Iraq and the "Fox Effect": An Examination of Polarizing Media and Public Support for International Conflict

The causes and consequences of public support, or the lack thereof, for the overseas application of military force is a subject of longstanding scholarly debate. The most widely accepted explanations emphasize rational public responses to events as they unfold. Such "event-based" explanations hold that a president's ability to sustain public support for a U.S. military engagement depends primarily on its degree of success, the number of or trend in U.S. casualties, or the U.S. goals in a given conflict. Yet, recent research into the framing of foreign policy has shown that public perceptions concerning, success or failure, the implications of casualties, and the offensive or defensive nature of U.S. military engagements are often endogenous to the domestic political circumstances surrounding them, including the efforts of political and media elites to frame events to their own advantage.

In this study, we develop and test a series of hypotheses concerning media coverage of, and public opinion regarding, the war in Iraq. In the former case, in prior research (Baum and Groeling 2004, 2005) we report evidence that journalists' preferences lead traditional news programs to disproportionately feature instances of members of the presidential party criticizing their fellow partisan president and, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent, of the opposition party praising him. Moreover, because they represent costly speech, presidential party attacks are highly credible to consumers, as is opposition party praise. In contrast, in more ideologically narrow "new media" outlets, we anticipate that the balance will likely differ substantially.

We test our hypotheses concerning media coverage through a comprehensive content analysis of *all* coverage of the war from September 2004 through February 2007 appearing on the *CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News* and *FOX's Special Report with Brit Hume.* We test our public opinion hypotheses using that same dataset, as well as an expert survey on conditions in Iraq and national opinion toward the Iraq War broken down by party. We find significant differences in both the composition and impact of partisan messages on public opinion across outlets.

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Just before the 2004 presidential election, the *New York Times Magazine* published an article by veteran reporter Ron Suskind titled “Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush.” In it, the author recounted being criticized by an unnamed member of the Bush Administration for over-valuing “judicious study of discernible reality” in the evaluation of policy options. The administration source argued, “That's not the way the world really works anymore… We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out.” (Suskind, 2004).

Scholars, too, have often disagreed about the impact of “reality” on government policy. Particularly in the arena of foreign policy, scholars have debated whether public support, or the lack thereof, for the overseas application of military force is shaped more by political rhetoric and wrangling or by the ebb and flow of events on the ground (e.g., Lippmann 1934, Almond 1950, Rosenau 1961, Baum 2003, Holsti 2004, Eichenberg 2005). In an attempt to better understand public responses to such conflicts, research has focused on the characteristics of the conflicts themselves (hereafter “event-based” explanations), the internal characteristics of individual citizens (“individual-level” explanations), or on the domestic political circumstances surrounding them (“domestic political” explanations).

Event-based explanations have focused primarily on *longer-term* public support, or, more precisely, everything beyond the immediate impact effect of the initiation of a crisis event. Such explanations argue that a president’s ability to sustain public support for a U.S. military engagement depends primarily on its degree of success (Kull and Ramsay 2001, Feaver and Gelpi 2004, Gelpi *et al*. 2005/2006, Eichenberg 2005), the number, rate or trend with respect to U.S. casualties (Mueller 1973, Gartner and Segura 2000), or the perceived goals of the mission

(Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998, Oneal *et al.* 1996, Eichenberg 2005). Jentleson (1992), for instance, argues that the American public is more likely to support military actions perceived as defensive (aimed at imposing "foreign policy restraint" on an adversary), rather than offensive (aimed at imposing "internal political change") in nature.

Yet research into both the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon (e.g., Brody 1991, Baum 2002) and, more generally, the framing of foreign policy (e.g., Entman 2004) calls these arguments into question. Such scholarship has shown that public perceptions concerning the costs, benefits, and the offensive or defensive nature of U.S. military engagements are often endogenous to the domestic political circumstances surrounding them, including the efforts of elites to frame events to their own advantage (Entman 2004). Presidents routinely seek to frame their military actions as self-defense (e.g., Baum 2003, Perla 2005).

Most Americans know relatively little about foreign affairs and cannot easily observe first-hand the status of events overseas (Almond 1950, Lippmann 1955, Converse 1964, Erskine 1963, Edwards 1983, Sobel 1993, Holsti 2004, Canes-Wrone 2006, Page and Bouton 2006). Consequently, in determining whether to support or oppose a conflict, typical Americans are ill-equipped to independently assess the president's "true" motivations or an action's "true" cost, most obviously in the short-term, but also even in the longer term (Berinsky 2007). Instead they rely on information shortcuts, or heuristic cues (Sniderman *et al.* 1991, Popkin 1994), most notably the opinions of trusted political elites, and primarily as they are reflected in the mass media (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, Kronsnick and Kinder 1990, Zaller 1992, Rahn 1993, Larson 1996 and 2000). Trust, in turn, frequently hinges on one particularly accessible heuristic: party identification (Rahn 1993, Popkin 1994, Nelson and Garst 2005).[1]

[1] Individuals also employ other heuristics in evaluating foreign policy, such as accessible "images" of potential adversaries (e.g., enemy vs. friend) and core values, such as isolationism vs. internationalism (Herrmann et al. 1997, Holsti 2004). Still, elite communication plays an important

Individuals' interpretations of heuristic cues depend in significant measure on their pre-existing belief systems (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987, Herrmann *et al.* 1997), of which party identification is typically an important element (Rahn 1993, Popkin 1994, Lupia and McCubbins 1998, Groeling 2001, Nelson and Garst 2005). The party affiliations of information sources (e.g., elites) and receivers (citizens) in interaction thus serve as a cognitive filter, mediating the selection and implications of the information shortcuts typical individuals rely upon in making political judgments.

In contrast to event-focused scholarship, research on the public's *immediate* reactions to the use of force – the so-called rally-round-the-flag-phenomenon – has focused far more on domestic politics in general, and on the influence of public statements by political elites in particular. In fact, the most widely accepted domestic political explanation for the rally phenomenon, which we term the Opinion Indexing Hypothesis, argues that the extent of elite criticism of the president determines the magnitude of a post-use-of-force rally (Brody 1991; see also Brody and Shapiro 1989, Oneal *et al.* 1996). According to this argument, when citizens observe elites expressing bipartisan support for a policy, they typically respond favorably (Larson 1996 and 2000). However, when citizens observe elites engaging in partisan bickering, they will tend to choose sides along partisan lines.[2]

The Opinion Indexing Hypothesis assumes that media coverage accurately reflects elite debate, or at least that of the most authoritative elites (Bennett et al. 2006). This implies that the media are relatively passive and non-strategic, faithfully reflecting the actual substance of elite

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role in priming such images and values, and thereby framing events for individuals. Some research (Herrmann et al. 1999, Campbell et al. 1960) has found that party identification is not a good predictor of public support for military conflict. However, party *does* mediate elites' capacity to successfully frame events for different individuals (Druckman 2004).

[2] In this respect, citizens employ the opinions of trusted elites as a heuristic cue, allowing them to reach a judgment that, at least most of the time, will reflect their self-interests, without expending a lot of time and energy (Popkin 1994, Lau and Redlawsk 1997, Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

debate. Others go a step further, arguing that elite debate actually bounds the range of arguments considered sufficiently "acceptable" to receive any news coverage (Bennett 1990), or that support and consensus among elites will short-circuit broader debate by constraining journalists' willingness to challenge an administration (Hallin 1986). We call this bounding of media coverage in conflicts the Media Indexing Hypothesis.

In contrast, we argue that the true nature and extent of elite debate may matter less than *media decisions to cover* any such debate and the partisan makeup of the debaters, and that this is likely to be true well beyond the initial "rally" period. These differences do not necessarily stem from partisan bias in the news, but rather from commonly held professional incentives and norms that lead journalists to strongly prefer certain stories over others. For example, highlighting discord within the president's party is an especially attractive story element. Conversely, there is relatively little reward for covering boosterism of the president by his own party. Across the aisle, for reasons we shall discuss, journalists cover statements from the opposition party with less regard to whether they are supporting or criticizing the president (Groeling 2001).

Like event-based theories, the Opinion Indexing Hypothesis also discounts differences in the characteristics of individual consumers. In contrast, consistent with substantial prior research, we also argue that not all elite statements are equally persuasive to the public. For example, opposition party endorsements or presidential party attacks of the president should be extremely credible to viewers because they are atypical and represent costly signals (Dutton 1973, Eagly *et al*. 1978, Lupia and McCubbins 1998, Groeling 2001). Similarly, typical individuals will likely view statements by their fellow partisan elites as more credible than statements by opposition elites (Rahn 1993, Popkin 1994, Lupia and McCubbins 1998, Groeling 2001, Nelson and Garst 2005).

Finally, in the new media, the incentives of journalists associated with more partisan outlets may differ from those of traditional mainstream outlets. As a consequence, the characteristics that make a story appealing to a more partisan news outlet may differ substantially from those that appeal to journalists in the traditional news media, and more closely reflect the preferences of the partisan outlet's preferred party.

Our theory highlights the central role of credibility in mediating the persuasiveness of information to consumers (Lupia and McCubbins 1998, Druckman 2001). The credibility of news *messages* and of the *messengers* and *outlets* communicating those messages mediate the influence of news on consumers. The reason, in short, is that citizens depend on credibility assessments in determining which information shortcuts to rely upon in rendering political judgments. Thus, we argue that only by understanding the individual incentives of, and strategic interactions between, elites, the public, and the press can we account for variations in public responses to presidential foreign policy initiatives.

Elsewhere (Baum and Groeling n.d.), we test our theory against all U.S. uses of military force between 1979 and 2003. For that study, we investigated all network news coverage of congressional rhetoric of the president and his administration during 60-day windows, centered on the start-date of each use of force. The results showed that communication effects on public attitudes emerge independently from, or at least in addition to, the "facts on the ground." However, because of our $\pm$30 day window limitation, we were only able to observe the short-term effects of communication and actual events.

The present study tests the applicability of our theory to a considerably longer timeframe, well beyond the initial "rally period" of a military conflict. To do so, we have gathered a daily time series of rhetoric by members of both political parties – including members of Congress (MCs) and

the Bush Administration – appearing on the *CBS Evening News*, *NBC Nightly News*, and the FOX News Channel's *Special Report with Brit Hume,* from August 2004 through February 2007.[3]

To complement this analysis, we assembled a parallel weekly time series on public attitudes toward the conflict in Iraq. These data allow us to investigate longer-term patterns in news coverage and its effects on public opinion, as well as more directly comparing "communication" effects with those of real-world "events on the ground" over a relatively long time period. Doing so allows us to pit our theory against so-called reality-based explanations on the traditional "turf" of the latter arguments. This makes the present study a particularly difficult test for our theory.

In particular, we are interested in testing our argument that, because the public only observes reality through the systematically distorted lens offered by the mass media, communication effects are likely to persist, even after accounting for the state of events on the ground (that is, net of *reality*), well beyond the initial rally period. However, as the public gathers more information, over time, the potential gap between reality and its representation (or framing) in the mass media is likely to recede. Following Baum and Potter (2007), we refer to this gap as the "elasticity of reality." As the elasticity of reality varies, so too, we anticipate, will the relative influence on public opinion of both objective indicators of reality and elite communication. Because our time series begins in mid-2004, it does not include the early stages of the conflict, which originated in March 2003. Hence, our data represent only the medium-to-long term, during which the elasticity of reality is presumably smaller than during the initial rally period. This should make it even more difficult to find independent communication effects.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. We begin, in the next section, by reviewing our core theoretical assumptions and applying them to the Iraq conflict. From this, we

[3] We were unable to acquire equivalent data for CNN and ABC.

derive a series of predictions concerning the relationships between unfolding events in Iraq, media coverage of Iraq, and public attitudes toward the conflict. Next, we discuss our data and methods, after which we present the results of our hypothesis tests. The final section concludes by considering the implications of our findings.

A Typology of Partisan Messages

Elsewhere (Baum and Groeling n.d.) we argue that the evaluative statements of partisans fall into four basic categories: (1) attacks on the other party (cross-party attacks), (2) support for one's own party (intra-party praise), (3) support for the other party (cross-party praise), and (4) attacks on one's own party (intra-party attacks).

Politicians expend considerable effort in seeking to shape their messages and images in the news media. The most universally accepted assumption in U.S. electoral politics is that politicians seek, first and foremost, re-election (Mayhew 1974). We generalize this observation by assuming that politicians seek re-election both for themselves and their fellow partisans. After all, winning a seat in the Congress holds dramatically different implications—both with respect to resources available for subsequent election campaigns, and for a member's ability to influence public policy—if one is a member of the majority party (Cox and McCubbins 1993, Cox and Magar 1999). Winning election or majority party status, in turn, requires making one's self and one's fellow partisans look good, while casting the opposition party in a negative light. The implication for politicians' preferences regarding media coverage is straightforward: typical politicians prefer stories that include cross-party attacks and intra-party praise, while preferring to avoid stories entailing cross-party praise and intra-party attacks.[4] With respect to the conflict in Iraq, because the war is closely

[4] It should be noted that one key implication of our model is that individual members of a party might selfishly prefer to advance their own personal brand name at the expense of their party, reaping personally-beneficial press coverage of their dissent as a reward (Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) is a prime example of such a so-called "maverick," and received favorable media coverage based on his attacks on Republican orthodoxy in the 2000 presidential election). However, such

associated with the Bush Administration, we equate rhetorical support for the conflict with support for the Administration, and vice versa. So, praise (criticism) of the administration's handling of the war by a Democrat would represent cross-party praise (criticism), and so on.

Despite politicians' best efforts to control their public communication, journalists and news organizations maintain ultimate control over the content of their news programs because of their function as "gatekeepers" of political news content.[5] Certain characteristics of stories or sources make them more (or less) desirable for journalists. In particular, professional journalists generally prefer stories that are novel, conflictual, balanced, and involve authoritative political actors (Baum and Groeling n.d., Graber 1997, Groeling 2001, PEJ 2002).

The most obvious characteristic of newsworthiness is that it entails a premium on stories that are actually *new*. Informing readers or viewers of unexpected, inconsistent, novel, or surprising information is the core value provided by news organizations. This leads reporters to strongly resist attempts by politicians to deliver "scripted," consistent messages to the public.

Numerous scholars (e.g., Sabato 1991; Patterson 1996; Cappella and Jamieson 1997), in turn, have observed that while negativity and conflict have long been staples of American journalism, the news media have increasingly embraced "attack journalism" and cynicism since the 1960s. Indeed, there seems to be consensus within the scholarly literature that negativity is pervasive and dominant in modern news coverage.

Considerable ink has been spilled debating whether the media might be more likely to attack liberal or conservative points of view in their coverage. Tuchman (1972) famously argued

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incentives are at odds with the general party need to communicate a consistent brand name with the public.

