

A TRUSTED SOURCE

**DOES ONE'S TRUST IN THE NEWS MEDIA INFLUENCE ONE'S POLITICAL
ATTITUDES?**

By

Jason M. Badura

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2008

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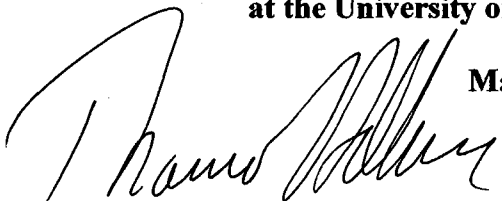
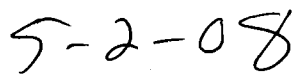

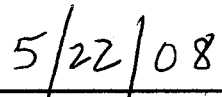
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Major Professor	Date
	
Graduate School Approval	Date

ABSTRACT

A TRUSTED SOURCE: DOES ONE'S LEVEL OF TRUST IN THE NEWS MEDIA INFLUENCE ONE'S POLITICAL ATTITUDES?

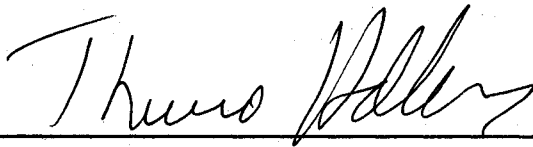
By

Jason M. Badura

**The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2008
Under the Supervision of Dr. Thomas Holbrook, Ph.D.**

Survey data over the past several decades indicates that the American public has become increasingly mistrustful of the news media. Tsfati (2003a, 65) notes that widespread and increasing media mistrust in recent years has provoked scholars to examine the correlates of declining trust (e.g., Kohut and Toth 1998; Watts et al. 1999; Bennett et al. 2001); however, little attention has been paid to the “consequences” of media skepticism in terms of “media theory building” and “incorporat[ing] audience mistrust of the media as a covariate into their models.” Following this research call, this dissertation examines the following question: Does one’s level of trust in the news media influence one’s political attitudes? Chapter one provides a brief summary of survey data concerning the decline of public trust in the media since the 1970s, as well as research related to “who trusts the news media”. Chapter two summarizes the literature on “media effects,” along with providing a detailed description of the theoretical model of media persuasion effects applied throughout the empirical studies in the dissertation: the Reception-Acceptance-Sample model of media effects or RAS model (Zaller 1992). Chapter two also discusses how media trust is a theoretically new and important variable that fits within the RAS model’s broader axioms and propositions concerning media effects. Chapter’s three

through five present experimental and large-N empirical research highlighting media trust as a critical moderating factor upon one's political opinions and evaluations. Chapter three examines the role of media trust on subjects' policy preferences toward the United Nations. Chapter four examines the impact of media trust on one's support for military intervention into Iraq. Chapter five explores the effect of media trust on one's evaluations of President Clinton's job performance in the wake of the 1998 Monica Lewinsky affair. Chapter six concludes the dissertation in which I argue that a healthy dose of criticism toward the news media serves democracy well.



5-7-08

Major Professor

Date

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Lisa, who has supported me in this effort from the very beginning. Thank you for your help, support, patience, and love.

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Chapter One

American's Growing Mistrust of the News Media

"Today, says [Peter] Kohut, the public considers the news media even less professional, less accurate, less moral, less helpful to democracy, more sensational, more likely to cover up mistakes and more biased."

