

Crossing the Water's Edge: Elite Rhetoric, Media Coverage, and the Rally-Round-the-Flag Phenomenon

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The most widely accepted explanation for the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon is a relative absence of elite criticism during the initial stages of foreign crises. In this study we argue that the nature and extent of elite debate may matter less than media coverage of any such debate and that these often systematically diverge. We also argue that not all messages in this debate matter equally for public opinion. Rather, the persuasiveness of elite messages depends on their credibility, which, in turn, arises out of an interaction between the sender, receiver, and message. Hence, only by understanding the interactions between elites, the public, and the press can we account for variations in public responses to presidential foreign policy initiatives. We test our theory by examining public opinion data and a new dataset on network news coverage of all major U.S. uses of military force from 1979 to 2003. We content analyze all congressional evaluations of the president and the executive branch of government from the three network evening newscasts within 61-day time periods centered on the start date of each use of force. Our results offer strong support for the theory.

In August 2005, senators Chuck Hagel (R-NE) and George Allen (R-VA) appeared together on ABC's *This Week* to discuss the current and future status of American involvement in Iraq. The senators were of comparable stature; both were considered credible aspirants for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination, both were forceful and articulate for their respective positions, and both spoke for similar lengths of time. Yet in the two weeks following the interview, journalists broadcasted over 20 times more television stories about Hagel's criticism of the war than Allen's defense of it.¹ In this study, we argue that the differential coverage of these prominent Republicans was both predictable and representative of an important limitation in our understanding of the dynamics of public support for the president, especially in times of foreign policy crisis.

Scholars have long debated the causes and consequences of public support for the overseas application of military force (e.g., Almond 1950; Baum 2003; Eichenberg 2005; Holsti 2007; Lippmann 1934; Page

and Bouton 2006; Rosenau 1961). To explain variations in public support, research in this area 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 focus primarily on *longer-term* public opinion, arguing that a president's ability to sustain public support for a U.S. military engagement depends primarily on its degree of success (Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/2006; Kull and Ramsay 2001) or the number of U.S. casualties (Gartner and Segura 2000; Mueller 1973). Such explanations cannot, at least in many instances, account for the presence or absence of a public opinion rally at the *outset* of a military conflict, before the public observes either the ultimate costs or outcome (for a critique of these literatures, see Berinsky 2007).

¹Our search of Lexis-Nexis' online transcripts produced nine hits for stories that only mentioned Allen, and 277 that only mentioned Hagel (61 stories mentioned both).

Jentleson (1992), however, advances an event-based theory that can, at least potentially, account for both initial and longer-term public support for U.S. conflicts. He 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 (see also Eichenberg 2005; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner 1996). Yet recent research into both the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon (e.g., Baum 2002; Brody 1991), and, more generally, the framing of foreign policy (e.g., Entman 2004) calls this argument into question. Such scholarship has shown that public perceptions concerning 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).

For example, presidents routinely seek to frame their military actions as self-defense (e.g., Baum 2003; Perla 2005). At the individual level, most Americans know relatively little about foreign affairs (Berinsky 2007; Holsti 2007). Consequently, in determining whether to support or oppose a conflict, typical Americans are ill equipped to independently assess the president’s “true” motivations, especially in the short-term. Instead they rely on information shortcuts, or heuristic cues (Popkin 1994; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991), most notably the opinions of trusted political elites, primarily as reflected in the mass media. Trust, in turn, frequently hinges on one particularly accessible heuristic: party identification (Nelson and Garst 2005; Popkin 1994; Rahn 1993).² Individuals’ interpretations of heuristic cues depend in significant measure on their preexisting belief systems (Herrmann et al. 1997; Hurwitz and Peffley 1987 et al.), of which party identification is typically an important (Groeling 2001; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Nelson and Garst 2005; Popkin 1994; Rahn 1993), albeit incomplete (Holsti 2007), element. 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 scholarship focused on longer-term public support for overseas conflicts, research on the public’s *immediate* reactions to such events—the rally phenomenon—focuses far more on domestic politics in general, and on rhetoric by political elites in particular. In fact, the most widely accepted domestic political explanation for the rally phenomenon holds that the extent of elite—and particularly *congressional* (Althaus, Entman, and Phalen 1996; Bennett 1990; Hallin 1986; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner 1996; Zaller and Chiu 2000)—criticism of the president determines the magnitude of a post-use-of-force rally (Brody 1991; Brody and Shapiro 1989). We refer to this as the Opinion Indexing Hypothesis, reflecting the tendency of the public to “index” their opinions to the tenor of elite debate to which they are exposed.

A closely related “prevailing wisdom” in the literature holds that media coverage is itself “indexed” to elite rhetoric in Washington (e.g., Bennett 1990; Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2006; Entman and Page 1994; Hallin 1986; Zaller and Chiu 2000). We refer to this as the Media Indexing Hypothesis. The implication is that the media are largely passive and nonstrategic, faithfully reflecting the actual substance of elite debate, and especially that emanating from the most powerful elites (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2006). Indeed, since, as Brody (1991) recognizes, citizens are exposed to elite debate primarily through the media, the Opinion Indexing Hypothesis implicitly shares this assumption. 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).

In contrast, we argue that the nature and extent of media coverage of U.S. foreign policy crises is driven less by political elites constraining journalists than by commonly held professional incentives and norms that lead journalists to strongly prefer certain stories over others. For example, as Republican Senator Hagel found when he characterized the Iraq war as similar to Vietnam, highlighting discord within the president’s party represents an especially attractive story. Conversely, there is relatively little incentive to cover boosterism of the president by his own party, as George Allen discovered after his *This Week* appearance with Hagel.

²Individuals 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 versus internationalism (Herrmann et al. 1997; Holsti 2007). Still, elite communication plays an important role in priming such images and values and thereby framing events for individuals. While some research (Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999) has found that party ID is not a good predictor of public support for military conflict, party *does* mediate elites’ capacity to successfully frame events for different individuals (Druckman 2004).

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

Our theoretical framework draws on widely recognized characteristics of human information processing, elite incentives, and journalistic preferences. Taken individually, our assumptions are not novel. However, we argue that combining these relatively common assumptions—concerning the distinct preferences of the makers, transmitters, and receivers of news—yields a variety of non-obvious predictions. The implications of our argument, in turn, extend well beyond foreign policy. Nonetheless, we focus on foreign policy crises as a particularly interesting and useful application of our framework because prior theories of public opinion and foreign policy have generally ignored the strategic incentives of media actors and their potential effects on the *nature* of the information upon which distinct subgroups of the public base their opinions. We also view foreign crises (particularly those involving military mobilizations and conflicts) as an especially hard case in which to find an independent effect from media or elite rhetoric because they involve life-and-death risks and large-scale movements of people and equipment. Such crises thus tend to be unusually visible and salient to the public compared to the material costs and benefits of most domestic policy initiatives, which tend to be observable only gradually and primarily over the long term, if at all (Arnold 1992).

By analyzing network news coverage of congressional evaluations of the president and his administration in periods surrounding the initiation of all major U.S. uses of military force between 1979 and 2003, we propose to demonstrate that even after controlling for a wide range of indicators of empirical “reality,” *communication* still plays a crucial, independent role in influ-

encing public support for the president during foreign crises.³ We shall further show that, rather than simply parroting the statements of Washington elites, journalists actively sort these statements according to their perceived newsworthiness, while the public’s response to these crises varies systematically with the credibility of those statements and the characteristics of the receivers; that is, depending on who the president is at the time of a crisis, who is speaking about it, what they say, and who is broadcasting and consuming that rhetoric.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

What Politicians Want from the Media. The most universally accepted assumption in U.S. electoral politics is that politicians seek, first and foremost, reelection (Mayhew 1974). We generalize Mayhew’s famous observation by assuming that politicians seek reelection 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 Magar 1999; Cox and McCubbins 1993). Winning election or majority party status, in turn, requires making one’s self and one’s fellow partisans look good, while casting members of the opposition party in a negative light. The implication for politicians’ preferences regarding media coverage is straightforward: politicians typically prefer stories that praise themselves and their fellow partisans or that criticize their opponents or the opposition party.

In the context of interbranch relations, this further implies that—notwithstanding any journalistic preferences for *covering* particular statements—members of the president’s party in Congress are likely to *offer* rhetorical support for the president, while opposition party members should be more likely to oppose him. While there are certainly periodic incentives for individual members to depart from these strategies—particularly if they are running for president or wish to gain press coverage by taking “maverick”

³The news media often attempt to cover Congress as an “institutional counterweight” to the president (Hess 1991). The congressional contingent of the nonpresidential party represents the most important federal officeholders of that party, especially during divided government. Legislators are also among the best-known national politicians available to the media. By using such well-known figures in stories, reporters can substantially reduce the effort devoted to providing background and context to viewers.

stances—the perceived novelty of such instances highlights the prevailing baseline from which they depart.

