may be considered acceptable due to a lack of knowledge or when an answer might imperil national security (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). A refusal to answer questions framed in terms of willingness may be due to these considerations, but may also reflect a simple personal unwillingness to provide the requested information. This deferential question form decreased by 77% in the second Bush term (See Table 4).

[Table 4 About Here]

Assertiveness is the dimension of adversarialness that captures attempts to “suggest, imply or push for a particular response (Clayman and Heritage, 2002).” The assertiveness dimension is composed of negatively formulated questions and questions with a hostile prefatory tilt. Negatively formulated questions are those that seek some politically damaging admission for the answerer (See Table 6). Negatively formulated questions epitomize assertiveness and may be treated not as though they prompt some yes or no answer, but as though they are “assertions and not questions (Clayman and Heritage, 2002).” Journalist use of this question form increased over time during the Bush administration, but the increase was not significant.

[Table 5 About Here]

[Table 6 About Here]

Assertive questioning of President Bush increased during his second term of office. Assertiveness increased for two of three relevant variables. Assertiveness is measured by four variables. The first measures the presence or absence of a prefatory tilt in question composition (See Table 5). Questions posed without prefatory tilt increased 24.5% during the second Bush term. In spite of this, it appears that assertively composed questions increased. Questions with hostile prefatory tilt indicate contradictory statements among executive branch spokesmen and/or perceptions from Congress, the president's party and the public that some issue that the president has an ability or duty to address is worsening. Questions with a hostile prefatory tilt may damage the public perception of a president or damage his political agenda. The preface frames a question emphasizing some interpretation and implies some answer to the question. The most assertive and adversarial prefatory questions are those most damaging to the interests, character, and/or policy agenda of a president (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Pomerantz, 1988). The hostile prefatory tilt formulation increased by more than 20% in the second Bush term of office. Questions with an innocuous prefatory tilt may suggest some answer, but answer and preface are not damaging to the political interests of the president. The use of innocuously tilted question formulations fell by 50% during the second Bush term of office.

[Table 7 About Here]

Hostility is the final dimension of adversarialness. Hostility, defined here as the degree to which a question is "overtly critical" of a president and/or administration, is measured by the presence or lack of hostile prefatory statements and questions that

presuppose the truth of the hostile prefatory statement. Variables assessing the hostility dimension evaluated thematic content questions. Those with a hostile preface which were overtly critical of president, policy, or administration, and requested a response to the hostile formulation specifically, were coded as containing a hostile preface (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Bannerman, 2004). The data collected measuring the hostility dimension do not permit a rejection of the null hypothesis ($\chi^2 = 5.56$; C.V. = 5.991; $p = .0620$). Questions with hostile prefaces and hostile prefaces presupposed to be true reduced in the second term of the Bush administration (4.9% and 5.1% respectively). The variables assessed thematic content and not simply the composition of the question posed. To avoid subjective assessments, the variables *hospref* (hostile preface) and *hpresup* (hostile preface presupposed to be true by the questioner) were coded conservatively. Only those questions which clearly and overtly implied that criticisms of president, policy, or administration were factual were coded as indicating this type of hostile preface and/or presupposition that some assertion was correct.

It is assumed that press deference to the president will decrease as job approval ratings decrease. American voters supply appraisals of presidents based partly upon perceptions of presidential job performance (Neustadt, 1980; Mueller, 1970). These approval assessments can alter the relative persuasive ability of presidents and may modify press/president encounters also (Mueller, 1970; Brace and Hinckley, 1992). The reviewed literature suggests a relationship between executive job approval and the composition of less deferential question by the press.

H 2: Press deference will decrease/increase as presidential job approval ratings fall/rise.

The second hypothesis is partially supported. Seven of thirteen relationships produced moderately strong to strong Pearson correlation coefficients, though only four of the obtained coefficients were statistically significant at the .05 level. Of the four variables measuring the initiative dimension, two relationships support the hypothesis that press deference will decrease/increase as presidential job approval ratings fall/rise. The variables simp and super measure the degree to which questions attempt to constrain the answerer and appear to reflect the overall trend towards a less deferential press over time (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). The substantive relationship between approval and the super variable is noteworthy. Super measures the presence of supercomplex questions, those containing preliminary statements and multiple questions. Supercomplex questions of this type are considered to be the least deferential form as they are the most elaborate. Initial bivariate regression analysis of the super and presidential approval variables produced a regression coefficient of .094 and Adjusted R-square .524. Based on this sample, supercomplex questions increase .094 for each single point increase in executive approval. The null hypothesis for the variable super may be rejected. The regression coefficient has a t-ratio of 4.185 and p-value of .001. The presence of divided government appears to have minimal effect on the variable super, though when the Congress and Executive branch were divided, the multi variable increased an average of three points with results significant at the .05 level. The strength and direction for preface and multi, the other 2 variables measuring initiative, suggest that as presidential approval decreases/increases, the incidents of less deferential question forms will decrease/increase also. Either outcome would contradict predictions from reviewed literature on press-president-public relations.