2004 and 2005 *State of the News Media Reports*
(Project for Excellence in Journalism)

American Public Opinion and the News Media

Fox News markets itself as the "fair and balanced" news network (Fox News Network, LLC 2007). CNN extols itself as the "most trusted name in news" (Cable News Network LP, LLLC 2007). Likewise, many other news organizations highlight the importance of trust to their audiences. Yet, Americans have become increasingly skeptical of the news media over the past several decades (e.g., Gaziano 1988; Meyer 1988; Alger 1996; Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Graber 1997; Liebeskind 1997; Kiouisis 2000; Bennett et al. 2001; Tsfati 2003a, 2003b; Tsfati and Cappella 2003). Consider the trends in Pew Research Center polling. The Pew Research Center (2007a) has conducted surveys on the press since 1985. Pew has asked respondents similar questions that allow readers to analyze changes in the public's assessment of the press over this time frame. Figure 1.1 depicts the trend in public opinion concerning the media's ability to report stories accurately. In 1985, 34% of Pew's respondents stated that "stories are often inaccurate". This percentage rose to 44% in 1992, 56% in 2005, and down slightly to 53% in 2007. Similarly, Figure 1.2 depicts the trend in public opinion concerning the percentage of respondents stating that the media was "politically biased". The percentages increased from 45% in 1985, to 56% in 1999, 60% in 2005 and down slightly to 55% in 2007. In

Figure 1.1: Pew Survey Data - Percent of Public that Believes Stories in the Media are "Often Inaccurate" (1985-2007)

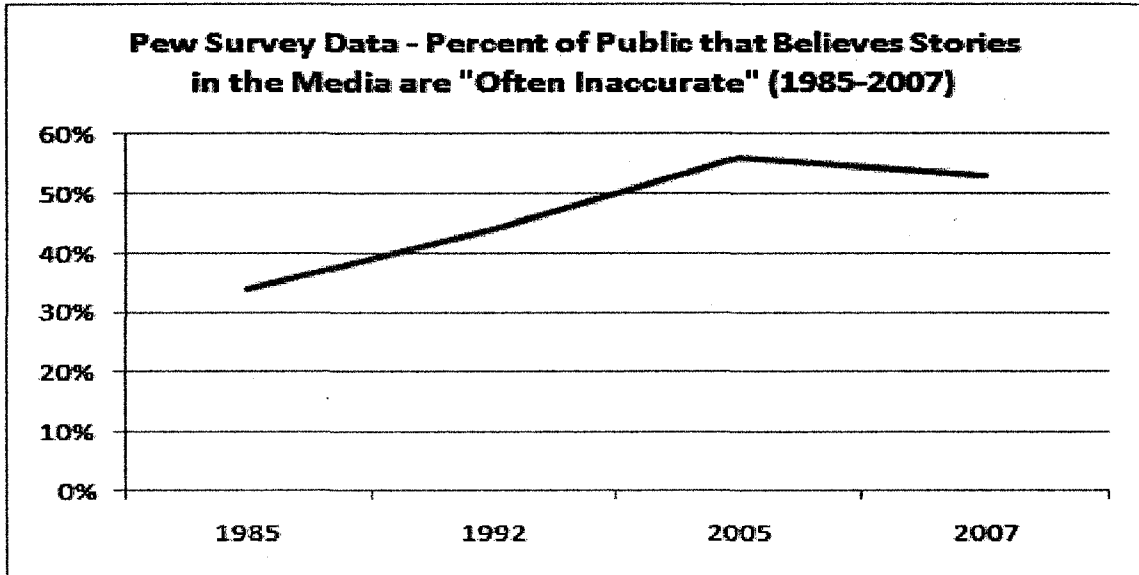
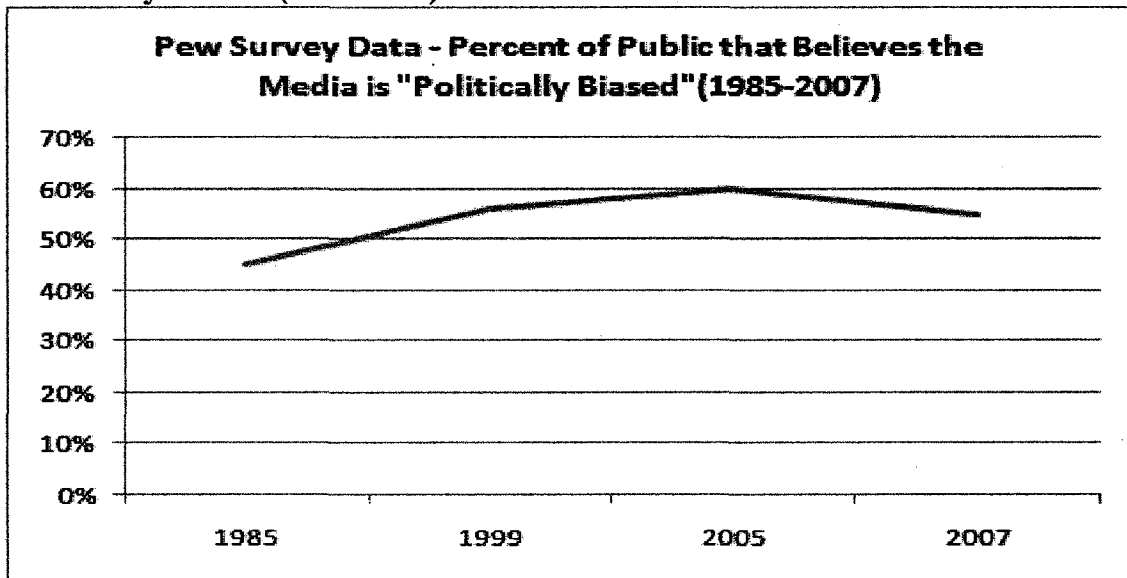