[5] Of course, many have noted that the traditional media's gatekeeping powers have been eroded by new media, and particularly peer-produced media on the web (see Groeling and Baum n.d. for a review of this topic). However, while we are clearly in a transition period, traditional media are still relatively powerful in this area. See, for example, the relatively weak opinion effects for Fox news versus the networks in our analysis that follows.

that, in part to counter such bias accusations, journalists have a strong incentive to use procedures or strategic "rituals" of objectivity in doing their jobs. The main ritual Tuchman and others discuss is presenting "both sides of the story." Mainstream news organizations, particularly broadcasters, have long followed this balancing practice. For most of the 20th Century, broadcast stations and networks were held to an exceptionally high standard of fairness through FCC regulation (the so-called “fairness doctrine”). Professional journalists have also internalized these standards through professional ethics and norms, which require them to make every effort “to assure that the news content is accurate, free from bias and in context, and that all sides are presented fairly” (ASNE 2002).

Finally, journalists place a premium on getting the most authoritative source. As Graber (1997, 116) argues, the "gatekeeping process winnows the group of newsworthy people to a very small cadre of familiar and unfamiliar figures...predominantly political figures." Sigal (1986, 20) adds that "by convention, reporters choose authoritative sources over other potential sources," and that "the higher up an official's position in government, the more authoritative a source he or she was presumed to be, and the better his or her prospects for making the news."

Baum and Groeling (n.d.), however, argue that the implications of these preferences regarding newsworthiness differ during a foreign policy crisis, like a war, from “politics as usual” in one important respect. As Senator Arthur Vandenberg, the Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, famously explained, "Politics stops at the water's edge." The implication is that, either due to patriotism or our of fear of the political consequences of being on the “wrong” side, major wars will induce each party to close ranks and increase its support for the president. If journalists *expect* partisans from both parties to rally behind the president when American troops are in harm’s way, criticism of the president by either party should be regarded as

even more newsworthy than during normal periods.

Table 1 applies these story characteristic preferences to the aforementioned four types of partisan evaluations of the Iraq war. This allows us to determine which types of stories should be most likely to gain airtime. With respect to such evaluations, Table 1 shows that Republican Party praise of the war (henceforth "Rep. praise") has little novelty, balance, or conflict, and is thus of little interest to journalists. (Hence, Table 1 labels Rep. praise as "low" in newsworthiness on these three dimensions). In contrast, Republican Party criticism of the war ("Rep. criticism"), is particularly attractive to journalists because it is highly authoritative, conflictual, *and*, in wartime, novel. (Hence, in Table 1 we label Rep. criticism as "high" on these dimensions of newsworthiness.)

[Table 1 here]

In contrast, both positive and negative evaluations of the war by the Democratic Party tend to be newsworthy. During wartime, such comments are always at least somewhat novel (criticism *more* so than in normal times and praise arguably somewhat *less* so), and conflictual (if they criticize the war). Airing Democratic Party comments also adds balance to stories about the war. Finally, journalists' preference for authoritative sources leads to an over-representation of the majority party in Congress. If the majority party happens to share the president's party affiliation – as is the case for most of our time series – this leads to the strongest possible incentive for journalists to air any intra-party criticism of the war: any such criticism is novel, conflictual, and authoritative. Our first two hypotheses follow.

(H1) Negativity: Net of their valence, major events in Iraq will be associated with relatively larger increases in negative than in positive coverage of the war.

(H2) Oversampled Presidential Party Criticism: Presidential partisans outside the

Administration will be shown on the evening news criticizing the war more than praising it.

In recent years, as media have fragmented and some news outlets have begun to cater to partisan audience niches (Hamilton 2003), we argue the underlying preferences and routines of news organizations have shifted markedly, and that these changes have widened the gap between the true nature and extent of elite rhetoric and public perceptions of such rhetoric. (For empirical evidence in this regard, see Baum and Groeling 2006, Baum and Groeling 2007). While, for the most part, traditional journalistic norms and preferences have persevered, their applicability clearly varies across media outlets, particularly for the norm of offering balanced coverage. Increasingly, sophisticated and motivated consumers are able to seek out news sources —from cable news to partisan web sites to political talk radio—that reflect their own ideological preferences. In their efforts to cater to these narrower niche audiences, such outlets seem less likely to follow the norms and preferences described above, instead giving more weight to the positions and preferences of their preferred party. If, for instance, one assumes Fox News has a more favorable stance toward the Republican Party than do CBS and NBC, a third hypothesis follows.

(H3) Partisan Media Content: Coverage on Fox will be significantly more pro-war and anti-Democratic, and significantly less anti-Republican than the other networks.

Message Credibility

In determining each message type's effect on viewers, it is important to note not just the content of the message itself, but also the credibility of the message or its speaker. Parties do not "inject" messages into a passive public; such messages are processed by individuals who accept or reject them depending in part on their perceived credibility (Sniderman, *et al.* 1991, Kuklinski and Hurley 1994, Druckman 2001a). One source of credibility for a message is the belief that the

speaker and listener have common interests (Crawford and Sobel 1982). This suggests that statements by a listener's own party will be regarded as more credible than those of the opposing party, all else equal. Our fourth hypothesis follows:

(H4) Partisan Credibility: Evaluations of the war by members of a given party will have a stronger effect on that party's identifiers' support for the war than will comments by members of the other party.

Another important source of credibility derives from the interaction of source and message: whether the message is costly to the speaker (Spence 1973). Typical individuals regard messages harmful to the interests of the speaker as more credible than those imposing no costs (so-called "cheap talk").[6] In the context of partisan messages, it follows that messages by partisan speakers that appear to damage their own party or help the other party will be regarded as more credible than messages that help their own party or damage the other party. Such costly messages should be at least somewhat credible regardless of the party affiliation of the listener.

Table 2 summarizes the relative credibility of different partisan messages about the war based on their partisan and costly credibility for viewers of each party. It demonstrates the relatively weak persuasive power of "politics as usual" statements (i.e., intra-party praise or cross-party attacks) during normal periods. Such statements by members of the Republican (Democratic) Party serve only to rally their own followers, who probably *already* approved (disapproved) of the president *prior* to the statement (Baum 2002).

[Table 2 here]

In contrast, Democratic Party praise ("Dem. praise") should be exceptionally persuasive (and positive), especially among Democrats (albeit perhaps a bit less so in wartime than in normal

[6] Two related lines of inquiry are research in social psychology into the influence of "incongruous" (Walster *et al.* 1966, Koeske and Crano 1968) or "disconfirming" messages (Eagly *et al.* 1978).

periods). Similarly, when Republicans attack their fellow partisans in the administration, the effects on public opinion should be dramatic (but negative), especially among the president's fellow partisans. In both cases, if available, the media demand for such stories virtually ensures they will receive coverage, further magnifying their potential impact on opinion. Our fifth and sixth hypotheses follow:

(H5) Costly Credibility: Evaluations that impose a cost on the speaker's own party will have a stronger effect on individuals' propensity to support the war than will equivalent "cheap talk" evaluations.

(H6) Combined Credibility: Positive (negative) evaluations by Democratic (Republican) party elites, which have both costly and partisan credibility, will have the strongest effects on war support for fellow members of their respective parties.

Rhetoric and Reality

The qualities that make a given story interesting to journalists and persuasive to the public are unlikely to remain constant over time. In the former case, for instance, a story, or type of story, that is highly novel at time 1, when events may appear to be going well "on the ground" may be somewhat less so at time 2, when events may appear relatively less favorable. Perhaps more importantly, the logic underlying the Media Indexing Hypothesis rests in significant measure upon an assumption that journalists are dependent upon government officials for information about foreign policy events. It is the information advantage of government officials – especially those from the administration and majority party in Congress – that makes them appealing to journalists seeking authoritative sources. This advantage is particularly acute in the early stages of a conflict or crisis, when an administration possesses a near monopoly on credible information about the event. Over time, as information diffuses, journalists will both gather an increasing store of

information about the event as well as develop alternative information sources. Hence, while an administration conducting a war will always have *some* informational advantage, its extent is almost certain to recede with time.

Regardless of how events on the ground are actually unfolding, any administration has a powerful incentive to cast them in a favorable light. Journalists, in turn, can be expected to attempt to contest this attempt at framing and seek to highlight any evaluations that depart from the "party line" or contest this administration frame. Over time, as journalists are better able to discern for themselves what is actually happening on the ground and as any prior discrepancies between administration framing and reality come to light, the discrepancy between reality and coverage should diminish. If things are, in fact, going well, then an administration may be able to continue framing the conflict as a success. Such was mostly the case in the first Persian Gulf War in 1991 (Page and Entman 1994, Iyengar and Simon 1994). However, if the state of the conflict is more ambiguous or if events are not going well, a negative frame will likely predominate. In sum, media coverage seems likely to converge on the actual valence of events over time. The greater the initial gap between "reality" and the administration's frame, the larger the likely change, over time, in the tenor of coverage. This suggests a seventh hypothesis.

(H7) Elasticity of Reality: Over time, the tenor of media coverage of a conflict will increasingly resemble objective indicators of "reality."

The over-time dynamics in public opinion are likely to resemble those in the media. After all, typical individuals are largely dependent on the news media – either directly, through their own consumption, or indirectly, by talking to individuals who have gained *their* information through the media – for their information about a conflict. For typical individuals, a given piece of information is likely to exert less influence as that individual collects and retains more information

over time. To see why, it is useful to review the so-called "top-of-the-head" model of public opinion most closely associated with Zaller and Feldman (1992). According to this model, typical individuals possess a range of considerations about any object or issue. When asked their opinion, Zaller and Feldman argue that individuals average across those considerations that are most accessible at the time they are asked. More politically attentive individuals tend to possess more, and more consistent, considerations about political issues than their less attentive counterparts. All individuals respond probabilistically when asked their opinions, based on the mix of considerations they possess about the issue at hand, and depending on which considerations are most accessible at the time they are queried. The greater the proportion that point in one direction – say toward supporting the conflict in Iraq – the greater the probability that any accessible considerations at the time they are queried will lead them to express support for the conflict.

Now consider an individual who, at time *t*, possesses, say, 5 considerations regarding the Iraq conflict. Suppose 3 of the 5 considerations are favorable. Ceteris paribus – that is, if we assume that each consideration is equally likely to be accessible – when asked her opinion of the conflict, the individual is likely to express support for the conflict 60% of the time. If that individual accepts two additional pieces of negative information about the conflict, her propensity to express support for the war when queried about it would, ceteris paribus, decline dramatically, from 60 to 37.5% of the time. If, however, that same individual possessed 50 considerations, then an additional two negative pieces of information would have a much smaller effect. In this case, if we assume the identical ex ante favorable-to-unfavorable proportion, the propensity to express a supportive opinion would decline from the initial 60% to 58%, representing hardly any change at all.

Presumably, as the U.S. engagement in Iraq has continued – approaching 4.5 years as of

this writing – typical citizens have increased their store of information about the conflict. As a consequence, attitudes regarding the war are likely to have increasingly solidified. Early in the conflict, elites and journalists enjoyed a substantial informational advantage over the public, thereby granting them substantial leeway in the framing of events. The public was thus inclined to accept information relatively uncritically as reliable, without verification. Because news is an experience good (Hamilton 2003), over time consumers have the opportunity to retrospectively evaluate the reliability of information they consumed in the past. This may lead to a shift in the balance of previously stored considerations – as some negatively or positively tagged pieces of information are re-tagged, based on a retrospective revision in the consumer's reliability assessment – as well as coloring assumptions regarding the reliability of new information.[7]

As this process unfolds, and as elites' informational advantage recedes with the passage of time, the influence of new information inconsistent with the (updated) prevailing valence of their considerations regarding the conflict presumably recedes. In other words, as individuals gather additional considerations, and update their beliefs about the reliability of those considerations, they are less and less influenced by subsequent considerations, especially those deemed likely to be unreliable. Consequently, the elasticity of reality – that is, the capacity of elites and journalists to manipulate the framing of events independently from the true status of those events – declines over time.

Figure 1 illustrates this process. It traces the typical path of the foreign policy informational advantage enjoyed by leaders, relative to the public (that is, the elasticity of reality). Specifically,

[7] While an inattentive public might be expected to have difficulty retroactively retrieving and updating their assessed valuation of information consumed in the murky past, the very prominence of the initial efforts to gain publicity for the desired frame should help citizens recall it later. For example, the Bush Administration's rhetorical reliance on Saddam Hussein's alleged WMD program as a justification for war made it easier for critics to dredge up such claims later to undermine the administration's credibility on future claims.

Figure 1 focuses on the effects "reality" (that is, the true nature of events on the ground) relative to the representation of that reality by the mass media. The "communication effects" curve represents the differential between actual events and reporting about them by the media. The "reality effects" curve, in turn, represents actual events on the ground. The gap between the two curves, shown in yellow or blue shading, represents the elasticity of reality – that is, the range of frames of events – with varying degrees of "distance" from the "true" tenor of events – that the public will accept.

[Figure 1 here]

At the outset of the conflict, represented by time t_0, the public has no information about events on the ground. At this stage, the only information the public receives is a framed representation of events provided by the media. Absent any capacity to retrospectively assess the reliability of this information, the elasticity of reality is extremely large, approaching infinite (albeit presumably bounded in some manner by longer-term public attitudes and assessments of the administration). After a little time passes, but still relatively early in a conflict, say at time t_1, the true tenor of events should tend to matter relatively less than news coverage of elite rhetoric regarding those events. To the extent that media coverage diverges from reality, the former is likely to exert greater influence than the latter, as shown by the gap between C_1 and R_1, which represents the elasticity of reality at time t_1. Over time, the two are likely to converge, with news reflecting actual events, as shown in Figure 1 at time t_2, where $R_2=C_2$. Eventually, however, as the public's store of information about the conflict increases, and as the public retrospectively updates its reliability assessments, the marginal influence of new pieces of information will recede. This decline is likely to be more rapid for communication effects. As the elasticity of reality collapses, and given public skepticism regarding information that diverges from its updated assessment regarding "reality", the capacity of news coverage to influence opinion independent of actual

events recedes, while actual developments "on the ground" continue to contribute, albeit at a reduced marginal rate, to net public assessments. This period is represented by the area shaded in blue between times t_2 and t_3. Eventually, the public judgment becomes all but unshakable, here represented by time t_3. At this point, neither events nor rhetoric seem likely to exert much influence. Several hypotheses regarding public opinion follow from this discussion.

(H8) Longer-term Communication Effects: The influence of elite rhetoric regarding a war on public attitudes will recede, over time.

(H9) Longer-term "Reality" Effects: The influence of objective indicators of the war's progress on public attitudes will recede, over time.

(H10) Rhetoric vs. Reality: The influence of elite rhetoric will decline more than the influence of objective indicators of the war's progress, over time.

Finally, research in social psychology (Reeder and Spores 1983, Skowronski and Carlson 1987 and 1989) has shown that negative information tends to outweigh positive information in people's evaluations of most objects or circumstances, particularly those related to moral judgment (e.g., "right" vs. "wrong," "good" vs. "evil," etc.). This is because negative information is more useful in reaching a judgment about an individual or object. In other words, typical individuals tend to consider *bad* behavior as characteristic primarily of bad people, while *good* behavior is more likely to be viewed as potentially characteristic of either good or bad people (i.e., good people sometimes do bad things, but bad people usually do not do good things). Hence, all else equal, negative information is less ambiguous.