The innoc variable measures prefaced questions that imply a preferred answer, but answer and preface are not damaging to the political interests of the president. The innoc variable produced the largest Pearson correlation coefficient, $-.714$ which is statistically significant at the $.001$ level. Bivariate regression analysis of the innoc and presidential approval variables produced a regression coefficient of $-.128$ and Adjusted R-square $.475$. This provides some substantive support for the hypothesis that press deference will decrease as presidential job approval ratings fall. Based on this sample, innocuously prefaced questions decrease $.128$ for each single point increase in executive approval. The regression coefficient has a t-ratio of -3.82 and p-value of $.002$.

The data partially support the null hypothesis. Nearly half of Pearson correlation coefficients (six of thirteen) obtained for IV/DV relationships are moderate or very weak suggesting that the relationship between executive job approval and the variables measuring aspects of press question composition do not move together in systematic fashion. Overall, nine of thirteen variables support the hypothesis that no systematic relationship exists between the variables measuring the deference of question composition and presidential approval over time. It is the case that questioning forms of the press became less deferential from one term of office to another during the Bush administration. It is also true that the job approval ratings of President Bush followed a familiar cycle wherein approval at the beginning of the administration was higher than when it ended eight years later, but the assertiveness and hostility dimensions of press adversarialness rise and fall independently of job approval ratings.

The reviewed literature on public perceptions of anxiety over terrorism suggests a relationship between public terrorism anxiety and the composition of less deferential questions by the press.

H 3: Press deference to the president will decrease/rise as public terrorism anxiety increases/falls.

The data partially supports hypothesis three. Thirteen variables measure press deference. Six show a moderate to moderately strong relationship with the anxiety variable. Nine of thirteen variables have the positive and negative directions predicted, but the strength of the relationships is weak. It is clear that some relationship exists between dimensions of press deference to the president and public terrorism anxiety. Correlation analysis supports the hypothesis that press deference to the president will decrease/increase as public terrorism anxiety increases/decreases (See Table 8).

The direction of eleven of thirteen variables suggests that deference to the president does decrease/increase as public terrorism anxiety increases/decreases. The data show that dimensions of adversarialness capturing press assertiveness and hostility have the hypothesized relationship in which these aspects of adversarial questioning will increase/fall as public terrorism anxiety increases/falls. Two variables (hostile and neg) showed significant correlations at the .005 level, both measuring the assertiveness dimension of adversarialness. Assertiveness, measured in terms of negative question formulations and overtly critical prefaces, did increase as public anxiety over terrorism increased. Initial bivariate regression analysis shows that public terrorism anxiety, negative formulations, and questions with a hostile preface are related. Based on this sample there is a .169 increase in hostile and a .199 increase in neg for each one point

increase in anxiety over terrorism. The independent variables work together in the manner anticipated. Approval has bearing on whether question formulations are more/less adversarial in terms of question composition and aspects of assertiveness. Anxiety influences the degree to which questions are hostile and negatively formulated, affecting the assertiveness and hostility dimensions of adversarial question design. For example, the regression coefficient for anxiety and hospref, the dependent variable will increase .143 for each single unit increase in the independent variable anxiety.

Multiple regression analysis was used to measure the effects of a single independent variable upon a dependent variable while controlling for other independent variable effects (Pollack, 2005). Multiple regression analysis revealed notable relationships between independent and dependent variables. Time, job approval, and public anxiety over terrorism hold predictive power over the initiative, assertiveness, and hostility dimensions of press adversarialness (See Table 9). Model adjusted R square values ranged between .254 and .401 suggesting that the three independent variables provide substantial explanatory power for differences in adversarial question composition, though roughly 60-70 % of variation remains unexplained by these models. Nine additional variables showed interesting, but less robust correlations with the anxiety variable. It appears that public anxiety regarding some imminent terrorist threat was related to the type of questions asked of George W. Bush. Along the initiative dimension, moderate correlations between the anxiety variable and two of four variables suggest that as anxiety over terrorism increases the press will behave more deferentially in terms of the simplicity of question construction.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined press questioning of the president during presidential press conferences to determine whether increases in adversarial questioning during the Bush administration were related to public terrorism anxiety and job approval. Assessing the balance of power between the US press and the president during foreign policy crises is a complicated task. It is clear that questioning during the Bush administration became more adversarial in terms of more elaborate question composition and decreasing press deference to the president. Power relations between press and president are in flux generally and remain so in times of crisis, but increasing anxiety and falling presidential approval are related to increases in adversarialness across all dimensions of question composition analyzed in this thesis. Assertiveness, measured in terms of negative question formulations and overtly critical prefaces, increased significantly as public anxiety over terrorism increased. During the Bush administration some adversarial questioning forms were certainly related to the level of anxiety present within the public.