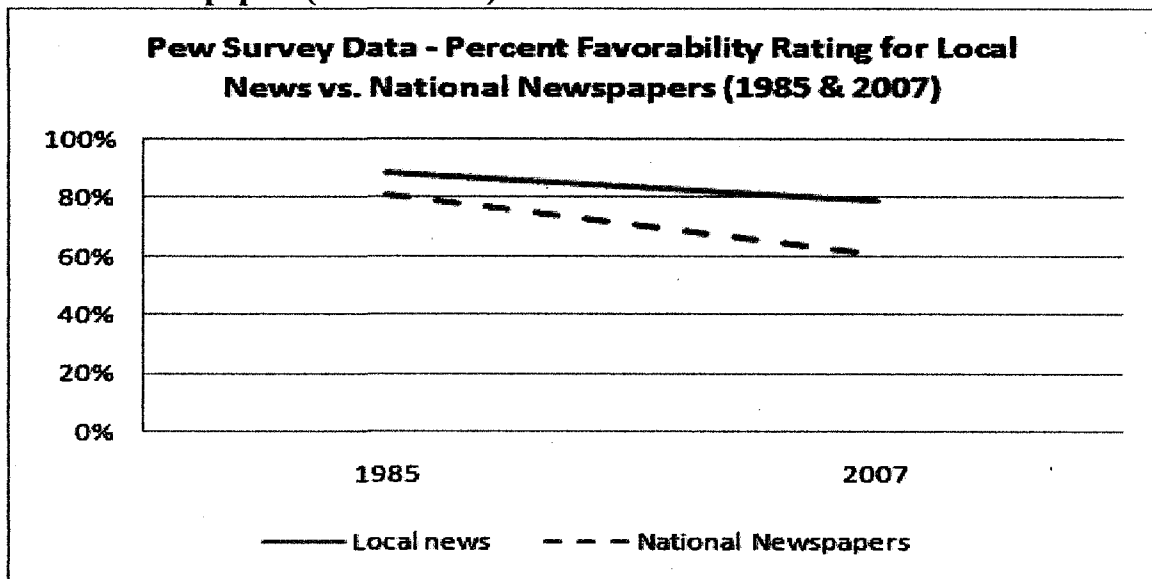
Figure 1.2: Pew Survey Data - Percent of Public that Believes the Media is "Politically Biased" (1985-2007)



terms of overall favorability ratings, Pew surveys indicate that differences exist among the public when asked to rate various media types. As Figure 1.3 depicts, local news has received the strongest favorability ratings. In 1985 local news received an 89% favorable rating and in 2007 a 79% favorable rating. The least favored media type was major

national newspapers. In 1985 major national papers received an 81% favorable rating compared to 61% favorable rating in 2007. The one common denominator that the Pew data point out, however, is that the trend in public favorability ratings toward all media types has been in decline over the past two decades.