Additionally, America's leaders routinely frame the nation's adversaries as the embodiment of evil (e.g., G.H.W. Bush likening Saddam Hussein to Hitler, or G.W. Bush branding Al Qaeda and its supporters as "evildoers") (Baum 2003). Hence, in evaluating U.S. foreign policy

initiatives, the American people are strongly encouraged by their leaders to base their opinions on moral judgment, thereby reinforcing the centrality of negative information. This suggests that, all else equal, "bad news" about the war in Iraq seems likely to attract greater public interest, and hence exert greater influence on public opinion, than "good news." A final hypothesis follows:

(H11) Bad News: The influence of elite rhetoric will be greater when the war is going relatively poorly than when it is going relatively well.

Data and Methods

The main data for this analysis are drawn from an extensive analysis of media content conducted by Media Tenor. The data extend from September 2004 through February 2007 and include every valenced (positive, negative, or neutral) statement about partisan figures that appeared on Fox's *Special Report with Brit Hume*, NBC's *Nightly News*, and the CBS *Evening News*.[8] The data also allowed us to categorize the evaluations by topic area, including whether or not the evaluation concerned Iraq.

Our public opinion series aggregates results from over 200 different polling questions regarding support for the war in Iraq.[9] The series, collected by Gary Jacobson (2006), uses LOESS (i.e., locally weighted polynomial regression) smoothing with a bandwidth of .05 to account for variation across survey wordings and organizations. This process fits a series of simple models to

[8] Media Tenor is a German firm founded in 1994 that bills itself as "the first international institute specializing in continuous and comprehensive media evaluation." Media Tenor codes the source, target, subject, explicit evaluation, and other related information for each evaluative statement on the programs. Data were unavailable for NBC from 05/17/2005 – 06/07/2005 and 11/06/2006 – 11/30/2006; for CBS from 04/07/2005 and 04/08/2005, and Fox from 09/01/2004 – 09/03/2004 and 05/29/2006 – 06/08/2006.

[9] The questions were selected from 15 different polling organizations, and included whether removing Hussein or the result of the war were worth the loss of lives, whether they approve of military action in Iraq, whether the U.S. did the right thing in going to war, whether they support or oppose the current U.S. Military presence in Iraq, favor or oppose having gone to war; whether it was the right decision despite the CIA report on WMD, whether the war was a mistake, and whether their view of the war was favorable.

localized subsets of the data to build up a function that describes the deterministic part of the variation in the data, point by point. [10] The series includes separate values for Democrats, Republicans and Independents. For our dependent variables, we employ the difference between the smoothed Iraq support value (averaged across all question wordings) between periods *t*+1 and *t*. To account for the likely autoregressive pattern in the residuals, we include the Iraq support value at period *t* as a causal variable.

We employ three main measurements of "reality" on the ground in Iraq. First, U.S. combat deaths, as provided by the Department of Defense. Second, non-U.S. casualties in Iraq, as reported by Iraqbodycount.org.[11] Our third and most important Iraq measure is our Events series. Unlike the casualty series, which can only take "bad" values in differing degrees, this series attempts to measure both progress and setbacks in Iraq. To generate this variable, we conducted a search of timelines of the Iraq War assembled by the Department of Defense, news organizations like the BBC, online sites like Wikipedia, etc., and selected the most important events from each. After culling these listings, we assembled a list of 45 major battles and military operations, mass casualty events, diplomatic or political developments, arrests, trials, or executions. (We present the complete list of events in the Appendix.) We then sent the list out to a group of academic experts and asked them to rate each event on a scale ranging from -10 (disaster) to 10 (great success),

[10] "At each point in the data set a low-degree polynomial is fit to a subset of the data, with explanatory variable values near the point whose response is being estimated. The polynomial is fit using weighted least squares, giving more weight to points near the point whose response is being estimated and less weight to points further away. The value of the regression function for the point is then obtained by evaluating the local polynomial using the explanatory variable values for that data point. The LOESS fit is complete after regression function values have been computed for each of the n data points." (Source: "Engineering Statistics Handbook", available at: http://www.itl.nist.gov/div898/handbook/index.htm.)

[11] We use the "minimum" tally from the site, rather than their higher estimate. While estimating non-U.S. casualties in Iraq is a controversial and undoubtedly imprecise exercise, by using the same estimator for the entire series, inflated or deflated levels should cancel out, leaving the relevant change effects intact.

taking into account both the valence of the event (positive vs. negative) and its importance to the overall status of the conflict.[12]

In modeling the impact of rhetoric, casualties, and events on public opinion, we faced a difficult modeling decision: how to account for impact of these items over time. On the one hand, all of these items have some lingering impact beyond the day or week in which they originally occur. Yet, on the other, it seems unreasonable to expect that an event or statement will have exactly the same impact two years later as it did on the day it originally occurred. To model this, we explicitly incorporated a non-linear decay function into these variables. The decay function carries forward 99% of the prior day's value of each variable, and then adds any new value for that day on top of the existing tally. The following day carries forward 99% of that tally and adds on any new value for the next day, and so on. Figure 2 illustrates how a 10-unit value would decay over the course of a year with no further new values added.

Because we anticipate that news organizations are likely to be more concerned about present developments in choosing their news, we use a slightly different specification for our news selection tests. In that case, the Iraq event series only includes the decay function of the most recent events (i.e. does not carry forward the residual value of the prior events when a new event

[12] The exact instructions were as follows: "For each of the events below, please indicate on the -10 to 10 scale whether, from the U.S. perspective, the event was harmful or beneficial to the prospects of a successful outcome to the situation in Iraq (as you yourself define "success"). Scores of -10 should indicate that the event was particularly disastrous, with serious harm to the prospects of success. Scores of -5 should be moderately harmful; scores of 0 are neutral; scores of +5 are moderately helpful, while scores of +10 should indicate a particularly successful event that substantially increased the prospects for a successful outcome in Iraq. If you would like to look up more information about the incident before answering, we have included links to external web pages (note that reading this supplemental material is optional)." As a validity check, we also submitted the survey to the readers of the online military affairs blog Intel Dump, run by Phil Carter. The results were highly correlated, giving us greater confidence that we have good measures of the impact of these events. See Appendix A for a breakdown of the events and the average expert appraisal of each event.

occurs).[13]

To control for general media salience related to the war, we include a daily tally of every mention of Iraq in the headline or citation of front page *New York Times* articles. To control for the state of the economy, we include controls for both the level of consumer sentiment (lagged one period) and change in consumer prices. Finally, we also include dummy variables for the 61 days preceding the 2004 presidential election (which runs back to the first date in our series) and six months preceding the 2006 midterm elections, as well as divided government.

Results

Media Coverage Hypotheses

We begin our analysis in Figure 3 by briefly exploring the contours of the rhetoric across different actors and outlets.

[Figure 3 here]

One immediately noticeable pattern visible in Figure 3 is the surprising discrepancy in the number of evaluations across outlets: Perhaps because of its hour-long format and more political focus, Fox News's *Special Report* actually airs considerably more evaluations of partisans than CBS and NBC combined (1/3 more evaluations of the president, 40% more administration evaluations, and more than twice as many evaluations of congressional figures). Consistent with prior research showing the dominance of negative portrayals of politics, Figure 3 shows most politicians (particularly those in the executive branch) swimming in a sea of bad news. In all four years of the analysis, both the networks and Fox showed more negative than positive evaluations of the president and his administration (although Fox comes close to parity in late 2004). The

[13] Note that we experimented with a variety of decay functions, but selected the 1% daily decay because it outperformed the alternatives in our models and also had compelling face validity.

congressional evaluations are more mixed, with Republican MCs receiving predominantly negative evaluations until they lost power in 2007, and Democrats receiving a comparatively easy time on the networks across all of the years and on Fox in 2007 (albeit with far fewer evaluations overall than any other target).[14]

The bottom part of Figure 2 combines all of these evaluations and further subdivides them by their source, showing their relative prominence during different weeks in the time frame of the study. While there is obviously considerable variation across the categories over time, several shifts in rhetoric are also apparent across time. Perhaps most obvious is the shift in rhetoric following President Bush's successful 2004 re-election, in which a surge of Republican self-congratulation and Democratic recrimination briefly supplanted the largely negative cross-party attacks that predominated in other periods. By early 2005, the dominance of Democratic criticism of Republicans (with considerable periods of Republican self-praise and criticism of Democrats) re-emerged.

In Figure 4, we begin testing for whether differences observed between coverage on Fox and the networks are statistically significant. Beginning in the upper left chart, we find that for every year except 2004, Fox airs a significantly smaller proportion of critical evaluations than the networks ($p \leq .001$ for 2005 and 2006; $p \leq .01$ for 2007), although both Fox and the networks air more criticism than praise overall. Moving to the upper-right chart, we find that (consistent with Hypothesis 3: Partisan Media Content) in every year of the sample, Fox presented proportionately less criticism of the Bush Administration than the networks ($p \leq .001$), although again, in all cases critical evaluations outnumber positive ones.

Turning specifically to evaluations related to the war in Iraq, the lower-left chart of Figure 4 shows that both Fox and the networks have increased their critical evaluations related to Iraq

[14] Note that the 2007 evaluations only include the first two months of the year.

since the end of 2004 (albeit less sharply so on Fox). As predicted by Hypothesis 9 (Partisan Media Inelastic Reality), Fox's increasing negativity appears to lag behind that of the networks, though the differential is only statistically significant in 2005 and 2007 ($p \leq .10$).

Focusing on evaluations directed at the Bush administration, the overwhelming predominance of negativity persists for both Fox and the networks, with 2004's relatively slight negativity offset by dramatic dips in positive coverage in subsequent years. In fact, it is interesting to note that neither NBC nor CBS aired a single positive evaluation of the Bush administration related to Iraq in the first two months of 2007. Again, consistent with H3 (Partisan Media), in every year except 2004, Fox is significantly less critical of the Bush administration than the networks (2005 and 2006 $p \leq .05$, 2007 $p \leq .01$).

In the charts contained in Figure 5, we continue drilling down into the differences between the coverage of Fox and the networks. Beginning with the upper-left chart, we see that in both venues, the Democrats are more negative than Republicans in their evaluations, and that the proportion of criticism is significantly higher on the networks than on Fox ($p \leq .001$ for Democratic statements; $p \leq .05$ for Republican). The upper right chart, in turn, provides some additional evidence in support of H3 (Partisan Media), as Fox is significantly less likely to air criticism of Republicans ($p \leq .001$) and more likely to do so for Democrats ($p \leq .001$). Nonetheless, once again a majority of evaluations are negative in all cases.

[Figure 5 here]

The middle two charts show evaluations of the administration and president, respectively (excluding their self-evaluations). as before, (and consistent with H3: Partisan Media) we find the networks airing a significantly greater proportion of criticism than Fox ($p \leq .001$). The differences for criticism originating within the presidential party are particularly striking: the networks aired

Republican attacks on the president and the administration roughly twice as often as Fox (proportionately).

Continuing to the final row of charts in Figure 5, we see yet more support for H3 (Partisan Media), with Fox covering significantly smaller proportions of criticism of Republican MCs than the networks ($p \leq .001$). Fox also airs roughly twice the proportion of criticism of intra-party criticism by Democrats ($p \leq .001$), as well as (insignificantly) more criticism by Republicans (although both exceed 90% criticism, so the lack of significance may be a ceiling effect).

In Figure 6, we repeat this analysis for the smaller subset of evaluations specifically focused on Iraq. In general, these results closely parallel those of Figure 5, albeit with decreased significance (likely driven by the comparatively small number of observations). Except for evaluations by Republican MCs (who are only shown as being the target of two evaluations specifically on the topic of Iraq), Fox again airs proportionately more criticism of Democrats and less criticism of Republicans than do the networks. Moreover, in the first direct test of Hypothesis 2 (Over-sampled Presidential Party Criticism) – which predicts that members of the president's party outside the administration will be shown more frequently on the evening news criticizing the war more than praising it -- the middle columns provide confirmation that the networks air more criticism than praise of the president and his administration from their Republican peers outside the executive branch. Somewhat surprisingly, the pattern for Fox also provides some support for this hypothesis, with 50% of rhetoric from Republicans outside of the administration being critical. The president himself does better, with about 2/3 of Fox evaluations regarding Iraq being positive, albeit with a tiny number of observations (nine evaluations).[15]

[15] Of course, if it were the case that most Republican rhetoric regarding the war was critical of the Bush Administration, this pattern could reflect the true mix of elite rhetoric. However, as we have discussed here and elsewhere (Baum and Groeling n.d.) – and elsewhere have provided supporting evidence (Baum and Groeling 2005, 2006) -- such a pattern fundamentally conflicts with the Party's self-interest and, hence, is highly improbable.

Of course, thus far we have examined rhetoric in isolation, with relatively little consideration of the events to which those speakers might be responding. In Figure 7, we test Hypothesis 1 -- which predicts that major events in Iraq will prompt relatively larger increases in negative than positive coverage of the war -- by examining the relationship between rhetoric and developments in Iraq. Our evaluation-level logistic regression employs the prior week's discounted expert assessment of the conditions in Iraq to predict whether the current broadcast is likely to air either supportive or critical evaluations related to Iraq (praise=1, criticism=0).[16] To allow distinct slopes (that is, marginal effects) for "good" versus "bad" situations in Iraq, we include a separate variable accounting only for negative event values. Each of the curves plotted in Figure 7 transforms logit coefficients (shown in a box in each chart) into probabilities and plots the predicted blend of criticism and praise that will result from each positive or negative development in Iraq.

[Figure 7 here]

Consistent with H1 (Negativity), the network results generally show a strong, significant relationship between criticism and both negative *and* positive event outcomes in Iraq. In other words, rather than seeing bad events associated with more criticism and good events associated with less (which would be indicated by a downward sloping line), or no relationship between event valence and criticism (which would produce a flat line), we find that in many cases the increased salience of major events seems to produce increased criticism regardless of the tenor of those events. This trend is particularly pronounced on the networks, where every breakdown of rhetoric follows these same patterns except evaluations by the Republican party of all targets (where the curve is insignificant and flat).

Fox shows a similar v-shaped curve for overall evaluations and evaluations of Iraq (albeit

[16] We exclude non-evaluative statements or statements not about Iraq.

insignificant in the latter case), but far different results in other cases. When Republicans are the source of the evaluation, for example, Fox follows precisely the opposite pattern, with the highest level of praise occurring when no events are taking place in Iraq. Conversely, Democrats appearing on Fox reveal an insignificant, yet downwardly sloped, change in their evaluations overall. Perhaps most interestingly, for Republican evaluations of the Bush administration appearing on Fox, while negative events significantly increase the probability of criticizing the administration, positive events do *not* decrease the probability of criticism (a potential floor effect, as the non-event level of criticism is only about 10%).[17] Democrats evaluating the administration fall back into the familiar v-shaped pattern, wherein increased attention to major events in Iraq leads to increases in criticism, even when those events are positive (although it should be noted that, perhaps in something of a nod to "reality", the curve for positive results is significantly flatter – that is, less critical -- than that for negative events).