If journalists *do*, as we shall demonstrate, consistently report discord more frequently than affirmation among the president's fellow partisans, there can be only two explanations. Either such coverage must reflect journalists' preferences, or elites from the president's own party must be routinely criticizing the president more often than they praise him during times of foreign crises. While the latter explanation supports the passive media assumption of the Media and Opinion Indexing Hypotheses, we consider it highly improbable, especially given that in the most public of all representations—votes for or against presidential initiatives in the legislature—recent presidents have typically received overwhelming support from members of their own party and strong opposition from the opposing party.⁴

What Journalists Want from Politicians. 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. In deciding what political material is or is not "news," certain characteristics of stories or sources make them more (or less) desirable for journalists. In particular, journalists generally prefer stories that are novel, conflictual, and balanced (Graber 1997; Groeling 2001; Project for Excellence in Journalism 2002).

This, of course, is not a comprehensive list of journalists' preferences. Rather, our model highlights several of the most important and widely recognized preferences that hold particular implications for our theory. In a more complete version of the model (see Baum and Groeling N.d.), for instance, we add an additional journalistic value: authoritative sources. Including this dimension in our model allows us to derive and test a series of hypotheses concerning the implications of unified and divided control of government. We have omitted this factor from the present study for reasons of space and clarity. Because, however, this latter dimension focuses on the relative authority of the sources, rather than the content of their statements, omitting it does not affect the predictions presented here.

⁴*Congressional Quarterly* reports that since the Eisenhower Administration, an average of about two-thirds of presidents' fellow partisans support them on votes where they stake a position. Presidents since Reagan have greatly exceeded that average. Conversely, opposition party support for presidents is generally low, with no president managing to break even on such votes (CQ Almanac 1953–2000).

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. In fact, without novelty it makes very little sense to speak of "news" organizations at all. This preference leads reporters to strongly resist attempts by politicians to deliver scripted, consistent messages to the public. As CBS's chief White House correspondent noted when covering the 2004 Republican National Convention, journalists want "to find the inconsistency here, to find the people who aren't quite agreeing with the script that's going on any given convention night, to get behind the story" (Kurtz 2004). In brief, *journalists prefer stories that contain new or unexpected information to stories presenting old or expected information.*

A second characteristic of "good" news is, ironically, a preference for bad news. Numerous scholars (e.g., Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1996; Sabato 1991) 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.

While not all politicians go so far as former Vice President Spiro Agnew in characterizing the media as "nattering nabobs of negativism," recent politicians appear to have shared the view that the press favors negativity and conflict in their story choices. Early in his first year in office, President Bill Clinton had already concluded that for the media, "success and lack of discord are not as noteworthy as failure."⁵ As one prominent journalist bluntly observed, "Well, journalists are always looking for conflict. That's what we do" (Saunders, in Kurtz 2004). Therefore, we assume that *journalists prefer stories in which political figures attack each other to stories in which political figures praise each other.*

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 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." News organizations, particularly broadcasters, have long followed this balancing practice. For most of

⁵From a May 7, 1993 Clinton press conference.

the twentieth century, broadcast stations and networks were held to an exceptionally high standard of fairness through FCC regulation (the so-called “fairness doctrine”). 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). We thus assume *journalists prefer stories that include both parties’ views to stories that only present the views of members of a single party.*

The top section of Table 1 applies these story characteristic preferences to four types of partisan evaluations of the president.⁶ This allows us to determine which types of stories are most likely to gain airtime. With respect to such evaluations, Table 1 shows that praise of the president by his own party (henceforth “PP praise”) has little novelty, balance, or conflict and is thus of little interest to journalists. In contrast, presidential party criticism of the president (“PP criticism”) is particularly attractive to journalists because it is conflictual and novel. (Hence, in Table 1 we label PP criticism as “high” on these dimensions of newsworthiness.)

In contrast, evaluations of the president by the opposition (that is, nonpresidential) party (henceforth “NPP”) tend to be newsworthy regardless of what the members choose to say. Such comments are always either novel—if they support the president—or conflictual—if they criticize him. Airing NPP comments also adds balance to stories about the president and his policies. A hypothesis follows.

(H1) Oversampled Presidential Party Criticism: The news media will present more negative than positive evaluations of the president by his own party in the news.

Salient Rally Events as Special Cases for Journalists. If the top section of Table 1 delineates the newsworthiness of “politics as usual,” the question arises as to how newsworthiness during a major foreign crisis might systematically differ. For much of the post-World War II era, the Republican and Democratic parties are commonly viewed as having achieved near consensus in foreign policy, especially with respect to the Cold War. Indeed, implicit in the very notion of a “rally-round-the-flag” is that major international crises will induce each party to close ranks and increase its support for the president.

⁶Because these evaluations are all directed at the president or administration, the stories already implicitly contain some exposition of the president’s or administration’s position.

From a standpoint of newsworthiness, however, the impact is somewhat more complex. 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 become even more newsworthy than during noncrisis periods. After all, criticizing the president during a particularly high-profile foreign crisis is especially risky. Research (e.g., Zaller 1994; Zaller and Chiu 2000) has shown that risk-averse members of Congress (hereafter “MCs”) typically prefer to avoid such criticism until the political ramifications of the crisis outcome are relatively clear. The middle section of Table 1 illustrates this point. While this table tells us little about each party’s *intent* to support the president in crisis periods, it does suggest that if any members of either party choose to criticize the president, they should find journalists even more eager to air their comments than during other times. This suggests a second hypothesis:

(H2) Salient Rally Novelty: For MCs from both parties, the amount of criticism of the president, relative to praise, appearing in the news will be greater during high-salience rally periods than during other periods.

What is Persuasive to Consumers? We now turn from the suppliers (the news media) to the consumers of news (the audience). In determining each message’s effect on viewers, it is important to consider not just the *content* of a message, but also its *credibility*. Parties do not “inject” messages into a passive public; individuals process such messages and can accept or reject them depending in part on their perceived credibility (Druckman 2004; Howell and Kriner N.d.; Kuklinski and Hurley 1994; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). One source of credibility for a message is the belief that the speaker and listener have common interests (Calvert 1985; Crawford and Sobel 1982; Kydd 2003). Restated in partisan terms, 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*. We call this our Partisan Credibility Conjecture. This suggests a third hypothesis:

(H3) Partisan Credibility: Presidential evaluations will have a stronger effect on approval ratings among members of the same party as the evaluator than among members of the other party.

The interaction of source and message can provide another important source of credibility. Typical individuals regard messages that are harmful to the interests of the speaker as more credible than those

TABLE 1 Newsworthiness, Novelty, and Credibility of Rhetoric Regarding President by Elites from Presidential Party (PP) and Nonpresidential 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
B. Change in Novelty During Salient Rally Periods				
Novelty During Salient Rallies	Low	<i>Higher</i>	Lower	<i>Higher</i>
C. Partisan and Costly Credibility, by Party of Speaker and Viewer				
<i>Partisan Credibility</i>				
Presidential Partisans	High	High	Low	Low
Independents	Low	Low	Low	Low
Nonpresidential Partisans	Low	Low	High	High
<i>Costly Credibility</i>				
All Partisans and Independents	Low	High	High	Low

that impose no costs (so-called “cheap talk”; Spence 1973).⁷ In the context of partisan messages, it follows that typical individuals will regard messages by partisan speakers that appear to damage their own party or help the other party as more credible than messages that help their own party or damage the other party. We term this our Costly Credibility Conjecture. Such costly messages should be at least somewhat credible regardless of the party affiliation of the listener.

The bottom section of Table 1 summarizes the relative credibility of different partisan messages about the president based on their partisan and costly credibility. It demonstrates the relatively weak persuasive power of “politics as usual” statements (i.e., NPP attacks on the president and PP praise). Such statements serve only to rally a party’s own partisans, who in all likelihood *already* approved (disapproved) of the president *prior* to any rally event, and hence cannot reevaluate the president upward (downward) following a use of military force (Baum 2002).

In contrast, NPP praise should be exceptionally persuasive and beneficial to the president, especially among NPP members. If rally events produce bipartisan elite support for the president, such support should be highly effective at moving public opinion—

especially among opposition identifiers—in support of the president. Similarly, if members of the president’s own party attack him, the negative effects on public opinion should be dramatic, especially among the president’s fellow partisans. In both cases, the media demand for such statements virtually ensures they will receive coverage if offered, further magnifying their potential impact on opinion. Finally, because Independents lack a party affiliation and are therefore unaffected by partisan credibility, they should be particularly influenced by the costly credibility of elite rhetoric. Two hypotheses follow:

(H4) Costly Credibility: Costly evaluations by elites from a given party will have a stronger effect on approval ratings than will “cheap talk” evaluations by elites from the same party.