Public expectations regarding press behavior hold that the press should be independent of outside influence and able to objectively criticize government officials to facilitate government accountability to the public. It is also true that the US government routinely use the news media to inform and lead public action in crisis situations through direct and mediated presentations of information supplied by the government to the media (Graber, 2006). Journalists must balance skepticism of government officials with the fact that continued access to governmental sources of information must be maintained. For journalists covering the White House, achieving this balance may be more important as continued access to decision-makers is of primary importance. Aspects of White House Press Corps questioning of George W. Bush were, at times, unconstrained by executive popularity and public anxiety over terrorism. Some of the most adversarial questions were posed in the months after 9/11 when a high degree of deference might be expected.

One limit of this research is the applicability of data collected for the anxiety variable. The data captured aggregate anxiety scores of persons polled by the Gallup organization. A survey dedicated to capturing the anxiety scores of some group of journalists may have resulted in different levels of anxiety. The general public and journalists are likely different in terms of information processing ability and the relative importance to place on some specific aspect of a crisis (Entman and Page, 1994; Zaller, 1992; Zaller, 1994). Other research suggests the differences between public and press may be less sweeping, as both members of the press and public often rally around the flag in response to some crisis (Zaller and Chiu, 2001).

House effects of organizations may affect individual journalist's question composition (Smith, 1978). House effects refer to differences in standard procedure,

culture, and organization that may influence the output of polling organizations (Smith, 1978). House effects may also influence the behavior of individuals within news media organizations. While beyond the scope of this thesis, determining the effect of specific factors related to inter-house differences in organizational culture, political culture, and standard operating procedures of news media organizations would likely shed further light on press deference to the president.

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APPENDICES

Table 1. Dependent Variable Descriptive Statistics.

Dependent Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
simp	6.3	6	6	3.4199
preface	7.4	7	7	3.1384
multi	2.8	2.5		2.4630
super	5.9	6.5	7	2.1437
ability	2.3	2	2	1.25
willing	.9375	0	0	1.34
preftilt	9.1	9	9	4.4403
notilt	5.4	5	3	2.5528
innoc	4.3	4.5	5	3.0489
hostile	4.9	5.5	2	2.4891
neg	8	8	9	2.9665
hospref	5	5.5	3	2.3944
hppresup	2.1	2	1	1.76895

N=16

Table 2. Independent Variable Descriptive Statistics.

Independent Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
job approval	49.6	53.5	63	16.9622
public anxiety	41.9	41.5	38	7.8135

Table 3. Question Complexity by Term- George W. Bush

	Simple	Prefaced	Multi	Super	Total
Term 1- n	61	45	28	40	174
%	35	26	16	23	100
Term 2- n	49	62	15	55	181
%	27	34	8	30	100

Pearson Chi square= 10.2, C.V.= 9.488, Probability= .038

Table 4. Other Referencing Question Frames by Term- George W. Bush

	None	Ability	Willing	Total
Term 1- n	135	21	13	169
%	80	12	8	100
Term 2- n	166	16	3	184
%	90	9	1	100

Pearson Chi square= 10.4, C.V.= 7.815, Probability= .016

Table 5. Yes-No Questions with Preface Tilt by Term- George W. Bush

	No Tilt	Innocuous	Hostile	Total
Term 1- n	4	46	35	85
%	5	54	41	100
Term 2- n	50	23	44	117
%	42	20	38	100

Pearson Chi square= 10.4, C.V.= 7.815, Probability= .016

Table 6. Negatively Formulated Questions by Term- George W. Bush

	Not Negative	Negative	Total
Term 1- n	116	53	169
%	69	31	100
Term 2- n	110	75	185
%	59	41	100

Pearson Chi square= 3.22, C.V.= 5.991, Probability= .199

Table 7. Preface Hostility by Term- George W. Bush

	Non-Hostile Preface	Hostile Preface	Hostile Preface Presupposed True	Total
Term 1- n	44	41	17	102
%	43	40	17	100
Term 2- n	78	39	16	133
%	59	29	12	100