Finally, we turn to tests of our final media content prediction: H7 (Elasticity of Reality) – which predicts that, over time, the tenor of media coverage of a conflict will increasingly resemble "reality." To test this hypothesis, we return to the event-based analysis of Figure 7, but focus on evaluations of the administration and divide our sample in half (Early=2004 and 2005, Later=2006 and 2007). The resulting logit predicted values and equations are shown in Figure 8.

[Figure 8 here]

If one assumes that a downward sloping line is a good approximation of "resembling objective indicators of reality" in a case where the x-axis represents a shift from worst-possble to best-possible events, we find at least some support for H7 (Elasticity of Reality) in each pair of

[17] It is also interesting to compare the evaluations of the administration by Republicans on the Networks vs. Fox. While the proportion of criticism for negative events actually appears pretty similar across the two venues, for positive events the networks increasingly show criticism by Republicans, while Fox's distribution levels out at a high level of praise.

charts. In every case but the early Republican evaluations on Fox, positive events in Iraq correlate significantly with increases in criticism. In every later case, those positive event curves flatten to insignificance or, in some instances, even become downward-sloped. The changes for Republican evaluations are particularly striking. On Fox, the curve changes from almost complete, flat support of the president to a fairly (albeit insignificant) downwardly-sloped line.

The changes for Republican evaluations on the networks are even more extreme (and in this case, statistically significant). During the earlier period, network coverage of Republicans was actually skewed such that negative events were strikingly less likely than positive ones to correlate with criticism. In the later period, network broadcasts of Republican evaluations shift to a more "realistic" downward-sloped curve, albeit one that is only marginally significant.

A similar pattern emerges for Democrats on the networks., Once again, the early evaluations reveal both positive and negative events associated with a significant increase in criticism. The significant positive slope subsequently reverses, becoming negative, albeit insignificantly so, in later periods, again suggesting a closer connection between rhetoric and events on the ground.

Public Opinion Hypotheses

Before presenting our public opinion hypothesis tests, it is important to bear in mind that the audience for network news (in 2006, an average of 18.3 million viewers for CBS and NBC combined) is over 13 times that for FOX during prime time (in 2006, an average of 1.38 million viewers), on average.[18] In addition to directly reaching a far larger audience, the major network newscasts are also more representative of the traditional national news media. Indeed, they are arguably the quintessential examples of the so-called "mainstream news media." Despite the considerable loss of audience over the past several decades, network newscasts continue to reach

[18] Source: http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2007/

dramatically larger audiences than any other single news outlet. Consequently, we can be reasonably confident that a substantial portion of the public – including Democrats, Republicans, and Independents – has consumed either network news or something similar to it. In contrast, FOX remains a niche news outlet, with an overwhelmingly conservative and Republican audience (Baum and Groeling 2007; Baum and Gussin n.d.). It is therefore unclear whether changes in coverage on FOX are likely to be reflected in comparable changes in the overall mix of information consumed by typical Americans. Even if we were to observe significant opinion effects, we would not have sufficient confidence that the relationship was causal, rather than merely masking some omitted third factor driving changes on both sides of the equation. Consequently, for our public opinion hypothesis tests, we focus on the network news rhetoric series.

It is also important to note that because we employ "smoothed" series for our dependent variables – which was necessary due to the diverse question formats and wordings employed to construct the series – it is especially difficult to isolate the marginal effects of causal variables on the remaining changes in the series. This is because the smoothing process, by definition, wipes away much of the variation in a series between time t and time t+1. As a consequence, many of the main effects we report are substantively modest. However, in some instances (e.g., when events are perceived as going badly in Iraq), the effects of rhetoric are fairly substantial, despite the smoothed format of the dependent variables.

With these important clarifications in mind, we turn to our results, beginning with the Partisan (H4), Costly (H5) and Combined (H6) Credibility Hypotheses. The dependent variables for these analyses are changes in Democratic, Republican, and Independent support for the Iraq war, while the key causal variables measure the number of instances of praise or criticism of the

president by either party during a given week, employing the previously described *100-day discounted cumulative* weight factor. Table 3 presents the results from 6 OLS analyses testing Hypotheses 4-6 and 11.

[Table 3 here]

Beginning with party identifiers, Models 1 and 2 in Table 3 investigate the effects of elite rhetoric on the network news on Democratic and Republican partisans, respectively. Among Democrats, these results support the Partisan (H4), Costly (H5), and Combined (H6) Credibility Hypotheses. One positive evaluation of the war by a Democrat on the network news, which should (per H6) have the strongest persuasive impact for Democratic partisans, is associated with about a .042 percentage point decrease in approval ($p \leq .05$). The 75th percentile of Democratic praise in a given week in our data set – a relatively, but not exceptionally, high figure – is 38 positive evaluations (weighted by our 100-day decay process). With all other rhetoric types held constant at their mean values, this would be associated with about a 1.6 percentage point increase in war support among Democrats. As predicted, this is the largest substantive effect across the four types of rhetoric. In contrast, the effect of Republican praise, which lacks both partisan and costly credibility for Democratic partisans, is small and insignificant. In addition, a negative evaluation by a Republican, which should (per H5) have a greater persuasive impact than "cheap talk" Republican criticism, is associated with about a .0033 percentage point decrease in Democratic approval ($p \leq .08$). In this instance, the 75th percentile of negative Republican evaluations in a given week is about 107 (again, weighted by our 100-day decay process). All else equal, this amount of negative rhetoric would be associated with about a .35 percentage point decrease in Democratic approval.

Presumably due to the combination of partisan credibility (H4) and the relatively greater

costliness of criticism in wartime (H5), Democratic criticism has a significant negative effect on war support. Each negative evaluation by a Democrat is associated with about a .0075 percentage point decrease in war support among Democrats ($p \leq .001$). In this instance, the 75th percentile of negative Democratic evaluations in a given week is 122 (as before, weighted by our 100-day decay process). All else equal, this amount of negative rhetoric would be associated with nearly a one-percentage-point decrease in Democratic approval. Consistent with H5 and H6, in turn, the effects of positive Democratic evaluations are significantly greater than those of negative Democratic evaluations ($p \leq .001$). Finally, it is worth noting that the difference in the effects of relatively costly rhetoric (support by Democrats vs. criticism by Republicans) is itself statistically significant ($p \leq .001$), while that for relatively cheap talk (support by Republicans vs. criticism by Democrats) is far smaller in magnitude and statistically insignificant.

Turning to Republican identifiers (shown in Model 2 of Table 3), consistent with H4 (Partisan Credibility), each critical Republican evaluation on the network news is associated with about a .0053 percentage point decrease in war support ($p \leq .01$). At the 75th percentile, we observe about 106 such evaluations. At this level of criticism, the predicted effect is nearly a .6 percentage point decrease in war support among Republican identifiers. Consistent with H5 and H6, this effect is far more significant than (albeit statistically indistinguishable in magnitude from) the corresponding effect of "cheap talk" Republican praise, which is associated with no significant effect. The corresponding effect of a critical Democratic evaluation is a .006-point decrease in war support ($p \leq .001$). At the 75th percentile (122 evaluations), this corresponds to about a three-quarters-of-one-point decrease in war support. The difference between the effects of criticism by Republican and Democratic elites is statistically insignificant. On their face, these patterns appear inconsistent with H5. However, given that, as we have argued, criticizing a war is riskier, and hence tends to be

more costly, than other types of partisan criticism, the relatively large effect of negative Democratic evaluations is arguably not inconsistent with the theory.

More unambiguously consistent with H5, each costly positive Democratic evaluation is associated with almost a .05-point increase in support among Republicans ($p \leq .001$). At the 75th percentile (38 positive Democratic evaluations), this corresponds to an increase in war support of nearly 2 percentage points. Contrary to H6, however, the marginal effect of one negative Republican evaluation is smaller than that for a positive Democratic evaluation (.05 vs. .005 percentage points). Finally, as before, the difference in the effects of relatively costly rhetoric (support by Democrats vs. criticism by Republicans) is statistically significant ($p \leq .001$), while that for relatively cheap talk (support by Republicans vs. criticism by Democrats) is tiny in magnitude and statistically insignificant.

Model 3 in Table 3 presents the results for Independents. These results mostly, albeit imperfectly, support H5 (Costly Credibility). A costly positive evaluation by a Democrat yields a relatively large, (.017) and statistically significant ($p \leq .06$) increase in war support, while a cheaper (albeit less so in wartime) negative Democratic evaluation yields about a .008-point *decrease* in approval ($p \leq .001$). The difference in the effects of positive and negative Democratic evaluations is significant at $p \leq .001$. At the 75th percentile, the respective effects of positive (negative) evaluations (38 and 122 such evaluations, respectively) are increases (decreases) of about two-thirds of a (one) percentage point.

Somewhat surprisingly, and contrary to H5, a cheap talk positive Republican evaluation is associated with a statistically significant ($p \leq .05$) .008 percentage point increase in war support among Independents. At the 75th percentile (76 such evaluations, weighted by our 100-day decay process), this represents about a .61-point increase in war support. Though we cannot be sure why

Independents respond favorably to such cheap talk, we suspect the reason is that much of this rhetoric emanates from the Bush Administration, which is the most authoritative source for information about the Iraq conflict. Given that, unlike Democrats, Independents are not inclined for partisan reasons to dismiss Bush Administration rhetoric, it is therefore understandable that, at least for much of our series, Independents would tend to treat rhetoric from the Administration as at least somewhat credible.

Finally, again among Independents, criticism of the conflict by Republicans is associated with a nearly significant ($p \leq .15$) – albeit somewhat smaller in magnitude relative to Republican praise – .003 point decrease in war support among Republicans. At the 75th percentile (106 such evaluations), this represents an increase in war support of about .34 percentage points. While the nearly significant effects of Republican criticism are weakly consistent with H5, the smaller magnitude of such effects, relative to Republican praise, is not consistent with the hypothesis. Finally, as with partisan respondents, the difference in the effects of relatively costly rhetoric (support by Democrats vs. criticism by Republicans) is statistically significant ($p \leq .05$), while that for relatively cheap talk (support by Republicans vs. criticism by Democrats) is smaller in magnitude (differences of .74 vs. .57), albeit in this instance significant ($p \leq .01$).

We turn next to H11 (Bad News). This hypothesis predicts that elite rhetoric will exert a stronger influence on public attitudes about the war is proceeding relatively poorly (that is, when objective indicators of the state of the war are relatively negative). To test this hypothesis, we add an interaction between each type of rhetoric and our previously described summary expert assessment scale regarding the state of events in Iraq. The results for Democratic, Republican, and Independent identifiers are shown in Models 4 through 6, respectively, in Table 3. For ease of interpretation, Table 4 then presents the predicted effects of moving from the 25th to 75th percentile on the expert

summary evaluation scale (from fairly bad to fairly good). In each instance, the hypothesis predicts larger and more significant effects when events are going poorly. As we will see, this is precisely what we find in a majority of instances. In many, but not all, cases, the predicted effects of partisan rhetoric when events are perceived as going poorly are indeed larger than those described in our initial tests.

[Table 4 here]

Beginning with Democrats, for three of the four types of rhetoric, the effects are statistically significantly larger when events are going poorly (defined as the 25th percentile on the summary expert evaluation scale), relative to when they are perceived as going well (the 75th percentile on the scale). The sole exception is Democratic praise, which exerts comparable positive effects regardless of the state of events: about a one percentage point increase in war support at the 75th percentile when things are going badly, compared to about a 1.4 point increase when things are going well. The positive effect of Republican praise is about 2.6 percentage points greater when events are going relatively poorly (1.5 vs -.90, $p \leq .05$), while the negative effect of Democratic criticism of the war is a little less than 1 percentage point greater when events are going poorly (-1.05 vs. .14, $p \leq .15$). Finally, costly Republican criticism, at the 75th percentile, is associated with over a 1.2 percentage point greater decrease in war support when events are going poorly, relative to when they are going relatively well (-1.24 vs. .02, $p \leq .10$).

Among Republican identifiers, the results are mixed. As shown in Table 4, the effects of three of the four types of rhetoric are larger when events are going poorly (again defined as the 25th percentile on the summary expert evaluation scale), relative to when they are perceived as going well (the 75th percentile on the scale). However, only two of the four differences are statistically significant ($p \leq .10$), with one of these two being the exception to the predicted pattern. Consistent

with our hypothesis, the positive effect of Democratic praise is about 2 percentage points greater when events are going relatively poorly (2.9 vs .89, $p \leq .10$), while, contrary to our expectations, the negative effect of Democratic criticism of the war is about 1.4 percentage points greater when events are going well (.19 vs -1.2, $p \leq .10$). Costly Republican criticism, at the 75th percentile, is associated with about a 1.2 percentage point greater decrease in war support when events are going poorly, relative to when they are going relatively well (-1.2 vs. .06, insig.), while relatively cheaper Republican praise, at the 75th percentile, is associated with about a 1.3 percentage point greater decrease in war support when events are going poorly, relative to when they are going relatively well (-1.6 vs. .30, insig.), These latter two differences, though consistent in valence with our predictions, are statistically insignificant and, hence, represent at most suggestive evidence in support of the hypothesis.

Among Independents the results are again mixed. As before, the effects of three of the four rhetoric types are larger in magnitude when events are going badly. However, none of these differences are statistically significant. In terms of the absolute magnitudes of effects, the exception to the predicted pattern is cheap talk Republican praise. The positive effect of Democratic praise of the war is about 1 percentage point greater when events are going relatively poorly (98 vs. -.02, insig.), while the negative effect of Democratic criticism is about .5 percentage points greater when events are going poorly (-.93 vs. -.44, insig.). Finally, the negative effects of Republican criticism are slightly larger, albeit insignificantly so, when events are going badly (-.54 vs. -.41). However, because none of these differences are statistically significant, they must be considered at most modestly supportive of the hypothesis.

Next we evaluate Hypotheses 8 (Longer-term Communication Effects), 9 (Longer-term Reality Effects), and 10 (Rhetoric vs. Reality). These hypotheses predict that the influence of both

elite rhetoric and objective indicators of the state of the conflict will recede, over time, as the public reaches a relatively firm judgment about events, and that the former decline will exceed the latter in magnitude. Unfortunately, we lack sufficient statistical leverage to directly (and properly) model the effects of time in interaction with our various indicators of rhetoric and reality. Consequently, we turn to a simpler, albeit less definitive test, based on a comparison of Adjusted R2 values for models including only the rhetoric variables on the one hand, and the reality indicators on the other. Specifically, for each partisan subgroup (Democrats, Republicans, and Independents), we run basic OLS models containing only the variables of interest. We compare models restricted to the first half of our time series (September 1, 2004 through December 4, 2007) with identical models restricted to the second half of the series (December 5, 2005 through February 28, 2007). Table 5 presents the results of these tests.