(H5) Combined Credibility: Positive (negative) evaluations by nonpresidential (presidential) party elites will have the strongest effects on approval ratings among their fellow partisan identifiers.

Salient Rally Events as Special Cases for Public Opinion. For the same reasons noted previously for journalists, members of the public should be particularly attentive to such costly evaluations in rally periods that involve U.S. casualties. Considerable research has shown that U.S. casualties attract public attention and mediate public support for U.S. military conflicts (Eichenberg 2005; Gartner and Segura 2000; Mueller 1973), while numerous studies (e.g., Gartzke and Gleditsch 2005; Hegre 2000; Oneal, Russert, and Berbaum 2003;) have employed the

⁷Related lines of inquiry include research in social psychology into the influence of “incongruous” (Koeske and Crano 1968; Walster, Aronson, and Abrahams 1966) or “disconfirming” messages (Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken 1978). Chapman (2007) finds similar credibility enhancing effects for UN Security Council resolutions authorizing the use of force, due to its reputation for being conservative with such authorizations.

existence or absence of casualties in militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) to distinguish relatively serious military conflicts from less significant ones.

As previously noted, criticizing the president during a high-profile foreign crisis is especially risky. Consequently, MCs typically avoid doing so until the political ramifications of a crisis are relatively clear. This preference stems from a political calculation that, as commander-in-chief, the public holds the president, far more than Congress, accountable for the outcome of a military conflict. Hence, MCs have little to gain, and potentially much to lose, from opposing the president early in a crisis. An MC who supports a policy that subsequently fails may pay *some* political price—such as emboldened opposition at the next election—but the cost of opposing a successful policy is likely to be greater. After all, a victorious commander-in-chief (along with his party in Congress) will, more than an unsuccessful one, possess both the motive (political retribution) and opportunity (in the form of enhanced political capital) to punish recalcitrant MCs. As one senior congressional foreign policy aid commented with regard to the congressional vote to support President George H. W. Bush on the eve of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, “Why not support the president when he stands up for American interests? You can always withdraw your support later if you want to. In the meantime, go along” (quoted in Zaller 1994, 256). Consequently, if political circumstances necessitate taking a position early in a conflict, MCs are likely to view support as relatively less risky than opposition, all else equal.

Scholars continue to debate whether (e.g., Gartner and Segura 2000; Mueller 1973) or not (e.g., Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005) rising casualties depress public support for a conflict over time. Regardless, we do not believe this logic typically applies in the earliest stages of a crisis (the rally period). Schwartz (1994), for instance, argues that in the short term, casualties usually harden the public’s resolve, consequently *strengthening* public support for the use of force (see also Kull and Destler 1999).⁸ This raises the costly credibility of negative comments by either party during rally periods involving U.S. casualties (in the short-run). Conversely, for the reasons described above, like journalists, the public is likely to

anticipate initial elite support for the president during salient rally periods (e.g., those involving U.S. casualties). This reduces the costly credibility associated with supportive comments by the opposition party, thereby mitigating their persuasive impact. For the presidential party, however, comments supporting the president nearly always lack costly credibility. Thus, such comments have little credibility to lose and should produce similar, limited effects on opinion both during and outside of salient rally periods. Two final hypotheses follow:

(H6) Salient Rally Criticism: During rally periods with U.S. casualties, negative evaluations by either party will have a bigger negative effect on approval ratings—especially among the speaker’s fellow partisans and Independents (for whom partisan credibility does not conflict)—than during other periods.

(H7) Salient Rally Praise: During rally periods with U.S. casualties, positive evaluations by the non-presidential party will produce smaller effects on approval ratings than similar comments during other periods. Positive presidential party comments should be similarly unpersuasive in periods with and without casualties.

Table 2 summarizes our seven hypotheses, dividing them into media- and opinion-related predictions.

Data and Methodology

Mueller argues that for an event to be classified as a potential rally event, it should be international, directly involve the president, and be “specific, dramatic and sharply focused” (1973, 209). Oneal, Lian, and Joyner further restrict their definition of rally events to “major uses of force during a crisis,” insuring that they are “considering only cases that were truly consequential for the U.S. and salient to the public, necessary conditions for a rally...” (1996, 265). Following Oneal, Lian, and Joyner, we restrict our analysis to major uses of force during foreign policy crises. We employ an updated version of Baum’s (2002) dataset, which, in turn, represents an update of Blechman and Kaplan’s (1978) dataset on political uses of force (see also Fordham and Sarver 2001; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner 1996). Again following Oneal, Lian, and Joyner (1996), we code all uses of force measuring levels 1–3 on Blechman and

⁸We nonetheless seek to isolate the *salience* component of the effects of casualties in our statistical models by separately controlling for expert assessments of whether each U.S. use of force was “successful” and “worthwhile.”

TABLE 2 Summary of Hypotheses

Media Coverage Hypotheses

(H1) Oversampled Presidential Party Criticism: The news media will present more negative than positive evaluations of the president by his own party in the news.

(H2) Salient Rally Novelty: For MCs from both parties, the amount of criticism of the president, relative to praise, appearing in the news will be greater during high-salience rally periods than during other periods.

Public Opinion Hypotheses

(H3) Partisan Credibility: Presidential evaluations will have a stronger effect on approval ratings among members of the same party as the evaluator than among members of the other party.

(H4) Costly Credibility: Costly evaluations by elites from a given party will have a stronger effect on approval ratings than will “cheap talk” evaluations by elites from the same party.

(H5) Combined Credibility: Positive (negative) evaluations by non-presidential (presidential) party elites will have the strongest effects on approval ratings among their fellow partisan identifiers.

(H6) Salient Rally Criticism: During rally periods with U.S. casualties, negative evaluations by either party will have a bigger negative effect on approval ratings—especially among the speaker’s fellow partisans and Independents (for whom partisan credibility does not conflict)—than during other periods.

(H7) Salient Rally Praise: During rally periods with U.S. casualties, positive evaluations by the non-presidential party will produce smaller effects on approval ratings than similar comments during other periods. Positive presidential party comments should be similarly unpersuasive in periods with and without casualties.

Kaplan’s (1978) scale as “major uses of force.”⁹ Our data includes a total of 42 such events between 1979 and 2003 (hereafter “rally events”).¹⁰

We collected data on all congressional comments on the president and the executive branch during 61-day windows surrounding each rally event, from 30 days before to 30 days after the announcement or initiation of the major U.S. force deployment associated with each event. While we would prefer to have

⁹Following Baum (2002), we exclude several events inconsistent with these definitions, such as long-scheduled military exercises, cancellation of previously scheduled force withdrawals, or events that clearly were not major uses of force during a U.S. foreign policy crisis (e.g., U.S. support for withdrawal of U.N. forces from Somalia in January–March 1995, long after the U.S. withdrew its forces).

¹⁰Our complete list of rally events may be found in our supplemental online appendix.

gathered comprehensive measures of *all* sources of partisan rhetoric, the exceptional costliness of this content analysis work—representing many thousands of hours of research assistant labor—forced us to limit ourselves to the most important subset of these data (Althaus, Entman, and Phalen 1996; Bennett 1990; Hallin 1986; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner 1996; Zaller and Chiu 2000). While presidential rhetoric is, of course, vital to the conduct of modern American politics (Kernell 1997), presidents tend to uniformly support their own initiatives, leading to almost no variation in our key variables of interest. For instance, in a multiyear content analysis of presidential rhetoric, Groeling (2001) finds that over 90% of presidential self-evaluations are positive. In addition, for the reasons noted above in our discussion of partisan message credibility, such self-serving statements are cheap talk, and so should generally be far less persuasive to typical voters than messages of support from across the aisle.

For each 61-day window, we first searched the Vanderbilt Television News Abstracts to locate every appearance on the evening newscasts of ABC, CBS, and NBC by a senator or representative.¹¹ Our research assistants watched recordings or read verbatim transcripts of each selected story, coding the statement’s valence (positive, negative, or neutral) along a number of issue dimensions (e.g. foreign policy, budget, taxation), as well as the characteristics of the speaker (e.g., party, leadership status).¹² (See supplemental online appendix at <http://journalofpolitics.org/> for coding form and instructions to coders.) All coded statements were direct quotes of an identifiable MC pertaining directly to the president. Each observation consists of a summary of the content of a statement by a single MC in a single story. Although each statement might contain multiple, distinct instances of praise or criticism of the president, we code all statements dichotomously on both dimensions, separately recording the presence or absence of praise or criticism.¹³

We assigned each story to two coders, working independently. Experienced graduate student research assistants then reviewed and arbitrated any disagreements in the coding. *Prior to arbitration*, intercoder

¹¹Vanderbilt and UCLA archives supplied videotapes. Lexis-Nexis provided transcripts.

¹²Before coding, students attended an orientation with one of the principal investigators or their two graduate research assistants, and then practiced using a series of five online interactive practice sessions.