Pearson Chi square= 5.56, C.V.= 5.991, Probability= .0620

Table 8. Correlations- Pearson's r

	Public Anxiety	Exec Job Approval
Initiative- simp	.333	-.409
Initiative- preface	.018	-.204
Initiative- multi	.050	-.569*
Initiative- super	-.391	.745*
Directness- ability	-.030	-.309
Directness- willing	-.045	-.564*
Assertiveness- prefilt	.402	-.460
Assertiveness- notilt	.133	-.041
Assertiveness- innoc	.130	-.714**
Assertiveness- hostile	.531*	.029
Assertiveness- neg	.523*	.126
Hostility- hospref	.467	-.258
Hostility- hppresup	.179	.007

** Correlation significant at 0.001 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation significant at 0.005 level (2-tailed).

Table 9. Group Independent Variables/ Dependent Variable Multiple Regression

Independent Variables	Unstandardized	Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	
(Constant)	13.263	4.264	.009
approval	-.229	.072	.008
anxiety	-.097	.076	.229
time	.577	.259	.046

Dependent Variable: multi; Adjusted R Square= .401.

	B	Std. Error	
(Constant)	-9.671	4.344	.046
approval	.170	.073	.039
anxiety	.273	.078	.858
time	-.622	.264	.037

Dependent Variable: hostile; Adjusted R Square= .392.

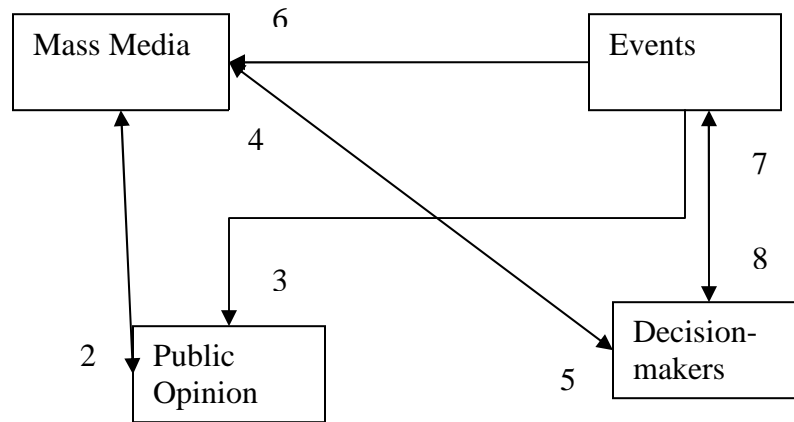
	B	Std. Error	
(Constant)	-4.492	7.773	.574
approval	.134	.131	.327
anxiety	.362	.139	.023
time	-.966	.473	.064

Dependent Variable: prefillt; Adjusted R Square= .388.

	B	Std. Error	
(Constant)	-4.409	4.626	.359
approval	.090	.078	.271
anxiety	.214	.083	.024
time	-.474	.281	.118

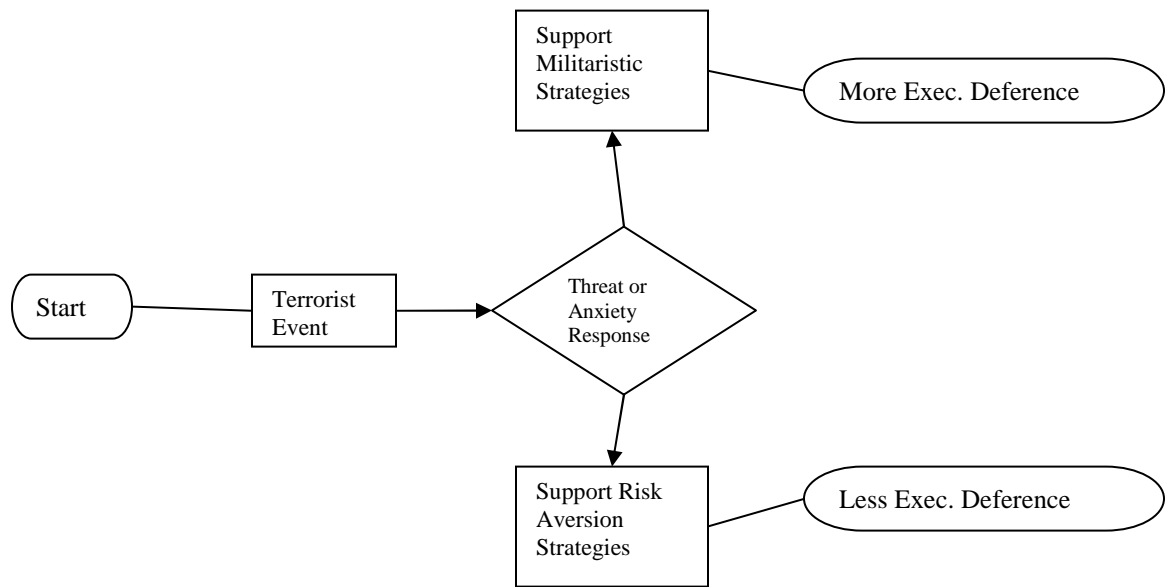
Dependent Variable: hospref; Adjusted R Square= .254.