[Table 5 here]

Beginning with the rhetoric-only models, the top half of Table 5 indicates that in the first half of our series, the Adjusted R2 for models with Democratic, Republican, and Independent war support as the dependent variables are .49, .21, and .42, respectively. The corresponding values for the second half of the series are .22, .02, and .18 respectively. This represents a decline in the amount of variance accounted for by variations in the explanatory variables (that is, partisan rhetoric) of .27, .19 and .24 points, respectively, for an overall average decline across the three partisan subgroups of .24 points. These results are consistent with H10.

Turning to the models including only our objective indicators of events (expert assessments, weighted U.S. casualties, weighted Iraqi casualties, and monthly change in weighted U.S. casualties), the bottom half of Table 5 indicates that the Adjusted R2 values for the first half of our series are .61, .12, and .31, for Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, respectively. For the

second half of the series, the corresponding Adjusted R2 values are .09, .18, and .20. Consistent with H11, this represents declines for Democrats and Independents of .52 and .11 points between the first and second halves of our series (weeks 1-66 vs. weeks 67-131). However, contrary to H11, among Republicans we observe an increase of .06 points. Hence, the overall average change between the first and second halves of the series is a decline of .18 points. As predicted by H12, the decline is thus one-third larger for elite rhetoric than for our reality indicators. Taken together, while these tests are admittedly indirect, and hence represent only suggestive evidence, the patterns they reveal are, in five of six instances, precisely what one would anticipate if the marginal effects of variations in the objective state of the conflict and in elite rhetoric on public support for the war over time were declining, with the latter declining more than the former.

Conclusion

Shortly before this paper was finished, two MCs made important, unexpected, and countervailing statements about the war in Iraq. Sen. John Warner (R-VA), made headlines across the country and the world by calling for American troops to begin withdrawing from Iraq by Christmas 2007. In contrast, the very next day an Op-Ed appeared in the *Seattle Times* in which Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA), a longtime opponent of the war, praised the recent progress in the country and called for a continuation of the U.S. troop presence there. Since the two statements became public, the news media devoted far more coverage to Warner's statement than to Baird's.[19] While some of the difference likely stems from Warner's relatively prominent position within the Republican Party, it appears from our results that there is also substantially more demand for and impact from criticism, relative to praise, even on relatively pro-Bush Administration outlets like

[19] A Lexis-nexis search for the member's name within 30 words of "Iraq" for the week of Aug. 19-26 found 20 newswire reports and press releases for Baird, compared to 115 for Warner; 19 vs. 480 news transcripts, 6 vs. 36 newspaper stories; 0 vs. 2 magazine articles, and 5 vs. 13 indexed blog entries.

Fox.

Far from revealing a world in which politics stops at the water's edge, our data suggest that partisanship and negativity dominate war coverage in contemporary America. Especially in early stages of the war, the rhetoric passing through America's airwaves bore little resemblance to the situation on the ground in Iraq. We also observe relatively little similarity in the rhetoric devoted to the same topic flowing across competing television channels. It is therefore unsurprising that the Iraq War has been so polarizing in the public sphere: each side has received a steady diet of criticism of the other party, with relatively little positive news filtering through to the public.

Our analysis of the effects of this rhetoric on public opinion revealed patterns in most respects similar to overall patterns in public responses to elite rhetoric in general (Groeling 2001) and with respect to foreign policy (Baum and Groeling n.d.). While the necessary smoothing of the series clearly moderated the magnitudes of these effects in many instances, the overall patterns indicate that both partisan and costly credibility have shaped public responses to the unfolding of events, and elite commentaries regarding those events, in Iraq.

Interestingly, and consistent with the assumptions underlying Figure 1, in the first half of our data series, elite rhetoric predicted changes in war support to a greater extent than our indicators of reality for two of three partisan subgroups (Republicans and Independents), while, in the second half of our series, the pattern reversed, with our reality indicators better predicting changes in war support for two of three partisan subgroups (again, Republicans and Independents). This suggests that as the elasticity of reality shrinks, over time, so too does the capacity of political elites to frame events to their own advantage, at least to the extent such frames contradict the tenor of actual events.

The ultimate implications of these findings for American foreign policy are thus ambiguous.

On the one hand, in such a media and public opinion environment, maintaining support for any foreign policy, much less a costly, protracted one, would seem to be ever more difficult for America's leaders than in the past. On the other, one might take heart from the apparent limitation on the capacity of elites to indefinitely manipulate public perceptions of reality. Sooner or later, it would seem, the public can discern the true merits of a conflict, to at least some degree, regardless of elite efforts to the contrary.

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Appendix: Events Series

Date	Expert Score	Details
12-Aug-04	0.54	8/12/2004: U.S., Iraqi Forces Prepare for Major Assaults in Najaf--Coalition forces launch offensive against outlaw militia loyal to radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in Kufa and Najaf.
14-Sep-04	-2.72	9/14/2004: U.S., Allies Dispute Annan on Iraq War--Kofi Annan stated that the Iraq war, "From our point of view and the U.N. charter point of view, it was illegal." For more infon, click here
16-Sep-04	2.53	9/16/2004: Strike Kills 60 Terrorists Near Fallujah--A strike on a compound near Fallujah killed approx. 60 terrorists Operation Hurricane.
01-Oct-04	-0.51	10/1/2004: "Scores Die" in Samarra Assault --U.S. and Iraqi government forces attack the insurgent-held city of Samarra in northern Iraq. U.S. says over 100 militants killed and 37 captured; local doctors say at least 80 people died, and 100 were wounded, including civilians.
07-Nov-04	-0.06	11/7/2004: Major US-led Offensive Against Insurgents in Falluja--State of emergency decreed on all the territory. More than 10,000 US soldiers and 2,000 Iraqi troops assault Fallujah. Operation al-Fajr. One of bloodiest battles.
21-Dec-04	-2.54	12/21/2004: Experts Investigating Source of Mosul Explosion--Attack on military dining facility in Mosul kills 22, wounds 78.
12-Jan-05	-3.41	1/12/2005: Official: U.S. calls off search for Iraqi WMDs--U.S. inspectors end their search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.
26-Jan-05	-3.08	1/26/2005: Deadliest Day for U.S. in Iraq War--Helicopter crash in western Iraq claimed the lives of 30 Marines and one sailor.
30-Jan-05	4.00	1/30/2005: Millions of Iraqis vote in their first free elections--An estimated eight million people vote in elections for a Transitional National Assembly. The Shia United Iraqi Alliance wins a majority of assembly seats.
28-Feb-05	-3.67	2/28/2005: Iraq Suicide Bomb Kills at least 125--At least 125 people are killed by a massive car bomb in Hilla. It is the worst single such incident since the US-led invasion.
04-Mar-05	-2.45	3/4/2005: Liberation of Italian journalist Giuliana Sgrena--Liberation of Italian journalist Giuliana Sgrena, during which secret Italian agent Nicola Calipari is killed by US fire. Berlusconi's government announce a partial withdrawal of Italian troops from the coalition.
16-Mar-05	1.28	3/16/2005: Iraqi Assembly Gets Off To Quiet Start--First meeting of the transitional National Assembly.
06-Apr-05	2.23	4/6/2005: Jalal Talabani elected as Iraq's new president --Parliament selects Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as president. Ibrahim Jaafari, a Shia, is named as prime minister.
09-Apr-05	-2.61	4/9/2005: Iraqis Protest on Anniversary of Saddam's Fall --Tens of thousands of demonstrators loyal to Shia cleric Muqtada Sadr march through Baghdad denouncing the US occupation of Iraq. Also insurgents kill 15 Iraqi soldiers.
28-Apr-05	3.05	4/28/2005: Iraqi lawmakers OK Cabinet--In a milestone move, Iraq's National Assembly chose a new government Thursday following three months of political wrangling in the wake of historic elections.
07-May-05	1.13	5/7/2005: Hunt for insurgents near Syria ends--Marines said they "successfully completed Operation Matador," a weeklong hunt for insurgents along the Syrian border; nine Marines and more than 125 insurgents dead.
15-May-05	2.23	5/15/2005: Iraqi Constitution Panel Formed--Formation of the parliamentary commission charged with drafting new Constitution.
18-Jul-05	-3.00	7/18/2005: Death Toll Rises to 100 in Suicide Blast--The death toll in suicide bombing in the southern Iraqi town of Musayyib reached 100.

22-Aug-05	2.39	8/22/2005: Iraqi Parliament Gets Draft of Constitution--Constitution's draft presented to the Iraqi Parliament.
31-Aug-05	-2.63	8/31/2005: More than 1,000 people are killed during stampede in Shia ceremony--Rumours of a suicide bomber cause panic amongst pilgrims on the shrine of the Imam Musa al-Kazim. Tigris River bridge.
14-Sep-05	-4.13	9/14/2005: 182 people are killed in attacks-Week-long surge of violence begins with suicide car bomb explosion in Baghdad's Oruba Square that kills 114, mostly Shia labourers. The same day, a suicide bomber attacks line of people waiting to fill gasoline cans, killing himself and 11 others. al-Qaeda in Iraq announces a countrywide campaign of violence in response to the military attack on the northern town of Talafar.
15-Oct-05	2.45	10/15/2005: Iraq draft constitution approved--Iraq's constitution was adopted by majority during the Oct. 15 referendum, as Sunni Arab opponents failed to muster enough support to defeat it. Constitution aims to create an Islamic federal democracy.
20-Oct-05	1.51	10/20/2005: Defiant Hussein, Lashing Out at U.S., Goes on Trial--Saddam Hussein on trial; charges of crimes against humanity.
19-Nov-05	-4.81	11/19/2005: Collateral Damage or Civilian Massacre in Haditha?--Time Magazine publishes its initial report of an alleged Nov 19, 2005 US massacre in Haditha in March of 2006.
15-Dec-05	3.69	12/15/2005: Iraqi Legislative Election--Iraqis vote for the first, full-term government and parliament since the US-led invasion.
22-Feb-06	-6.79	2/22/2006: Samarra Bombing--Bomb attack on an important Shia shrine in Samarra (Al Askari Mosque) unleashes wave of sectarian violence. Iraqi government estimates 379 people killed in subsequent attacks; Washington Post reported over 1,300 people killed.
22-Apr-06	2.31	4/22/2006: Iraqi compromise to end political deadlock--Newly re-elected President Talabani asks Shia compromise candidate Jawad al-Maliki to form a new government. Move ends four months of political deadlock.
24-Apr-06	-4.66	4/24/2006: Hamdania Incident--Marines allegedly abduct Iraqi civilian from house, kill him, and place components and spent AK-47 cartridges near body to make it appear he was planting an IED.
07-Jun-06	3.03	6/7/2006: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi Killed in Bombing Raid--Zarqawi, Al Qaeda in Iraq leader who led brutal campaign that included suicide bombings, kidnappings and beheadings, killed., or here
01-Jun-06	-1.97	6/1/2006: Withdrawal of Japanese Troops--Japan announces will begin withdrawing its approximately 600 ground troops from Iraq, after two US soldiers were kidnapped and tortured to death.
09-Jul-06	-4.56	7/9/2006: Mahmoudiya Case; Five soldiers charged in Iraq rape-murder--Four U.S. soldiers charged with participation in "rape and murder of a young Iraqi woman and three members of her family."
25-Jul-06	1.61	7/25/2006: Operation River Falcon--Operation aimed at denying terrorists use of Sayifiyeh as a safe haven, disrupting insurgent attacks and on collecting and destroying insurgent munitions.
20-Aug-06	-3.17	8/20/2006: Snipers kill 22--Sunni snipers killed at least 22 Shiites during pilgrimage in Baghdad.
01-Sep-06	-1.92	9/1/2006: US Maintains Operational Control Despite Plans to Transfer--Much-anticipated ceremony to transfer operational command from US-led forces to Iraq's new army postponed.
05-Nov-06	1.74	11/5/2006: Saddam, Co-Defendants Sentenced to Hang--Hussein found guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced to death. Hussein and six subordinates convicted and sentenced for 1982 killings of 148 people in Shiite town after an attempt on his life there.

08-Nov-06	4.00	11/8/2006: Democratic wins trigger Rumsfeld resignation--Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld resigns one day later. Bush appoints former CIA chief Robert Gates to replace him.
21-Nov-06	1.72	11/21/2006: Iraq and Syria restore relations--Iraq and Syria restore diplomatic relations after nearly a quarter century.
23-Nov-06	-3.64	11/23/2006: Car Bombings Increase--More than 200 die in car bombings in mostly-Shia Sadr City. An indefinite curfew is imposed after worst attack on the capital since the US-led invasion of 2003.
06-Dec-06	0.62	12/6/2006: Iraq Study Group Report--Iraq Study Group report describes Iraq situation as grave and deteriorating; warns of prospect of slide towards chaos.
30-Dec-06	-1.69	12/30/2006: Hussein Executed by Hanging--Executioners are videotaped taunting him, sparking protest.
11-Jan-07	0.14	1/11/2007: Bush: 'We need to change our strategy in Iraq'-- Bush announces new Iraq strategy: troop surge. Thousands more US troops will be dispatched to shore up security.
15-Jan-07	-1.33	1/15/2007: Head Severed in Botched Hanging--Saddam Hussein's half brother and the former head of Iraq's Revolutionary Court were both hanged.
12-Feb-07	-3.74	2/12/2007: Deadly bomb attacks in Iraq--Bomb in market kills more than 130 people. It is the worst single bombing since 2003. Twin car bombings explode in quick succession, killing at least 59 people and wounding 150. At least five others are killed in another bombing.
01-Mar-07	-3.37	3/1/2007: Hundreds Injured in Falluja and Ramadi --Insurgents detonate three trucks with toxic chlorine gas, injuring hundreds.
20-Mar-07	0.84	3/20/2007: Saddam's deputy hanged for crimes against humanity--Former VP Taha Yassin Ramadan is executed on the fourth anniversary of the US-led invasion.