¹³Any additional utility from coding each individual critique within a member statement would be outweighed by the exponential increase in complexity for our coding scheme. Our *MC Appearances* variable also accounts for news appearances by MCs that did not include codable evaluations.

agreement on praise and criticism of the president was 95% and 88% for CBS and 86% and 96% for NBC, respectively.¹⁴ The arbitration process increases the reliability of our coding. In a random sample of our data, our two graduate student arbitrators agreed on over 98% of all arbitration decisions, producing a postarbitration kappa score for our key causal variables of .86.¹⁵

We identified a total of 5,302 pertinent congressional appearances on network evening newscasts during the 2,115 days falling within ± 30 day windows surrounding our 42 rally events.¹⁶ For our public opinion analysis, we aggregate our data to the level of individual Gallup presidential approval polls (our dependent variable) appearing within our 61-day windows. This yields an average of 4.1 unique observations per event, of which an average of 2.7 took place in the period *after* a major deployment was initiated or announced. To mitigate serial autocorrelation we include the appropriate partisan presidential approval poll lagged one period. This also accounts for the possibility that MCs may base their decisions to rhetorically oppose or support the president on their assessments of his *ex ante* political capital, or on anticipated public reactions. We also transform our dependent variables into *differences*, for each partisan subgroup, between approval at time (i.e., poll period) $t + 1$ and at time t . Finally, because the several observations associated with each rally event are clearly not independent of one another, we cluster the standard errors by event.¹⁷

¹⁴Pre-arbitration kappa scores for these variables were .44 and .51, respectively, for CBS, and .52 and .48, respectively, for NBC. Altman (1991, 404) characterizes this as “moderate” agreement. Our intercoder agreement for ABC was 80%. (Due to differences in coding procedures, kappa is unavailable for ABC.)

¹⁵While the coding form has remained constant, we implemented some improvements in the coding process over time. For example, for a subset of ABC data, students hand-coded the stories, met to compare their coding, and submitted their consensus results to a graduate student RA for further examination. All of the NBC and CBS data, and the remainder of the ABC data, were submitted online—with students unaware of the identity of their coding partner—prior to arbitration. We excluded a small subset of observations in which tapes or transcripts were damaged or unavailable.

¹⁶About 8.6% of our coded evaluations (457 out of 5302) occur fewer than 30 days before one rally *and* fewer than 30 days after another rally. In all cases where sequence matters in our analysis, we count any overlapping days as “after” the prior event, rather than “before” the next event.

¹⁷We tested our models with event-specific fixed effects. The results were in many respects comparable to those with clustered errors. Given our limited number of observations, however, we have insufficient statistical leverage to be confident in the reliability of a fixed-effects specification.

Independent Variables. Many of our causal variables mirror those employed in previous studies of presidential approval and the rally phenomenon (e.g., Baum 2002; Chapman and Reiter 2004; Gartner and Segura 2000; Oneal, Lian, and Joyner 1996; Nicholson, Segura, and Woods 2002). They are intended to account for the domestic political circumstances surrounding each rally event, as well as the characteristics of the speaker evaluating the president, of the adversary nation, of the rally event itself, and of the international environment at the time of the event. For speaker characteristics, in addition to party affiliation (see above), we include a dummy variable measuring whether MCs are identified in a given story as leaders of the House or Senate, their party, or a committee. For domestic political variables, we include the number of mentions per poll period of the adversary nation on the front page of the *New York Times*, the monthly change in consumer sentiment (lagged one month),¹⁸ as well as dummies for presidential and midterm election years, unified government, presidential transition periods, second term presidents, and Democratic presidents. We also account for the number of days in between consecutive approval polls and the number of appearances by MCs on network evening newscasts during each poll period.

For adversary characteristics, we control for U.S. trade dependence and material capability ratio vis-à-vis the adversary, and whether the adversary was a U.S. ally. For the international environment, we include variables measuring the number of U.S. foreign policy crises in the year of each event and whether or not the event took place during the Cold War.¹⁹ Finally, for event characteristics, we include dummies for whether an observation took place before or after the start dates of major U.S. force deployments (or announcements of such), whether the U.S. goal was imposing “foreign policy restraint,” (FPR) “internal political change,” (IPC) or “humanitarian intervention” (HI) (as defined by Jentleson and Britton 1998), as well as whether the event was terrorism-related, involved a significant ground invasion by U.S. troops,²⁰ or lasted

¹⁸Changes in consumer sentiment outperformed a variety of other macroeconomic indicators.

¹⁹A post-9/11 dummy proved insignificant and had no material effect on our results.

²⁰Events meeting this definition include Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq (1991 and 2003). By virtue of their dramatically higher salience and profile, we expect these cases to be particularly likely to cause MCs and the public to rally to the president.

only one day. We also account for whether or not the U.S. suffered any fatalities in a given poll period.²¹

Finally, in order to increase our confidence that we have fully accounted for the unique characteristics of each event, we polled 38 scholars with expertise in American foreign policy, asking them to separately evaluate (on 0–10 scales) the extent to which, in their judgment, the events were “successful” and “worthwhile” (based on their own cost-benefit assessment) for the United States.²² We added the two items together to form a single “expert assessment” scale. We then regressed all of our control variables on this summary indicator and saved the residuals. The R^2 was .72, indicating that our control variables, *excluding* partisan rhetoric and lagged presidential approval, account for 72% of the variance in our experts’ summary assessments of our 42 rally events. We employ the residual of our experts’ summary assessments—that is, the exogenous portion—as a causal variable.²³ (See the supplemental online appendix for definitions, coding, and summary statistics of all causal variables, including our rhetoric indicators).

Statistical Results

Media Coverage Hypotheses. We begin with our Oversampled Presidential Party Criticism (H1), and Salient Rally Novelty (H2) hypotheses. Table 3 summarizes the valence of partisan evaluations in our data. One noteworthy pattern is the overwhelming predominance of negative evaluations. Depending on how we parse the data, between 55 and 90 percent of all evaluations were negative. This pattern holds across networks, and also if we focus only on evaluations concerning the president’s handling of foreign policy.²⁴ Somewhat more surprisingly, the overwhelming predominance of negativity remains largely unchanged following the initiation of rally events and during periods where the United States suffered casualties. Table 3 also offers strong support for H1; no matter

TABLE 3 Summary of Valence in Congressional Evaluations of President (Percent of all MC Messages, by Type)

	Presidential Party	Non-Presidential Party
<i>Cold War</i>	<i>N=130</i>	<i>N=207</i>
Percent Negative	64	86
Percent Positive	39	15
<i>Post-Cold War</i>	<i>N=262</i>	<i>N=605</i>
Percent Negative	61	88
Percent Positive	40	13
<i>Unified Government</i>	<i>N=150</i>	<i>N=163</i>
Percent Negative	69	90
Percent Positive	32	12
<i>Divided Government</i>	<i>N=242</i>	<i>N=649</i>
Percent Negative	58	87
Percent Positive	45	14
<i>Pre-Deployment</i>	<i>N=171</i>	<i>N=389</i>
Percent Negative	55	86
Percent Positive	46	15
<i>Post-Deployment</i>	<i>N=221</i>	<i>N=423</i>
Percent Negative	67	89
Percent Positive	35	13
<i>No Casualties</i>	<i>N=341</i>	<i>N=738</i>
Percent Negative	62	88
Percent Positive	40	13
<i>Any Casualties</i>	<i>N=51</i>	<i>N=74</i>
Percent Negative	61	82
Percent Positive	39	19

Notes: (1) Sums exceed 100% because some evaluations include both praise and criticism.

how we slice the evaluations, a majority of all presidential party evaluations of the president are negative.²⁵

One alternate explanation for this predominance of negativity may be the disproportionate weight our data place on post-Cold War years, which account for

²¹A similar variable, measuring the logged number of U.S. casualties-per-poll-period produced similar effects in our models. However, because we anticipate a *threshold*, rather than cumulative, short-term effect of casualties, we prefer the dichotomous specification.

²²We contacted 96 foreign policy experts via email. Our response rate was 40%.

²³The summary expert assessments for each event may be found in our supplemental online appendix.

²⁴See the supplemental online appendix for further breakdowns of the percentages of positive and negative evaluations. Aggregating per rally event, we find 7.14 MC criticisms of the president (1.57 and 5.57 critical comments by PP and NPP MCs, with standard deviations of 1.90 and 5.23, respectively), compared to just 2.05 supportive comments (1.26 and .79 by the PP and NPP, with standard deviations of 1.65 and .89, respectively).