Figure 1. Causality in Relationships among Mass Media, Events, Public Opinion and Decision-makers (Baum Potter, 2008).



1. Hamilton, 2003.
2. Paletz, 2002; Graber, 2002; Reese, 2001; Baum, 2003.
3. Feaver and Gelpi, 2004; Mueller, 1971; Kull and Ramsay, 2001.
4. Cohen, 1963; Bennett, 1990; Brody, 1991.
5. Powlick, 1995; Eisinger, 2003; Mueller, 1995.
6. Gartner, 2004; Graber, 1997; Tift and Jones, 1999.
7. DeRound and Peake, 2000; Meernik, 2004.
8. Behr and Iyengar, 1985; Andrade and Young, 1996.

Figure 2. . Public Psychological Responses to Terrorism (Huddy et al, 2005)



APPENDIX 1: Press Question Code Sheet (Bannerman, 2004)

1. Press Briefing Date _____
2. Total number of questions _____
3. Total number of questioning turns _____
 - A. Initiative Dimension/Question Composition
 - A1. Simple _____
 - A2. Prefaced _____
 - A3. Multiple _____
 - A4. Supercomplex _____
 - B. Directness Dimension/Ability and Willingness Question Frames
 - B1. Ability _____
 - B2. Willing _____
 - C. Assertiveness Dimension.
 - C1. Preface Tilt _____
 - C2. Innocuous _____
 - C3. Hostile _____
 - C4. No Tilt _____
 - C5. Negatively Formulated Questions _____
 - D. Hostility Dimension
 - D1. Preface Hostility _____
 - D2. Preface Truth Presupposed _____

APPENDIX 2: Code Sheet Instructions (Bannerman, 2004)

1. Press Briefing Date: Month, day, and year of press briefing.
2. Total number of questions: All questions posed by journalists to the president during the press briefing.
3. Total number of questioning turns: A questioning turn occurs when the president responds to one reporter's question or series of questions.

The question design features are scored by the total number of features present in each presidential press conference.

A. Initiative Dimension/Question Composition: Measures the elaborateness of question composition.

A1. Simple: One sentence question.

A2. Prefaced: Elaborated preliminary statement to a single question.

A3. Multiple: More than one question.

A4. Supercomplex: Both prefaced statements and multiple questions.

B. Directness Dimension/Ability and Willingness Question Frames: Question construction indicates the president may decline to answer based upon ability or willingness to provide a response.

B1. Ability: Can/could you + comment, explain, or tell?

B2. Willingness: Will/would you + comment, explain, or tell?

C. Assertiveness Dimension: Measures the presence of questioner attempts to suggest some preferred answer within a questioning turn.

C1. Preface Tilt: Yes-no question involving a prefatory statement tilted towards a preferred answer.

C2. Innocuous tilt: Non-damaging prefatory tilt, which may favor presidential agendas.

C3. Hostile tilt: Potentially politically damaging prefatory tilt against the president.

C4. No tilt: Neutral prefatory statement that identifies or contextualizes some question.

C5. Negatively Formulated Question: Questions that push for a particular answer.

Questions of this type often begin with phrases like isn't it, aren't you, or don't you think that...

D. Hostility Dimension: Indicates the degree to which a question is overtly critical of a president and/or administration. Hostility is measured by the presence or lack of hostile prefatory statements and questions that presuppose the truth of the hostile prefatory statement.

D1. Preface Hostility: Overly critical remarks of the president and/or administration in question prefaces.

D2. Preface Presupposed as True by Question: Question invites president to respond to question and assumes that the hostile preface is factual and accurate.

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The creation of foreign policy news is affected by more than ranking the impact and importance of relevant events as they occur. This thesis examines the adversarial nature of US press questioning of the executive during presidential press conferences and whether increases in adversarial questioning during the Bush administration were related to public terrorism anxiety and presidential job approval ratings. Findings include consistent, moderately strong positive correlations between public anxieties regarding terrorist actions, and overtly hostile and negative questioning of Bush administration press conferences; and strong positive correlations between executive approval and question types indicating press deference to the president.

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