TABLE 1. Newsworthiness, Novelty, and Credibility of Rhetoric Regarding President by Elites from Presidential Party (PP) and Non-Presidential Party (NPP)

	PP Praise	PP Criticism	NPP Praise	NPP Criticism
A. Newsworthiness of Partisan Evaluations of the President				
Novelty	Low	High	High	Low
Conflict	Low	High	Low	High
Balance	Low	Low	High	High
Authority (UG)	High	High	Low	Low
Authority (DG)	Low	Low	High	High
B. Change in Novelty During Salient Rally Periods				
Novelty During War	Lower	*Higher*	Lower	*Higher*

TABLE 2: Party and Costly Credibility, by Party of Speaker and Viewer

	Congressional Democrats			***Congressional Republicans***		
	Rep. viewer	Ind. viewer	Dem. viewer	Rep. viewer	Ind. viewer	Dem. viewer
	Attack Republican President			*Attack Republican President*		
Partisan Credibility	no	no	YES	YES	no	no
Costly Credibility	no	no	no	YES	YES	YES
	Praise Republican President			*Praise Republican President*		
Partisan Credibility	no	no	YES	YES	no	no
Costly Credibility	YES	YES	YES	no	no	no

TABLE 3. OLS Analyses of Effects of Media Coverage of Elite Rhetoric on Public Support for Iraq War

	(1) Democrats	(2) Republicans	(3) Independents	(4) Democrats	(5) Republicans	(6) Independents
War Support$_{t-1}$	-0.0463^	-0.0481	-0.0250	-0.0205	-0.0577	-0.0312
	(0.025)	(0.034)	(0.022)	(0.028)	(0.035)	(0.023)
Republican Support	-0.00448	-0.00729	0.00824*	-0.00523	-0.00846	0.00904*
	(0.0047)	(0.0050)	(0.0036)	(0.0052)	(0.0054)	(0.0040)
Democratic Support	0.0425**	0.0485***	0.0168^	0.0345*	0.0499***	0.0108
	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.0089)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.010)
Republican Criticism	-0.00327^	-0.00526*	-0.00323	-0.00348	-0.00314	-0.00465
	(0.0018)	(0.0020)	(0.0023)	(0.0021)	(0.0028)	(0.0030)
Democratic Criticism	-0.00747***	-0.00585***	-0.00787***	-0.00340	-0.00739**	-0.00513^
	(0.0021)	(0.0017)	(0.0018)	(0.0031)	(0.0026)	(0.0027)
Expert Event Assessment	-0.000701	-0.00245*	-0.000164	-0.00340**	-0.00539**	-0.00194
	(0.00081)	(0.0012)	(0.00093)	(0.0013)	(0.0019)	(0.0016)
U.S. Fatalities (decay)	0.00229**	-0.00124^	0.000176	0.00257**	-0.00121	0.000357
	(0.00078)	(0.00072)	(0.00078)	(0.00091)	(0.00080)	(0.00081)
Non-US Fatalities (decay)	-0.0000350	0.000111*	0.000116**	-0.0000560	0.000103*	0.000102*
	(0.000034)	(0.000047)	(0.000042)	(0.000035)	(0.000048)	(0.000041)
Change in U.S. Fatalities $_{t \text{ to } t-1}$	-0.000124	-0.000870	-0.000424	-0.000110	-0.000738	-0.000414
	(0.00063)	(0.00080)	(0.00073)	(0.00059)	(0.00075)	(0.00073)
Republican Support x Events	-------	-------	-------	-0.000542*	0.000368	0.0000721
				(0.00026)	(0.00031)	(0.00032)
Democratic Support x Events	-------	-------	-------	0.000186	-0.000777	-0.000413
				(0.00038)	(0.00048)	(0.00050)
Republican Criticism x Events	-------	-------	-------	0.000230*	0.000237	0.0000301
				(0.00011)	(0.00015)	(0.00014)
Democratic Criticism x Events	-------	-------	-------	0.000153^	-0.000151	0.0000877
				(0.000086)	(0.00011)	(0.00010)

Table 3, Continued

Praise minus Criticism (other sources)	-0.00217**	-0.00216**	-0.000822	-0.00210**	-0.00220*	-0.000756
	(0.00073)	(0.00078)	(0.00059)	(0.00070)	(0.00087)	(0.00062)
Divided Government	0.194*	0.228*	0.307***	0.261**	0.407**	0.416***
	(0.074)	(0.089)	(0.080)	(0.084)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Presidential Election Period	-0.0687	0.175	0.487***	-0.0791	0.136	0.514***
	(0.21)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.24)	(0.19)	(0.15)
Midterm Election Period	0.194***	-0.0508	0.107*	0.238***	-0.0412	0.142*
	(0.056)	(0.072)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.077)	(0.054)
# Iraq Stories in NY Times	0.0217	-0.00453	0.0322	-0.00641	-0.0134	0.0174
	(0.026)	(0.033)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.034)	(0.028)
Consumer Sentiment$_{t-1}$	-0.00326	-0.00871*	-0.00915**	-0.00261	-0.00675^	-0.00796*
	(0.0040)	(0.0035)	(0.0031)	(0.0039)	(0.0038)	(0.0031)
% Change CPI	-0.0134	0.0753*	0.00767	0.00915	0.0860*	0.0230
	(0.026)	(0.033)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.036)	(0.028)
Missing Network Observations	0.127**	-0.0146	0.0420	0.0688*	-0.0264	0.0181
	(0.040)	(0.055)	(0.047)	(0.034)	(0.055)	(0.045)
Week Counter	-0.00371	-0.00713^	-0.00542*	-0.00242	-0.00786*	-0.00576*
	(0.0024)	(0.0037)	(0.0027)	(0.0027)	(0.0039)	(0.0027)
Constant	0.851	4.744^	1.518	0.243	5.376^	1.678
	(0.60)	(2.69)	(0.98)	(0.65)	(2.81)	(1.03)
Observations	130	130	130	130	130	130
R-squared	0.61	0.43	0.56	0.66	0.46	0.58

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

TABLE 4. Effects of Rhetoric when Events in Iraq are Going Well vs. Badly

	Events Bad (25th Percentile)	Events Good (75th Percentile)	Difference
Democratic Identifiers			
Republican Praise	1.525	-1.088	2.613*
Democratic Praise	0.813	1.028	-0.215
Republican Criticism	-1.237	-0.018	-1.219^
Democratic Criticism	-1.047	-0.141	-0.906^^
Republican Identifiers			
Republican Praise	-1.596	-0.307	-1.289
Democratic Praise	2.891	0.888	2.003^
Republican Criticism	-1.211	-0.058	-1.153
Democratic Criticism	0.191	-1.200	1.391^
Independents			
Republican Praise	0.292	0.441	-0.149
Democratic Praise	0.978	-0.023	1.001
Republican Criticism	-0.538	-0.409	-0.129
Democratic Criticism	-0.928	-0.442	-0.486

*$p \leq .05$, ^ $p \leq .10$, ^^ $p \leq .15$

TABLE 5. OLS Analyses of Effects of Media Coverage of Elite Rhetoric and Objective Indicators of Events on Public Support for Iraq War, 9/1/04-12/4/05 (Weeks 1-66) vs. 12/5/05-2/28/07 (Weeks 67-131)

	(1) Democrats (Weeks 1-66)	(2) Democrats (Weeks 67-131)	(3) Republicans (Weeks 1-66)	(4) Republicans (Weeks 67-131)	(5) Independents (Weeks 1-66)	(6) Independents (Weeks 67-131)
Rhetoric Only						
Republican Support	0.00930*	0.000820	-0.00779***	-0.00310	0.00322*	0.00564
	(0.0042)	(0.0036)	(0.0021)	(0.0050)	(0.0015)	(0.0038)
Democratic Support	0.00478	-0.0261*	0.0355**	-0.0134	0.00393	-0.0481**
	(0.018)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.0092)	(0.014)
Republican Criticism	-0.0104*	-0.00179	-0.00677*	0.00142	0.00227	0.00332
	(0.0051)	(0.0018)	(0.0030)	(0.0029)	(0.0021)	(0.0023)
Democratic Criticism	0.00278	-0.000109	-0.00248	-0.0000919	-0.00749*	-0.00231
	(0.0062)	(0.00092)	(0.0045)	(0.0016)	(0.0037)	(0.0016)
Constant	-0.0410	0.0165	0.0401	-0.0758	-0.00614	-0.0859*
	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.036)	(0.048)	(0.030)	(0.041)
Observations	66	65	66	65	66	65
R-squared	0.49	0.22	0.21	0.02	0.43	0.18
"Reality" Only						
Expert Event Assessment	-0.00201**	-0.000583	-0.000742	-0.00283^	-0.000465	0.000609
	(0.00070)	(0.0011)	(0.0011)	(0.0014)	(0.00082)	(0.0014)
U.S. Fatalities (decay)	0.00388***	-0.00172	-0.00134^	-0.00303*	0.0000147	-0.00251*
	(0.00049)	(0.0011)	(0.00070)	(0.0013)	(0.00070)	(0.0012)
Non-US Fatalities (decay)	-0.000135***	0.00000175	0.0000885*	0.0000647*	0.0000698*	0.0000985***
	(0.000018)	(0.000020)	(0.000034)	(0.000032)	(0.000027)	(0.000025)
Change in U.S. Fatalities $_{t \text{ to } t-1}$	0.000557	-0.00248	-0.000564	-0.00175	-0.000834	-0.000722
	(0.00089)	(0.0019)	(0.0011)	(0.0022)	(0.0010)	(0.0023)
Constant	-0.535***	0.348	-0.0370	0.280	-0.311*	0.0904
	(0.088)	(0.22)	(0.11)	(0.24)	(0.12)	(0.24)
Observations	65	65	65	65	65	65
R-squared	0.61	0.09	0.12	0.19	0.31	0.20

Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

FIGURE 1. Communication vs. Reality Effects, Over Time

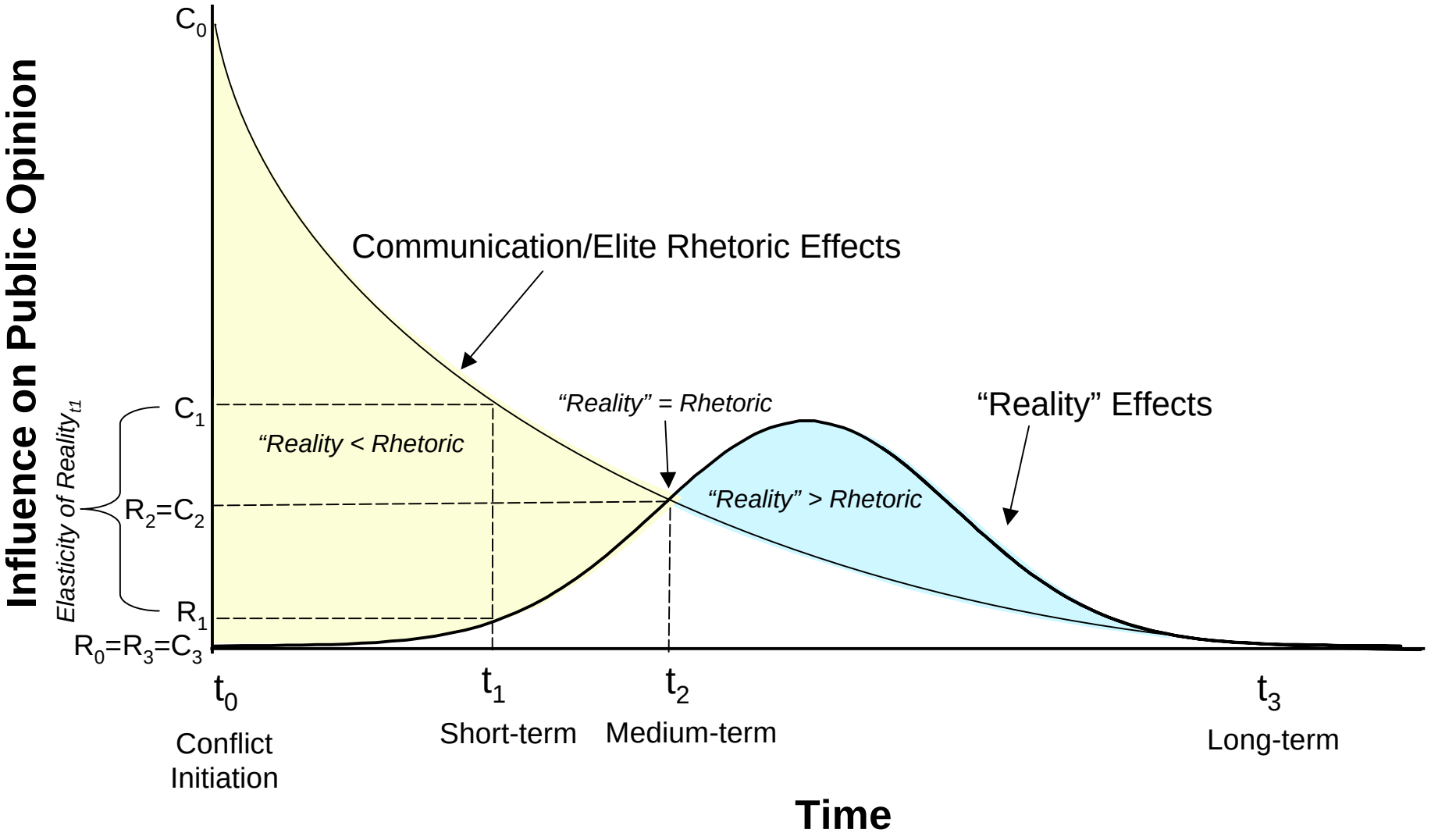


FIGURE 2: Illustration of 1/100th Daily Decay Function

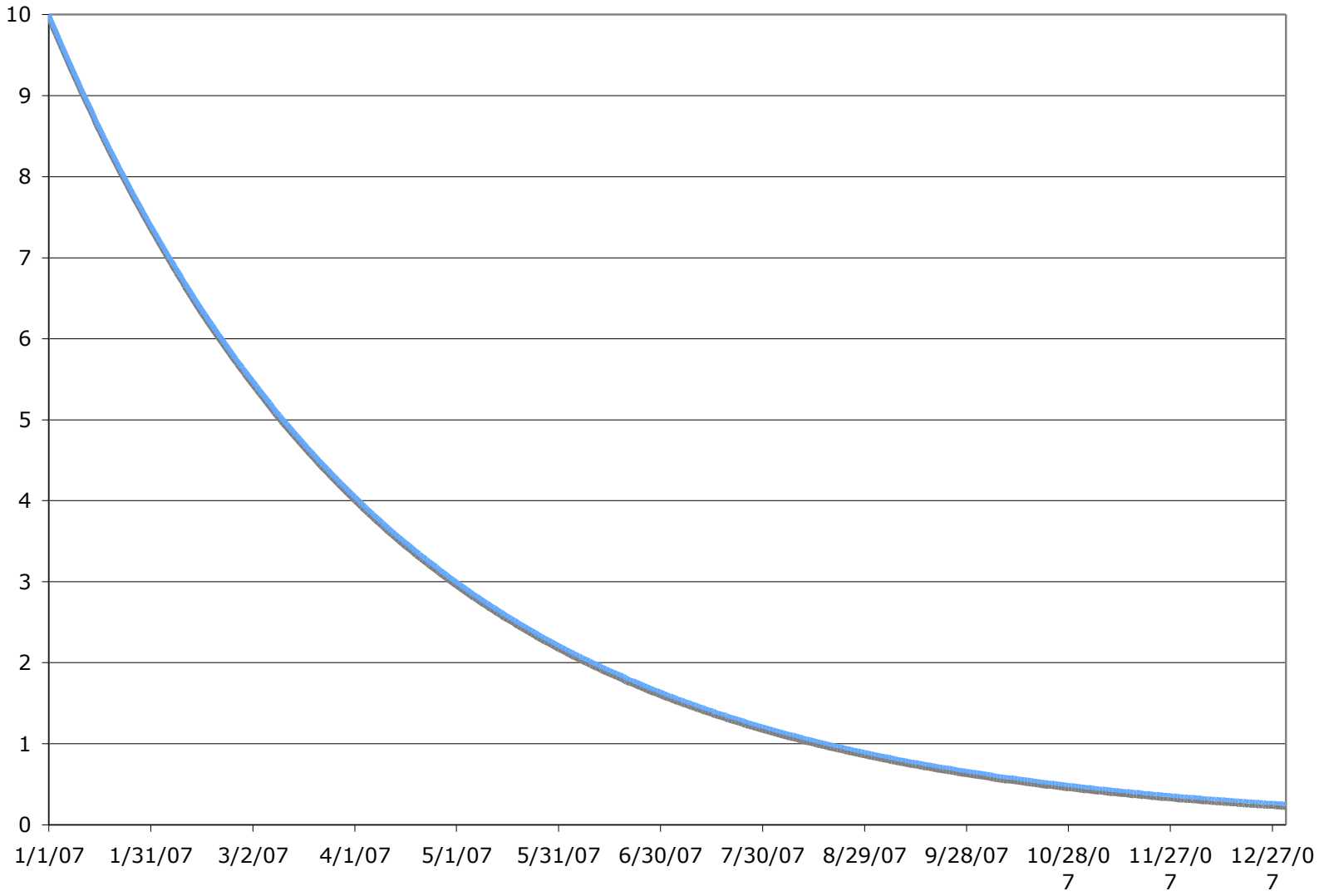
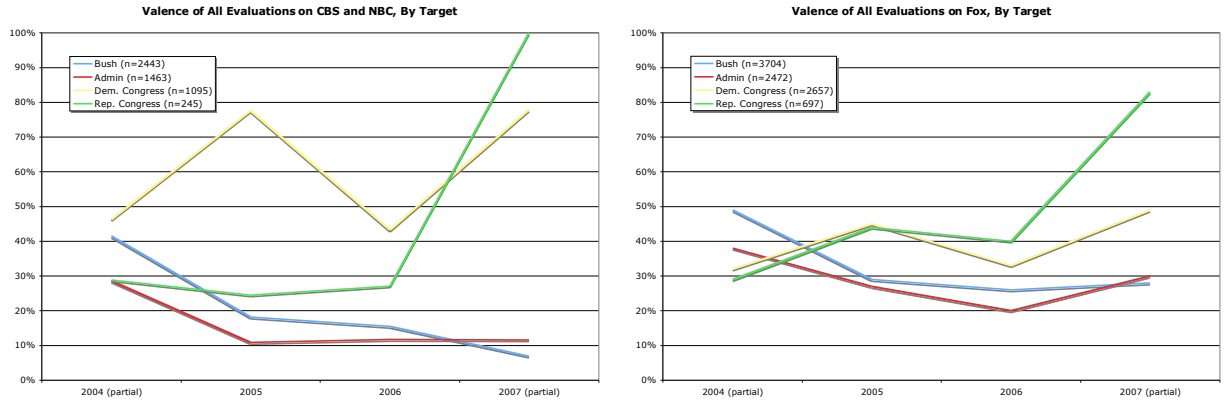


FIGURE 3: Overview of Partisan Evaluations



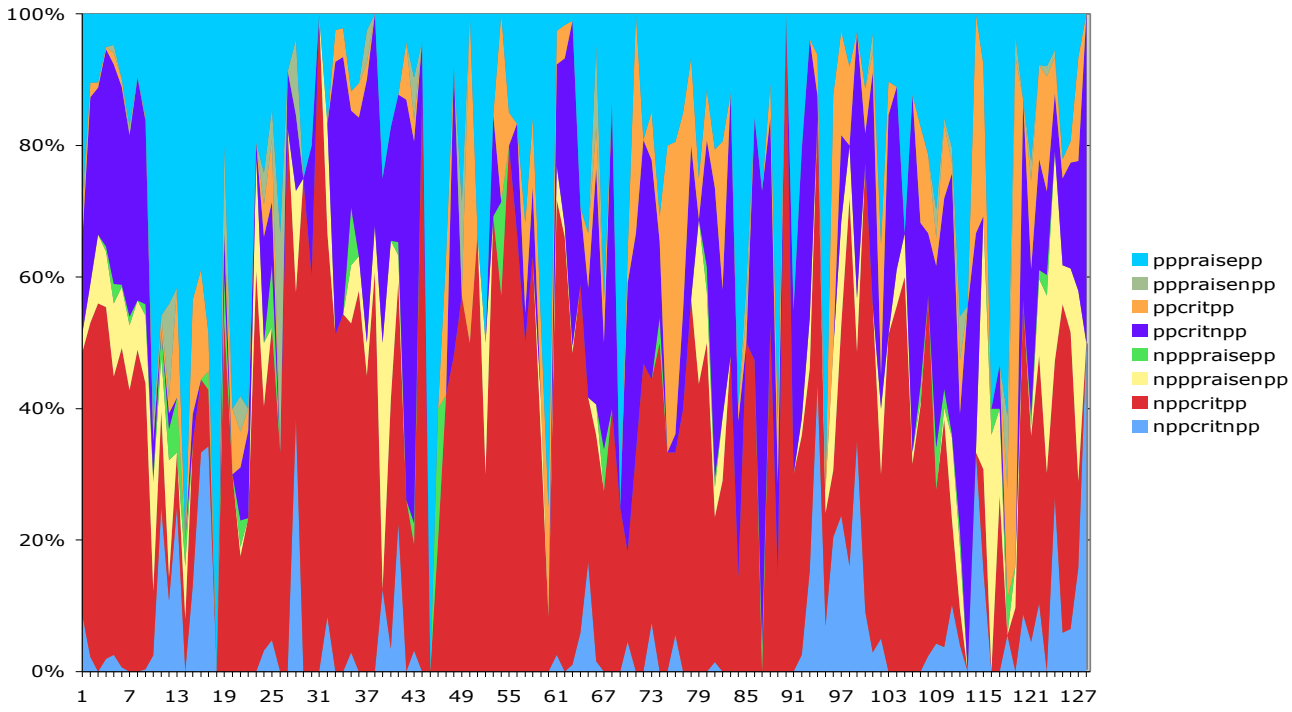
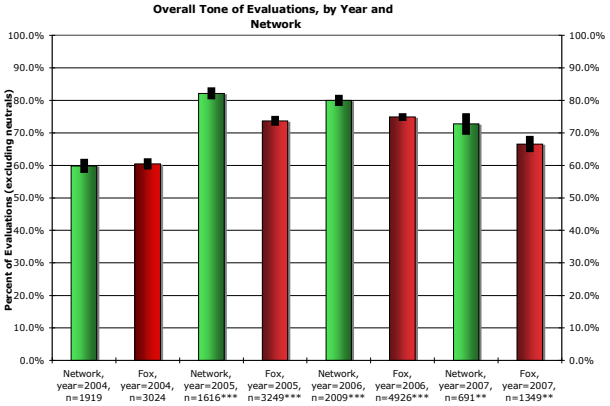
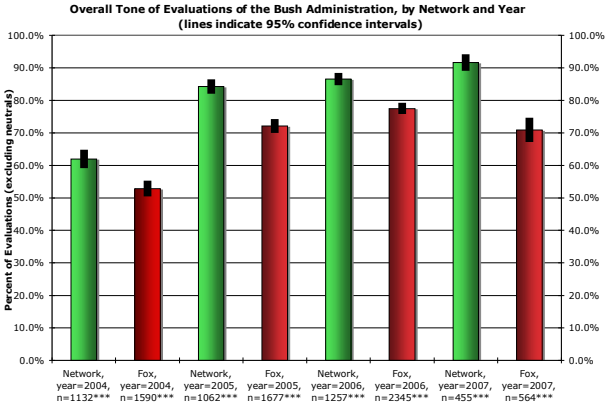
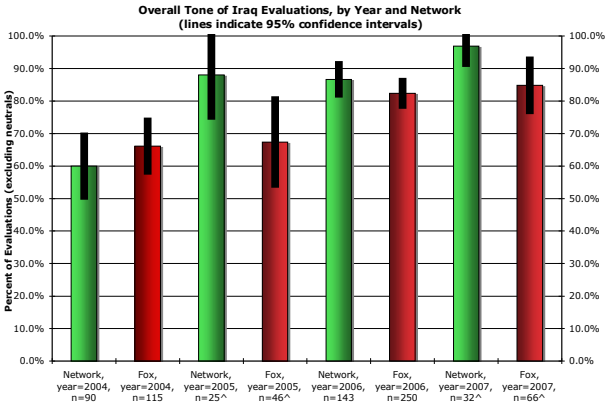


FIGURE 4: Valence of Evaluations, by Year







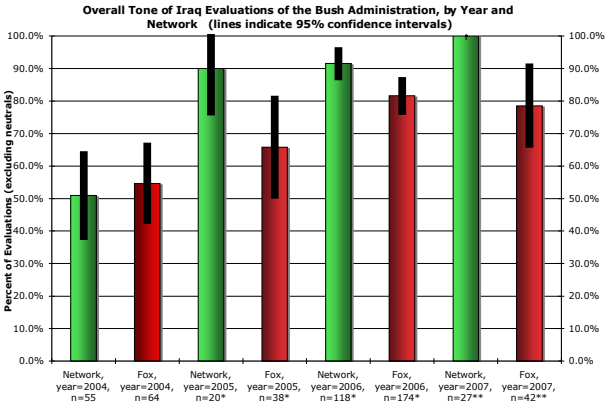


FIGURE 5: Evaluations on Fox versus Networks

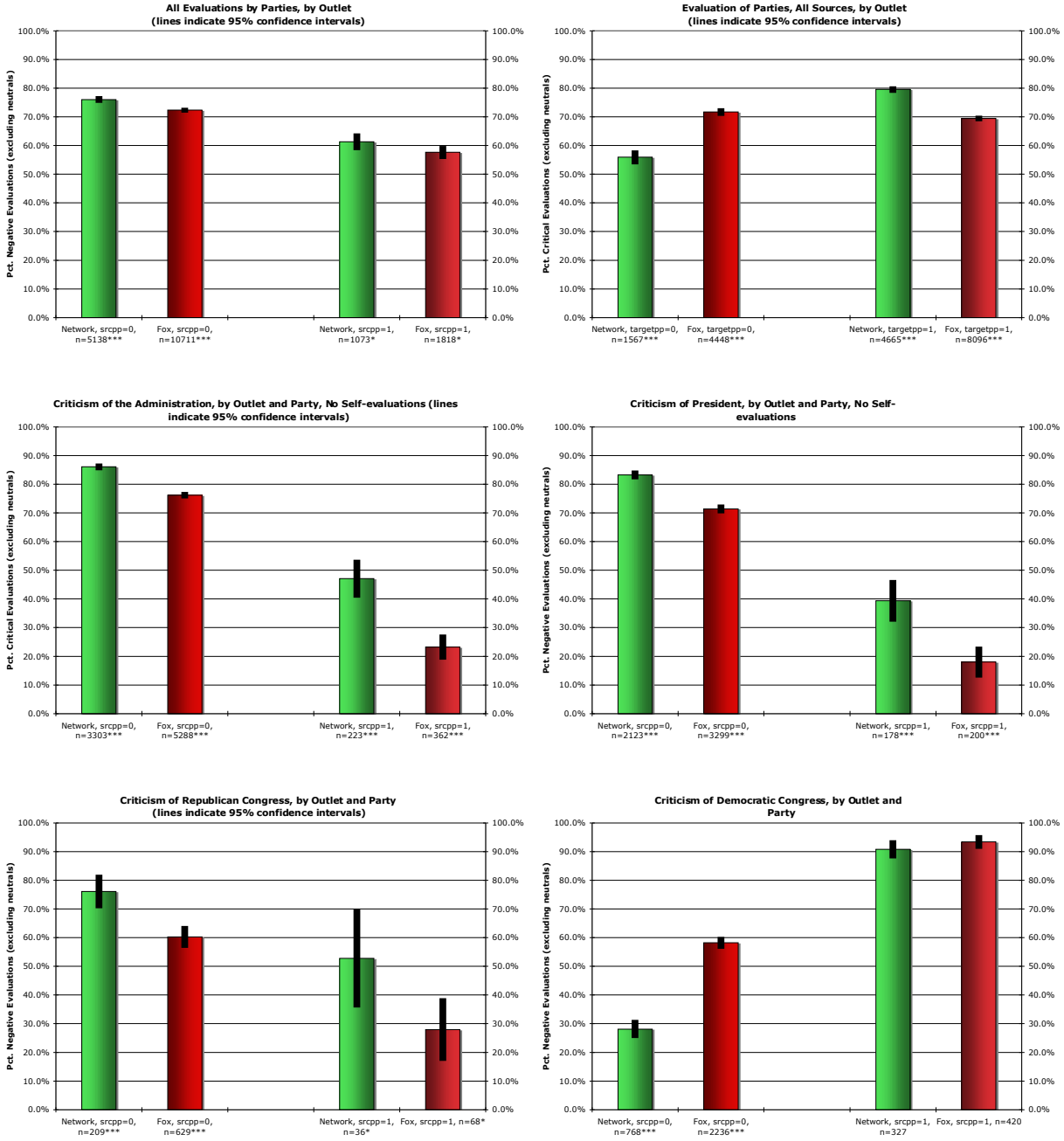
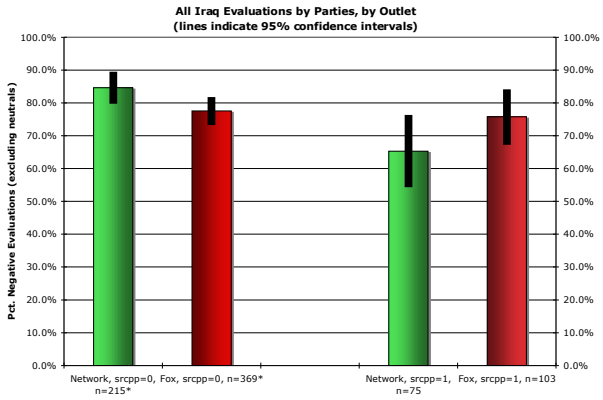
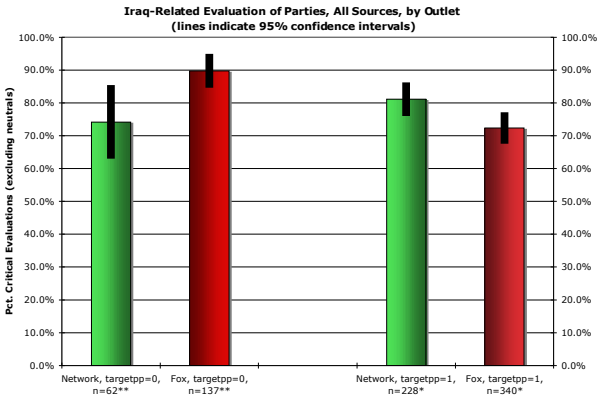
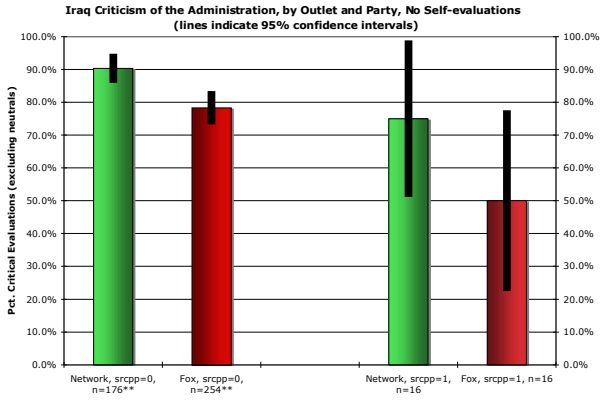
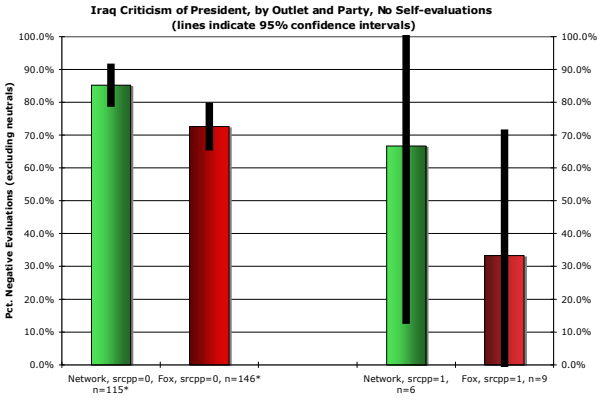