²⁵Unfortunately, we cannot, within the confines of our data, definitively prove that this dramatically skewed distribution results from journalists’ choices, rather than a conscious choice by PP partisans to attack their leader nearly twice as often as they praise him in the news. However, if one accepts what we consider an extremely modest assumption—that PP partisans do not typically attack their fellow partisan president far more than support him—then our empirical results clearly support the hypothesis. Moreover, even if we exclude the one noteworthy episode in our data where PP partisan attacks on their own president are likely to have been relatively common—during the 1998 Lewinsky scandal—the overall pattern changes hardly at all. Elsewhere, we confront this “unobserved population” problem directly (Baum and Groeling N.d. Groeling and Baum Forthcoming; Groeling and Kernell 1998), and find that the news media do, in fact, over-sample criticism, particularly from the president’s party (see discussion in “counterarguments” section).

a majority of our sample. Some scholars (e.g., Holsti 2007) have conjectured that absent the unifying threat posed by the Soviet Union, domestic politics may wield a stronger influence on U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. Our results do not support this conjecture, as no statistically significant differences between rhetoric in the Cold War and post-Cold War periods emerge for either party's MCs.

Next, Table 3 also tests H2. As predicted—and contrary to conventional wisdom—due to its exceptional novelty, presidential party (PP) criticism in the news actually *increases* by 12 percentage points (from 55 to 67% of all PP evaluations, $p \leq .01$) following U.S. military deployments (or announcements of such) during rally events. Conversely, PP praise *declines* by 11 points (from 46 to 35%, $p \leq .05$). Also as predicted, criticism by the nonpresidential party (NPP) increases and praise decreases following the onset of a rally event, although these changes are small and statistically insignificant.²⁶ However, when we “raise the bar” and focus only on periods where it would be *most* politically risky for MCs to criticize the president—that is, rally periods in which the United States suffers casualties—we find, inconsistent with H2, modest (albeit statistically insignificant) declines in criticism for both parties.

In sum, these results offer clear support for our media hypotheses, including strong support for the Oversampled Presidential Party Criticism (H1) hypothesis, and qualified support for the Salient Rally Novelty hypothesis (H2); supporting it for pre- versus post-deployment periods, but (perhaps unsurprisingly) less so for noncasualty versus casualty periods.

While cross-tabs offer the most straightforward tests of our media hypotheses, they do not allow us to account for potential alternative explanations for these relationships. Hence, we retest H2 under a more extensive set of controls. Table 4 reports the results from three OLS models testing H2, as well as nine models testing our public opinion hypotheses.²⁷ In order to investigate the sensitivity of our results to model specification, we present three versions of each model. The first

(Models 1–4) excludes most of the controls. The second (Models 5–8) presents the fully specified models, while the third (Models 9–12) adds interactions with dummies for whether the observation took place before or after the initiation of a given event (Model 9) or for whether the United States suffered any casualties in a given poll period (Models 10–12).²⁸

The first noteworthy pattern in Table 4 is the impressive consistency of the results on our key causal variables across model specifications; throwing the proverbial “kitchen sink” at our rhetoric indicators produces surprisingly modest changes in their effects. While many of the controls are statistically significant, their effects appear mostly orthogonal to our key causal variables. We can therefore proceed more confidently to interpreting our results from the fully specified models.

Model 5 in Table 4 presents our fully specified OLS model testing H2. The dependent variable is positive rhetoric by either party as a proportion of all rhetoric, both positive and negative. The key causal variable in this analysis is whether or not a given event produced U.S. casualties (our primary indicator of salient rally events). The results indicate that, consistent with H2, the presence of casualties is associated with about a 10-point *decline* in praise, relative to criticism ($p \leq .05$). (Recall that this pattern failed to emerge in our simple cross-tabs, thereby demonstrating the importance of accounting for potentially confounding influential factors through multiple regression.)

Of course, the predicted effects of casualties in the early stages of a rally event are conditional on the existence of a U.S. military action that the public *could* rally behind. Hence, Model 9 isolates the postevent-initiation effects of casualties by interacting the casualty indicator with a postevent-initiation dummy. (In several instances, casualties took place prior to the official start date of an event.) Because the combined effects of interaction terms and their constituent variables are frequently associated with statistically significant effects on dependent variables even when the individual variables themselves are insignificant, evaluating the substantive importance of such effects requires assessing the significance of the differences in the dependent variable(s) produced by the combined variations in the key causal variables and interaction terms (see supplemental online appendix for further discussion of this point). Hence, for ease of interpretation, we employ Clarify (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000), a statistical simulation procedure, to calculate the expected values of our dependent variables

²⁶Baum (2003) reports a trend between 1953 and 1998 toward larger rallies among the least educated Americans, but *not* among their highly educated counterparts. This appears inconsistent with our findings of overwhelmingly critical rhetoric and its strong effects on public opinion. However, the least-educated segment of the population has constricted proportionately since the 1950s, and these citizens might be less able to distinguish between credible and noncredible rhetoric. Also, Baum's time series extends far longer than our data, making it difficult to draw direct comparisons between the studies.

²⁷All models exclude one to two extreme outlier observations, the inclusion of which modestly weakens, but does not fundamentally alter, the reported results.

²⁸We replicated all models using only the domestic political and economic controls, as well as using only the actor- and event-characteristic controls (see the supplemental online appendix), with comparable results.

TABLE 4 Results of OLS Investigations of Correlates of MC Rhetoric and Changes in Approval

Dep. Var:	Base Models				Fully Specified Models				Fully Specified Interaction Models			
	1. Praise/ Crit Ratio	2. PP Approve	3. NPP Approve	4. Ind Approve	5. Praise/ Crit Ratio	6. PP Approve	7. NPP Approve	8. Ind Approve	9. Praise/ Crit Ratio	10. PP Approve	11. NPP Approve	12. Ind Approve
Approval _t	-0.215 (0.053)***	-0.082 (0.036)*	-0.185 (0.059)**	-0.492 (0.091)***	-0.663 (0.112)***	-0.400 (0.143)**	-0.492 (0.091)***	-0.661 (0.113)***	-0.406 (0.146)**	-0.514 (0.092)***	-0.406 (0.146)**	-0.514 (0.092)***
PP Criticism	-0.404 (0.149)**	-0.194 (0.132)	-0.469 (0.200)*	-0.510 (0.274)^	-0.515 (0.216)*	-0.226 (0.257)	-0.510 (0.274)^	-0.508 (0.285)^	-0.013 (0.228)	-0.309 (0.295)	-0.013 (0.228)	-0.309 (0.295)
NPP Criticism	0.061 (0.105)	-0.175 (0.121)	-0.186 (0.157)	-0.193 (0.182)	0.093 (0.101)	-0.244 (0.124)^	-0.193 (0.182)	0.092 (0.104)	-0.266 (0.133)^	-0.201 (0.189)	-0.266 (0.133)^	-0.201 (0.189)
PP Praise	0.001 (0.329)	-0.120 (0.325)	-0.207 (0.382)	-0.448 (0.516)	0.079 (0.354)	-0.399 (0.509)	-0.448 (0.516)	0.199 (0.441)	-0.536 (0.594)	-0.298 (0.599)	-0.536 (0.594)	-0.298 (0.599)
NPP Praise	0.618 (0.356)^	1.220 (0.369)**	1.124 (0.351)**	1.050 (0.448)*	0.934 (0.465)^	1.166 (0.409)**	1.050 (0.448)*	0.987 (0.485)*	1.167 (0.429)**	1.228 (0.490)*	1.167 (0.429)**	1.228 (0.490)*
Any KIA	-0.081 (0.049)				-0.099 (0.046)*	1.319 (1.549)	4.314 (2.090)*	0.049 (0.061)				
PP Crit. x Any KIA												
NPP Crit. x Any KIA												
PP Praise x Any KIA												
NPP Praise x Any KIA												
Any KIA x Post-Deploy									-0.179 (0.083)*			
Evals-per-period	-0.026 (0.030)	0.016 (0.029)	0.025 (0.032)	0.058 (0.042)	0.000 (0.001)	0.010 (0.029)	0.056 (0.036)	0.058 (0.042)	-0.000 (0.001)	0.007 (0.030)	0.058 (0.037)	0.045 (0.043)
Days Between Polls					0.000 (0.003)	-0.017 (0.052)	0.007 (0.037)	0.010 (0.063)	0.000 (0.003)	-0.014 (0.053)	0.026 (0.045)	0.029 (0.065)
Post-Deploy					-0.063 (0.054)	2.232 (1.088)*	2.448 (1.404)^	1.470 (1.557)	-0.049 (0.054)	2.079 (1.052)^	2.198 (1.363)	1.184 (1.557)
Pre + Post Deploy					0.015 (0.055)	-2.585 (0.901)**	-1.775 (2.514)	-0.549 (1.735)	0.015 (0.055)	-2.479 (0.899)**	-1.474 (2.344)	-0.155 (1.649)
Major War					0.071 (0.054)	5.319 (1.809)**	11.370 (3.088)***	10.346 (2.149)***	0.066 (0.055)	5.401 (1.881)**	11.922 (3.532)**	11.198 (2.217)***