Figure 1.3: Pew Survey Data - Percent Favorability Rating for Local News vs. National Newspapers (1985 & 2007)

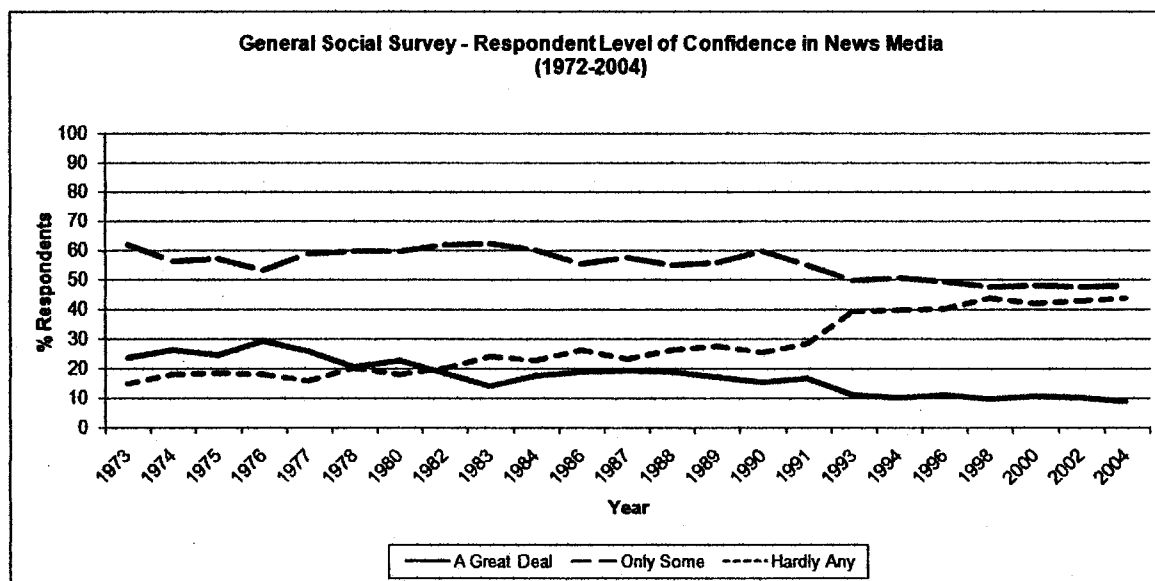


Recent survey data from Pew also suggests that individuals who obtain most of their news from the Internet are particularly likely to illustrate negative evaluations of the media. Thirty-eight percent of those who obtained their news primarily from the Internet stated that they held an unfavorable opinion of cable news networks such as CNN, Fox News Channel, and MSNBC compared to 25% of the entire public and 17% of those who obtain their news mostly from television. The Pew survey also noted that Internet news readers criticized news organizations for “their lack of empathy, their failure to ‘stand up for America,’ and political bias.” Sixty-eight percent remarked that the news organizations “did not care about the people they report on” and 53% believed that the news organizations were “too critical of America”. These figures were higher than the

entire public sample, although the public at large provided a negative assessment as well (53% and 43% respectively).¹

Pew is not alone in its findings. The General Social Survey (2006) has asked respondents the following question since 1972: “I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?” Figure 1.4 depicts the negative trends in public support toward the news media as a key institution within the United States. As is clearly illustrated, over the past thirty years the number of respondents stating they hold “hardly any” confidence in the news media has grown substantially while those claiming “a great deal” or “only some” have consistently dropped.²

Figure 1.4: General Social Survey (GSS) Trends Depicting Respondents Level of Confidence in the News Media (1972-2004)