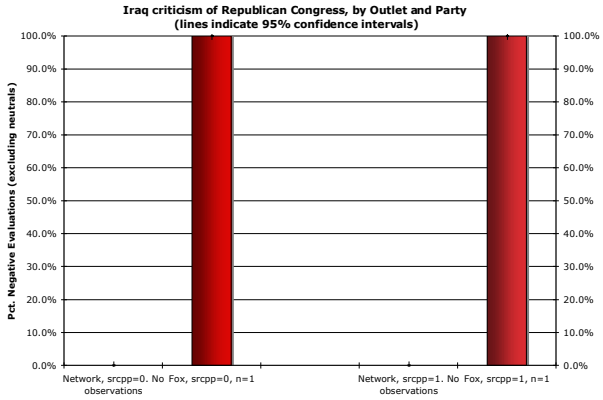
FIGURE 6: Iraq-Related Evaluations on Fox versus Networks











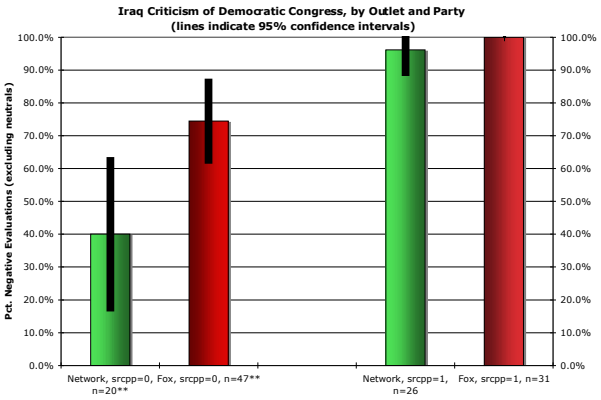
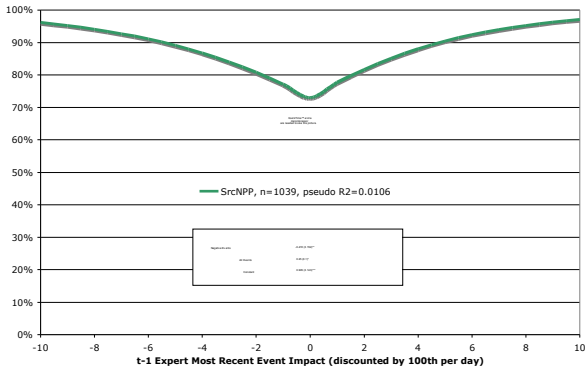


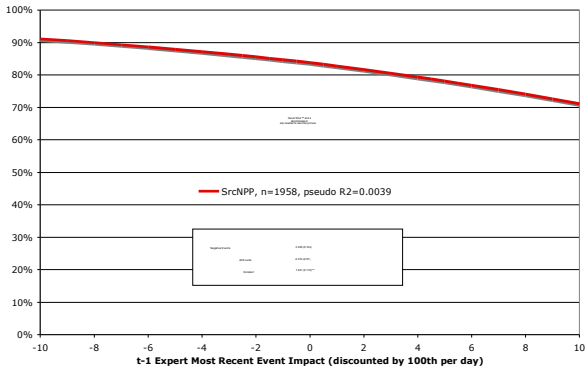
FIGURE 7: Events vs. Rhetoric, by Source, Target, Outlet, and Topic

Figure 7, continued

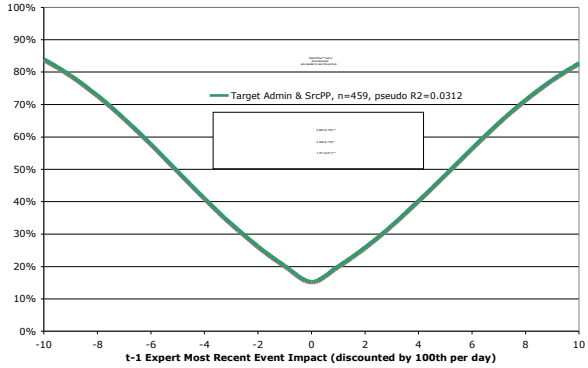
Source is Non-Presidential Party



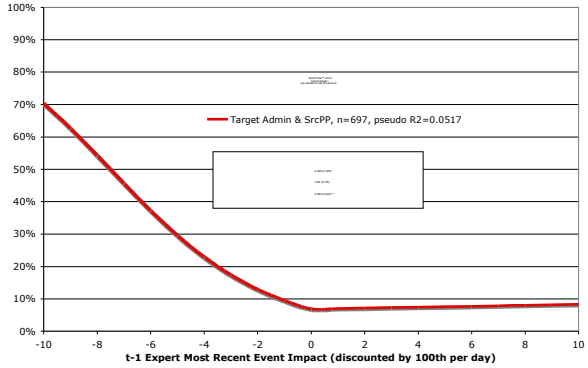
Fox Source is Non-Presidential Party



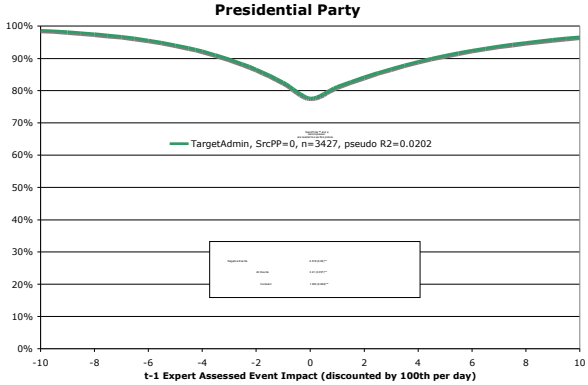
Network Evaluations of Administration by Presidential Party



Fox Evaluations of Administration by Presidential Party



Network Evaluations of Administration by Non-Presidential Party



Fox Evaluations of Administration by Non-Presidential Party

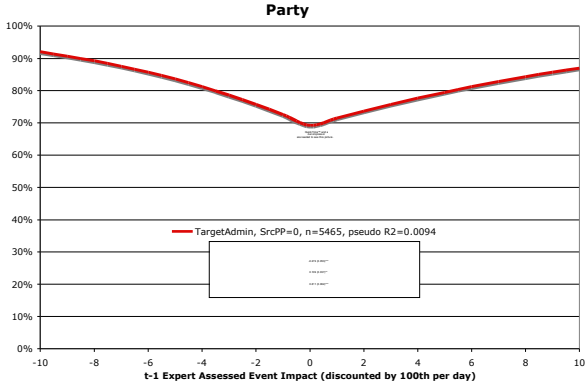
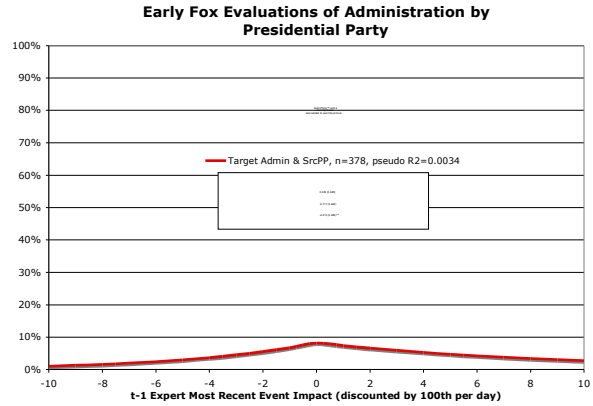
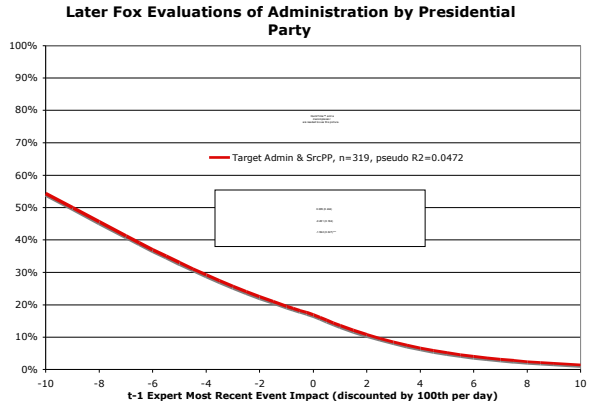
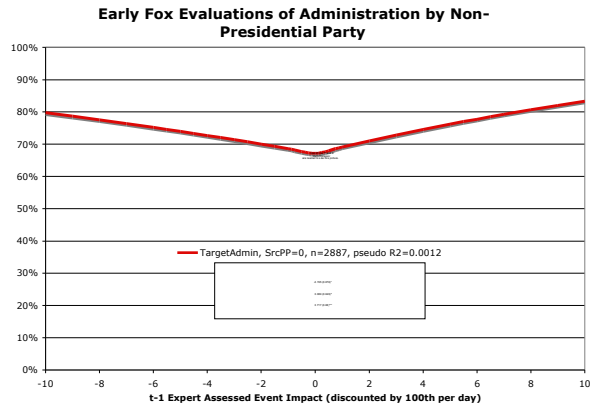
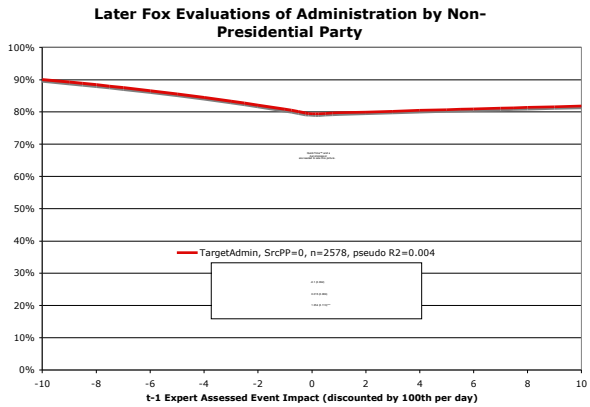


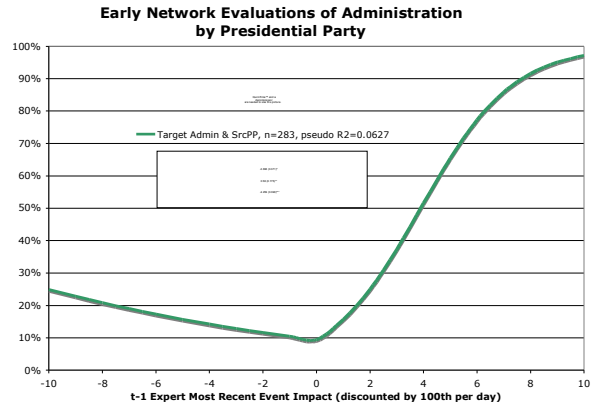
FIGURE 8: Rhetoric targeting Administration v. Events; Early (2004, 2005) versus Later (2006, 2007) , by Outlet and Party Source











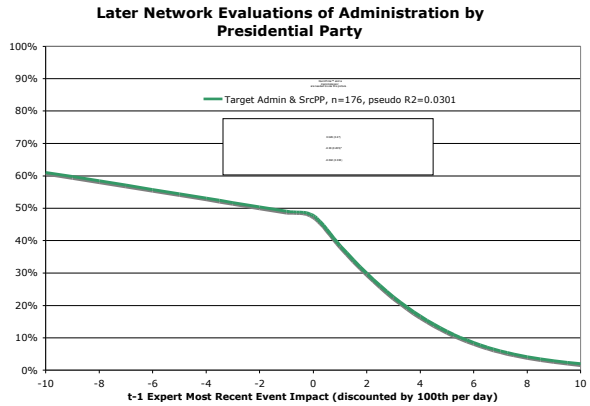
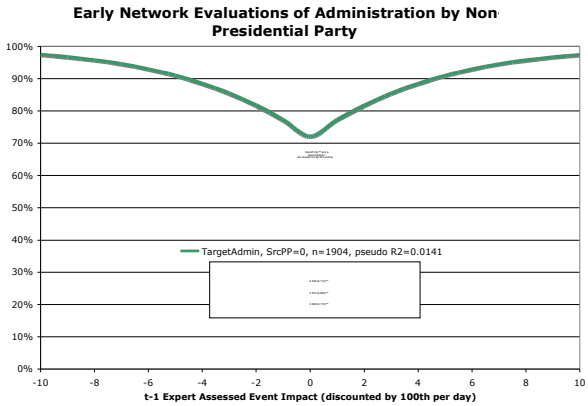
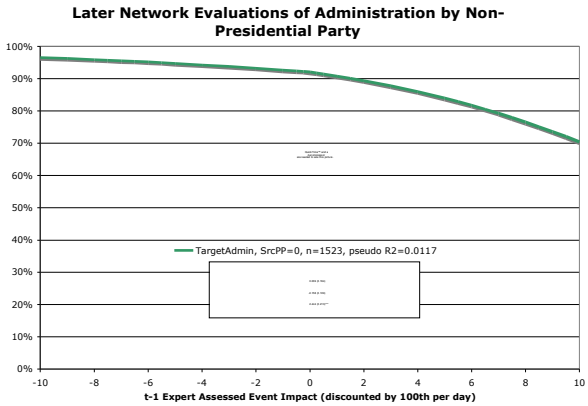


Figure 8, continued


Early Network Evaluations of Administration by Non-Presidential Party
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
-10
-8
-6
-4
-2
0
2
4
6
8
10
TargetAdmin, SrcPP=0, n=1904, pseudo R2=0.0141
t-1 Expert Assessed Event Impact (discounted by 100th per day)


Later Network Evaluations of Administration by Non-Presidential Party
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
-10
-8
-6
-4
-2
0
2
4
6
8
10
TargetAdmin, SrcPP=0, n=1523, pseudo R2=0.0117
t-1 Expert Assessed Event Impact (discounted by 100th per day)