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Dep. Var:	Base Models			Fully Specified Models			Fully Specified Interaction Models					
	1. Praise/ Crit Ratio	2. PP Approve	3. NPP Approve	4. Ind Approve	5. Praise/ Crit Ratio	6. PP Approve	7. NPP Approve	8. Ind Approve	9. Praise/ Crit Ratio	10. PP Approve	11. NPP Approve	12. Ind Approve
Pres. Elec. Year	-0.144 (0.034)***				-0.120 (0.052)*	0.376 (1.426)	-2.891 (1.782)	-2.104 (1.871)	-0.116 (0.052)*	0.392 (1.494)	-2.886 (1.836)	-2.000 (1.936)
Midterm Election					0.060 (0.039)	-0.343 (1.012)	-0.003 (0.974)	-1.821 (1.487)	0.057 (0.039)	-0.236 (1.083)	-0.083 (1.100)	-1.825 (1.723)
Party Leader					0.002 (0.002)	-0.113 (0.067)^	-0.079 (0.111)	-0.005 (0.126)	0.002 (0.002)	-0.113 (0.075)	-0.086 (0.118)	-0.002 (0.126)
Second Term	-0.109 (0.043)*				-0.118 (0.052)*	3.818 (1.319)**	-0.240 (1.370)	2.031 (1.607)	-0.112 (0.052)*	3.796 (1.251)**	-0.702 (1.317)	1.767 (1.578)
ΔCons. Sentiment					-0.007 (0.003)*	-0.070 (0.088)	-0.262 (0.198)	-0.361 (0.169)*	-0.007 (0.003)*	-0.083 (0.095)	-0.329 (0.223)	-0.442 (0.186)*
Unified Gov't	-0.089 (0.042)*				-0.098 (0.045)*	-6.429 (1.708)**	-6.675 (2.909)*	-6.475 (2.548)*	-0.091 (0.044)*	-6.592 (1.980)**	-7.497 (3.453)*	-8.250 (3.031)**
Transition					0.193 (0.089)*	-1.732 (3.044)	0.860 (2.074)	0.776 (5.513)	0.205 (0.085)*	-2.122 (3.192)	0.794 (2.668)	0.518 (5.923)
Dem. President					0.054 (0.073)	0.618 (2.102)	-2.607 (2.459)	0.844 (2.613)	0.049 (0.074)	0.710 (2.085)	-2.203 (2.461)	1.497 (2.770)
Post-Cold War	-0.107 (0.039)**				-0.127 (0.073)^	3.903 (2.520)	0.145 (1.935)	2.353 (2.747)	-0.112 (0.075)	3.554 (2.618)	-0.584 (1.991)	1.160 (2.983)
NY-Times Gov.					0.338 (0.123)**	8.306 (3.637)*	10.628 (4.293)*	8.755 (4.951)^	0.334 (0.113)**	7.650 (3.967)^	8.093 (4.940)	6.153 (5.349)
Expert Assess.					0.014 (0.005)*	0.384 (0.166)*	0.442 (0.323)	0.504 (0.250)^	0.013 (0.006)*	0.389 (0.165)*	0.464 (0.328)	0.558 (0.258)*
One Day Event					-0.002 (0.039)	0.535 (0.961)	-1.396 (1.673)	-0.218 (1.690)	-0.004 (0.040)	0.460 (0.963)	-1.437 (1.674)	-0.900 (1.774)
Capability Ratio					-0.070 (0.220)	-3.815 (5.296)	-31.354 (12.755)*	-26.964 (9.939)**	-0.103 (0.220)	-3.402 (5.764)	-32.939 (13.702)*	-27.239 (10.722)*
Terrorism Related					0.061 (0.040)	-0.732 (1.323)	2.839 (1.446)^	2.817 (1.803)	0.058 (0.040)	-0.683 (1.314)	2.749 (1.505)^	3.092 (1.885)
US Crises-per-year					-0.014 (0.045)	1.505 (1.025)	2.948 (1.104)*	4.082 (1.316)**	-0.015 (0.045)	1.501 (1.087)	3.348 (1.212)**	4.511 (1.488)**
US Ally					-0.027 (0.067)	-10.414 (2.587)**	5.156 (2.168)*	0.687 (2.782)	-0.020 (0.068)	-10.489 (2.541)**	4.408 (2.206)^	-0.376 (3.015)
Trade Depend.					-0.286 (2.584)	186.478 (62.218)**	-173.946 (106.455)	-120.597 (101.435)	-0.682 (2.587)	195.234 (66.927)**	-170.170 (105.332)	-83.598 (109.031)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Dep. Var:	Base Models				Fully Specified Models				Fully Specified Interaction Models			
	1. Praise/ Crit Ratio	2. PP Approve	3. NPP Approve	4. Ind Approve	5. Praise/ Crit Ratio	6. PP Approve	7. NPP Approve	8. Ind Approve	9. Praise/ Crit Ratio	10. PP Approve	11. NPP Approve	12. Ind Approve
FPR					-0.167 (0.068)*	-5.962 (2.720)*	-2.068 (1.938)	-3.232 (2.145)	-0.166 (0.068)*	-6.177 (2.732)*	-2.774 (2.224)	-4.496 (2.341)^
IPC					-0.158 (0.049)**	3.862 (1.987)^	-6.437 (1.720)***	-3.866 (2.307)	-0.153 (0.049)**	3.748 (1.950)^	-6.508 (1.700)***	-4.638 (2.155)*
HI					0.096 (0.085)	-4.180 (2.356)^	7.908 (2.257)***	4.274 (2.841)	0.094 (0.086)	-4.035 (2.393)^	7.980 (2.310)***	4.865 (2.925)
Constant	0.370 (0.050)***	19.056 (4.703)***	3.405 (1.675)*	11.353 (3.894)**	0.564 (0.140)***	56.598 (10.815)***	42.623 (16.622)*	47.789 (12.294)***	0.577 (0.133)***	56.628 (11.552)***	45.342 (18.253)*	51.093 (13.316)***
Obs.	170	166	166	164	169	165	165	163	169	165	165	163
R-squared	0.08	0.16	0.08	0.13	0.19	0.44	0.34	0.41	0.19	0.44	0.36	0.43

Robust standard errors in parentheses; ^ $p \leq .10$, * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

as the key causal variables vary. This procedure also derives standard errors surrounding the expected values, thereby allowing us to determine whether the differences in the effects of the causal variables, separately or in interaction, are themselves statistically significant.

The simulation results indicate that, as anticipated, the criticism-enhancing effect of salience (measured by the presence of U.S. casualties) is considerably stronger during the postevent-initiation period. Prior to event initiation, casualties are associated with a relatively small and statistically insignificant 4.9-point increase in relative praise (from .225 to .274). In contrast, following event initiation, the presence of one or more casualties is associated with nearly a 13-point relative decline in praise (from .176 to .046, $p \leq .05$). Indeed, the apparent praise-inhibiting effect of casualties is nearly 23 points greater following event initiation (.274 vs. .046, $p \leq .01$), compared to only about a 5 point praise differential absent casualties (.225 vs. .176, *insig.*). These results strongly support our Salient Rally Novelty Hypothesis (H2).

Public Opinion Hypotheses. We turn next to the Partisan (H3), Costly (H4), and Combined (H5) Credibility hypotheses. The dependent variables for these analyses are changes in Presidential Party (PP), Non-Presidential Party (NPP), and Independent approval ratings, while the key causal variables measure the number of instances of praise or criticism of the president by either party during a poll period. Figure 1 presents the results from our simulations testing these hypotheses. (We present the data underlying Figure 1 in the supplemental online appendix.)

Beginning with party identifiers, Models 6 and 7 in Table 4 investigate the effects of MC rhetoric on PP and NPP partisans, respectively. The top-left graphic in Figure 1 illustrates the substantive effects of a two standard deviation increase in each type of MC rhetoric. Among PP partisans, we find strong support for H3, H4, and H5. Increased PP criticism, which should (per H5) have the strongest persuasive impact among PP partisans, is associated with a 2.8 percentage point decrease in approval ($p \leq .01$). As predicted, this is the largest substantive effect across the four types of rhetoric. In contrast, NPP criticism, which lacks both partisan and costly credibility for PP partisans, produces small and insignificant effects. A two standard deviation increase in costly NPP praise, in turn, which should (per H4) have a greater persuasive impact than cheap talk NPP criticism, is associated with a 2.5 percentage point increase in PP approval ($p \leq .05$). Lastly, presumably because it is cheap talk during such events, PP praise has no significant effect on PP partisans.

Turning to NPP partisans, consistent with H3 and H4, PP praise has no significant effect, while,

consistent with H3, a two standard deviation increase in NPP criticism yields a 2.9 point drop in NPP approval ($p \leq .05$). Consistent with H5, in turn, NPP praise is associated with the largest effect across the four types of rhetoric: a 3.1-point increase in NPP approval ($p \leq .01$). Presumably due to low partisan credibility, while correctly signed and substantial in magnitude (-1.2 points), the effect of PP criticism fails to achieve statistical significance. Also consistent with our hypotheses, the difference between the effects on approval of PP Criticism and NPP Praise (*high-credibility* evaluation types) is significant for both PP and NPP partisans ($p \leq .01$), while that between NPP criticism and PP praise (*low-credibility* types) is not.

Finally, Model 8 in Table 4 presents the results for Independents. The substantive results shown in Figure 1 (again, top-left graphic), in turn, offer strong support for H4 (Costly Credibility). A two standard deviation increase in costly PP criticism yields about a 2.8 percentage point *decrease* in approval ($p \leq .05$), while an equivalent increase in costly NPP praise yields about a 2.8-point *increase* in approval ($p \leq .01$). Comparable increases in “cheap talk” PP praise or NPP criticism are associated with smaller and insignificant effects. Hence, consistent with H4, both high-credibility evaluation types (PP criticism and NPP praise) produce significant effects in the predicted directions, while both low-credibility evaluation types (PP praise and NPP criticism) do not. Moreover, as with party identifiers, the difference between the effects of high credibility positive and negative evaluations is itself significant ($p \leq .01$), while that between low-credibility positive and negative evaluations is far smaller and insignificant.²⁹

²⁹Elsewhere (Baum and Groeling N.d.) we employ Models 6–8 in Table 4 to determine the marginal predicted change in presidential approval, given the actual observed flows of partisan rhetoric in both unified and divided government across our 42 events. The marginal aggregate opinion change for each event represents an equally weighted average of the predicted change for Independents, PP, and NPP partisans. Our results predict that, on average, the actual partisan evaluations of the president in divided government would add 1.22 approval points, while the flows in unified government would actually cost the president -.15 approval points. This 1.37 percentage point difference is significant at $p \leq .01$. Even though our model explicitly controls for divided government, these changes track fairly closely the average aggregate opinion changes across our 42 events, particularly during divided government (increases of .85 approval points overall, and .93 and .55 approval points during divided and unified government, respectively). This is consistent with prior research (Meernik and Waterman 1996) that has found that typical rallies—with the exception of major wars (Chapman and Reiter 2004)—tend to be relatively small and ephemeral. The average observed change in approval across all of our events was an increase of .846 for PP members, 1.06 for members of the NPP, and .87 for Independents. If we include all controls, set at their mean values, the model predicts somewhat larger (slightly positive) rallies in divided (unified) government.

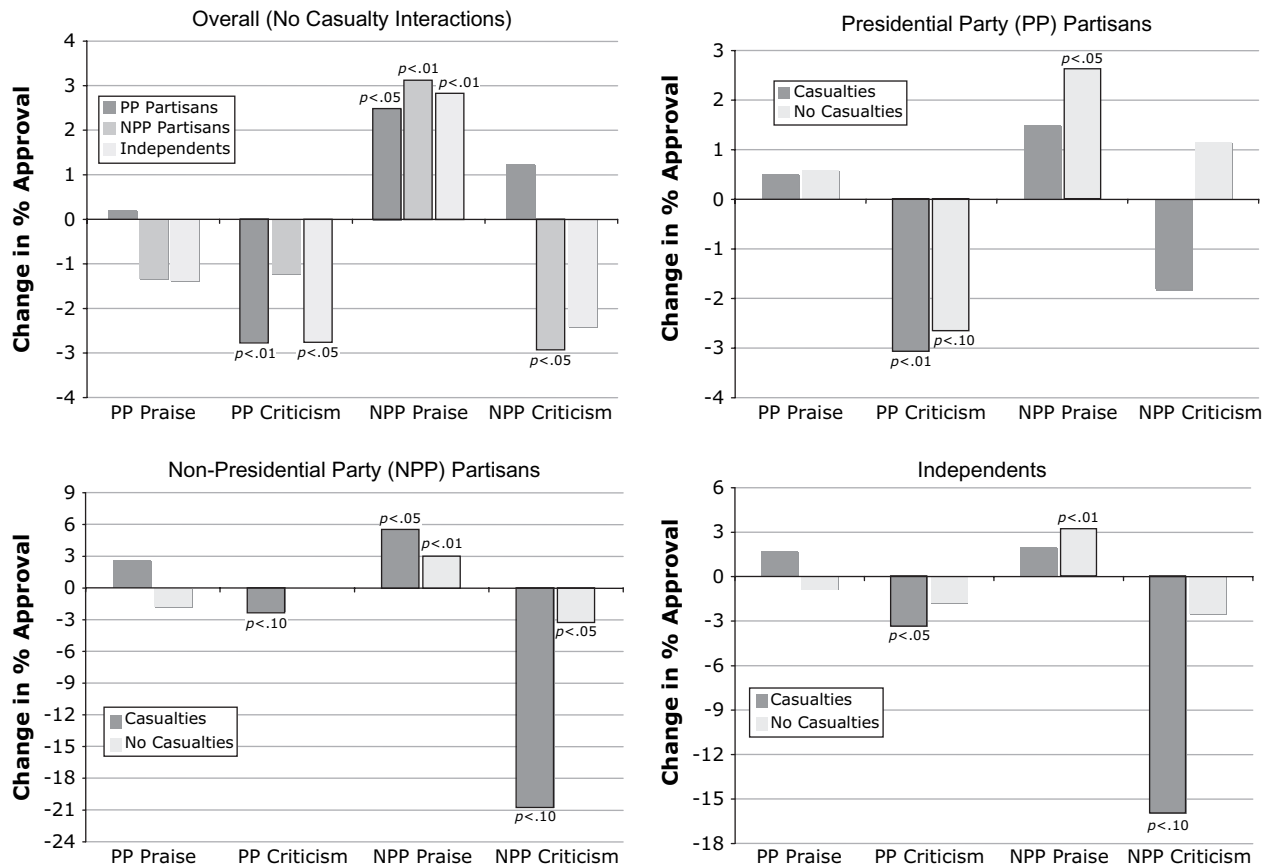
We turn finally to our Salient Rally Criticism (H6) and Praise (H7) hypotheses which predict that criticism by either party’s MCs during rally periods with U.S. casualties will have a bigger effect than criticism in other periods, while praise from NPP MCs (but *not* PP MCs) will have a smaller effect than in other periods. To test these hypotheses we interact each type of rhetoric with our casualty dummy. The results for PP partisans, NPP partisans and Independents are shown in Models 10, 11, and 12, respectively, of Table 4. The top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right graphics in Figure 1, in turn, compare the substantive effects of two standard deviation increases in each type of rhetoric for non-casualty versus casualty periods among PP partisans, NPP partisans, and Independents, respectively.

Beginning with PP partisans, the top-right graphic in Figure 1 indicates, consistent with H6, that a two standard deviation increase in PP criticism (which has high costly credibility) is associated with larger (-3.1 vs. -2.7) and more significant ($p \leq .01$ vs. $p \leq .10$) effects during casualty periods, relative to noncasualty periods. Also as expected, due to its low partisan and costly credibility, variations in NPP criticism do not significantly influence the approval ratings of PP partisans. Consistent with H7, in turn, increased (costly) NPP Praise yields considerably larger (2.6 vs. 1.5) and more significant ($p \leq .05$ vs. *insig.*) effects during noncasualty periods, while increases in (cheap) PP praise do not produce significant effects during either casualty or noncasualty periods.

Turning to NPP partisans, and consistent with H6, the bottom-left graphic in Figure 1 indicates that criticism by either party’s MCs exerts a far larger effect during casualty periods: -2.4 ($p \leq .10$) versus $-.07$ (*insig.*) and -20.8 ($p \leq .10$) versus -3.3 ($p \leq .05$), for increased PP and NPP criticism during casualty versus noncasualty periods, respectively. Consistent with H7, in turn, increased PP praise has no significant effect on NPP approval during either noncasualty or casualty periods. Also consistent with H7, the corresponding increase in NPP praise produces a more highly significant increase in approval during *noncasualty* periods ($p \leq .01$ vs. $p \leq .05$). However, contrary to H7, the effect is somewhat larger during casualty periods (3.0 , vs. 5.5). Nonetheless, with this one partial exception, the results for PP and NPP partisans offer strong support for H6 (Criticism) and H7 (Praise).

Finally, among Independents, the bottom-right graphic in Figure 1 indicates that, as predicted by H6, a two standard deviation increase in costly PP criticism is

FIGURE 1 Effect on Approval of Two Standard Deviation Increase in MC Rhetoric



associated with larger (-3.4 vs. -1.8) and more significant ($p \leq .05$ vs. *insig.*) drops in approval during casualty periods. Similarly, and also consistent with H6, increased NPP criticism is also associated with much larger (-16.0 vs. -2.5) and more significant ($p \leq .10$ vs. *insig.*) declines in approval during casualty periods. Consistent with H7, in turn, the corresponding increase in costly NPP praise yields larger (3.2 vs. 2.0) and more significant ($p \leq .01$ vs. *insig.*) increases in approval during *noncasualty* periods. Conversely, also consistent with H7, cheap talk PP praise is not associated with significant effects in either *noncasualty* or *casualty* periods. Overall, the data support H6 and H7 fairly unambiguously in 11 of 12 possible comparisons, and at least partially in every instance. Once again, this represents strong support for our theory. (See supplemental online appendix for a table summarizing of all our hypothesis test results.)

A Few Words on Potential Counter-Arguments.

We briefly address four potential criticisms, including: (1) reverse causality; (2) the intrinsic characteristics of the events may drive both elite rhetoric and public opinion; (3) MC criticism is intrinsically more significant than praise, and so journalists “should”

cover it and the public “should” value it more, and (4) differences in elite rhetoric in the news “could” reflect the *actual* mix of elite rhetoric, rather than journalists’ preferences.

Beginning with reverse causality, we believe the concern that the changing patterns of evaluations could *reflect*, rather than *cause*, changes in presidential popularity is unfounded for at least three reasons. First, approval ratings at the time of the evaluation are directly factored in to our models through inclusion of approval at time t as a lag term. Second, because we employ the *difference* between approval at time $t + 1$ and at time t as our dependent variable, a president’s unknown future approval logically cannot *cause* present actions.³⁰ Lastly, and most importantly, if one assumes that anticipated future increases in presidential approval *do* cause politicians to increase their support for the president, this should affect the political calculations of both PP and

³⁰Of course, in some cases future presidential approval can be accurately forecast. In the case of rally events such as the 9/11 attacks, it was probably clear to most politicians that the public would rally around George W. Bush. But in most cases, it seems unlikely an MC could predict a president’s future popularity with enough certainty to affect his or her present actions.

NPP MCs. Yet, in most cases we only observe significant effects for praise from the NPP, while PP praise is insignificant in every case. Similarly, there would be no reason to expect that PP, but not NPP, criticism would be “caused” by anticipated future drops in PP partisan approval, with NPP partisans responding only to criticism from *their* fellow partisan elites.

The second potential concern is that differences in the intrinsic characteristics of the events, rather than in media coverage, may drive differences in MC rhetoric, and thus in public reactions. Yet our fully specified models include controls for a wide array of the unique characteristics of the events, including the adversary’s military capabilities, whether it was a U.S. ally, U.S. trade relations with the adversary, the U.S. “principal policy objectives” in the conflict, the presence of U.S. casualties, the number of U.S. foreign policy crises under way at the time, as well as whether the event involved a large-scale U.S. ground invasion or terrorism, took place during the Cold War, or lasted one day. Moreover, wherever possible, we gathered data based on the *poll period*, giving us an average of about four distinct observations per event. This allows us to account for evolving circumstances as events unfold. Inclusion of our expert assessments further enhances our confidence. The fact that our other controls explain well over 70% of the variance in our experts’ summary assessment suggests that we have included a fairly comprehensive set of controls. In the presence of all of these controls (including the exogenous portion of our expert assessments), it seems improbable that some additional, unknown “unique” characteristics of the events are driving our results.

With respect to possible greater intrinsic value of *critical* evaluations, as also noted, our results clearly show that NPP *praise* is strongly persuasive to all respondents, save PP partisans. Similarly, if negative evaluations were more intrinsically important, it seems likely that this would apply to *all* critical statements by MCs of both parties, and not, as we find, just the subsets that are most credible to their own partisans or Independents.

Finally, we turn to the possibility that variations in *actual* elite rhetoric—rather than in journalists’ preferences—could be driving the differences we observe in elite rhetoric presented in the news. As noted earlier, we believe it would be a truly heroic assumption to presume that, all else equal, elites *prefer* to criticize their fellow partisan presidents far more than support them—which is the pattern we found in our data. Still, because our dataset does not account for the complete universe of elite rhetoric offered to

the media, we cannot determine with certainty whether the observed patterns of coverage accurately reflect the available population of potential evaluations.

While space limitations prohibit us from systematically addressing this concern here, elsewhere (Baum and Groeling Forthcoming) we address precisely this issue. In that study, to isolate the media’s independent effect, we investigate a class of stories for which we *can* observe a full population of potential elite rhetoric: all interviews with MCs on the Sunday morning talk shows of NBC, ABC, and CBS (*Meet the Press*, *This Week*, and *Face the Nation*, respectively). Such interviews allow elites to present their views in an unedited and comparatively unfiltered, “open mic” format, and are routinely combed for fodder by all three networks’ evening news programs. While political interview shows are not a perfect measure of the universe of elite rhetoric—after all, journalists select guests based on presumptions of newsworthiness—examining which MC statements originating on these shows (that is, the complete universe of available MC rhetoric on the Sunday morning talk shows) were actually selected for broadcast on the evening news provides us with far greater leverage to divine journalists’ preferences. Consistent with our theory, we find that, relative to the morning talk shows, the evening news heavily overrepresents PP criticism, while underrepresenting PP praise. Consequently, we remain confident that the rhetorical patterns we observe likely reflect the preferences of journalists more than the actual population of statements offered by political elites (particularly elites in the presidential party).

Conclusion

In explaining the shift from prewar isolationism, Senator Arthur Vandenberg, the Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, famously asserted, “Politics stops at the water’s edge.” The findings presented here indicate that any president expecting such sentiments to hold sway in the contemporary political environment is likely to be sorely disappointed; throughout these data, partisan politics demonstrate precious little sensitivity to the location of the water’s edge.

In addition, while the data appear to bear out Brody’s (1991) hypothesis concerning the link between elite debate and the magnitude of rallies, the process through which the content of this debate is selected and influences opinion is substantially more complex and nuanced than previously assumed. Whether

a given member of the public rallies to support the president following the use of force is not simply a function of the overall tenor of elite debate, but rather of: (a) one's own partisan affiliation; (b) the partisan affiliations of the elite debaters selected to appear in the media; (c) the costliness of the messages communicated to the public, and (d) journalists' decisions to cover or ignore particular speakers and messages.

We find little evidence that presidents can consistently expect to enjoy substantial rallies when they use force abroad, at least to the extent that rally magnitude does follow from the nature and magnitude of elite debate presented in the media, as our evidence suggests. Indeed, one of the most striking patterns in our findings is the seemingly unyielding wave of negativity in media coverage of elite discussion concerning the president and his policies. Most U.S. deployments of military force fail to alter the unrelenting negative tone of elite discussion featured in the media. In an era of rising partisan polarization, in turn, the persuasion-mediating effects of partisan and costly credibility make it increasingly difficult for presidents to reach those segments of the public that could potentially rally—that is, those not *already* supporting him—with positive messages they are likely to deem credible. This suggests that in many, perhaps most, instances, presidents seeking to rally public support for the use of military force face a more difficult and uncertain task than is often assumed in the literature.

Major conflicts may be a partial exception. When we limit our data to U.S. invasions involving substantial incursions of ground forces (Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq in 1991 and 2003), we find less credible criticism and more credible praise, relative to the other events in our data. During postdeployment periods surrounding ground invasions, highly credible NPP praise nearly doubles proportionately (from 12 to 22% of all NPP evaluations), while highly credible PP criticism falls from 69 to 42% of all PP evaluations. Applying the calculus employed earlier (see footnote 29) to predict average rally size across our 42 events thus unsurprisingly yields larger predicted rallies during ground invasions—an increase of about 3.3 approval points, on average, compared to a little over one point during rally events *not* involving ground invasions.³¹ This is consistent with prior research

(Chapman and Reiter 2004) that has found evidence that substantial rallies are mostly limited to major wars and may help reconcile our finding of an overwhelming overall negativity bias with the occasional emergence of substantial rally effects.

Finally, in addition to offering support for our theory concerning the effects of individual and institutional factors in shaping the nature and extent of post-use-of-force rallies, our findings also hold an important implication for diversionary war theory (Levy 1989). If presidents cannot be confident of receiving favorable treatment in the media when they employ military force abroad—at least short of a full-scale war like Operations Desert Storm or Iraqi Freedom—it seems highly unlikely that they would do so for purely domestic political purposes. Our data suggest that, at least from a domestic political perspective, using military force abroad is a high-risk strategy with at best an uncertain payoff.

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³¹Baum and Groeling (N.d.) argue that the media will present more credible praise than credible criticism in divided, relative to unified, government, leading to a prediction of larger rallies in divided government. These data support that prediction, showing an average rally of 4.4 points during ground invasions that take place in divided government.

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