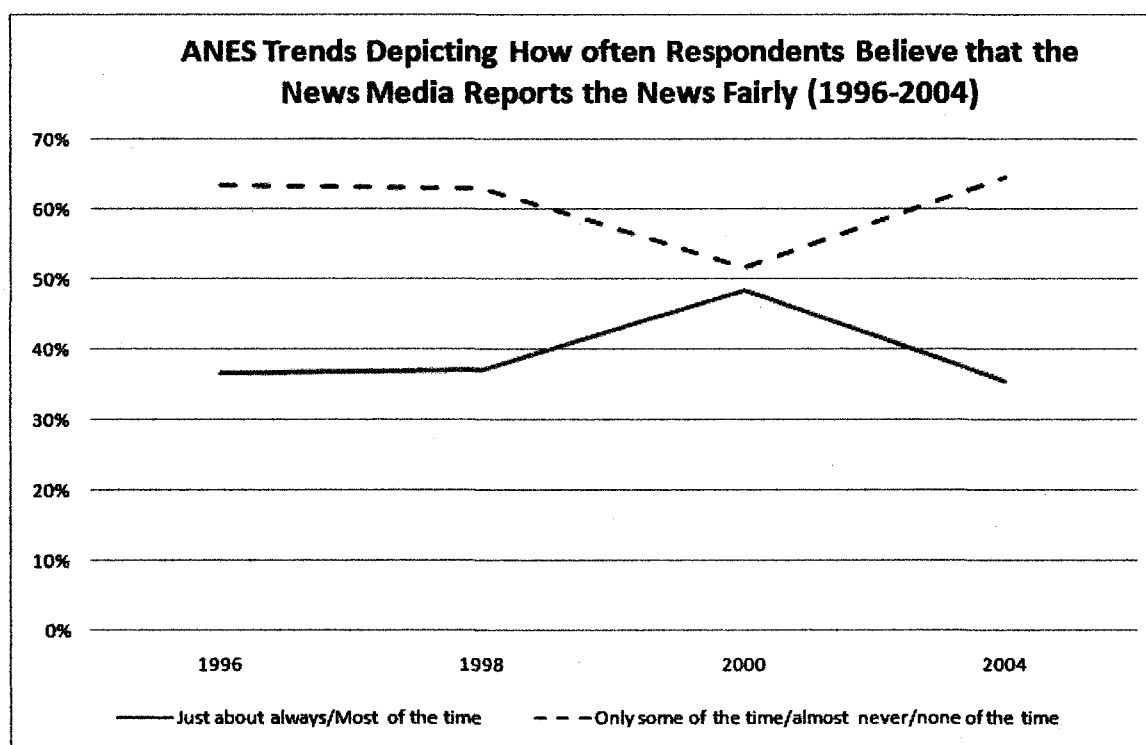


¹ Pew survey data and quotes obtained from <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=348>

² General Social Survey data obtained from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss04>

Likewise, the American National Election Study (2007) has tracked respondent levels of trust in the news media since 1996. ANES has asked respondents, “How much of the time do you think you can trust the media to report the news fairly? Just about always, most of the time, only some of the time, almost never, or none of the time?”³ Figure 1.5 provides a summary of respondent opinions concerning this issue. Overall, respondents have consistently provided higher negative opinions concerning the media’s capacity to report the news fairly.⁴ In the following section I highlight research, as well as my own findings, that potentially explain “who trusts the news media”.

Figure 1.5: American National Election Study (ANES) Trends Depicting How Often Respondents Believe that the Media Reports the News Fairly (1996-2004)



³ American National Election Study cumulative data file and codebook are available at: http://www.electionstudies.org/studypages/download/datacenter_special.htm

⁴ Results were merged by the author into two categories (i.e., generally positive or negative opinions of the media’s ability to report the news fairly) from the original five-point ANES scale.

Who Trusts the News Media?

Declining trust in the news media is not a unique phenomenon among the American public. In fact, declining levels of trust in the news media coincide with dwindling degrees of trust in key political institutions including Congress, the Executive branch, and the Supreme Court over the past thirty years as well.⁵ So what is driving this decline in media trust among the American public? Yariv Tsfati (2003a, 65) notes that widespread and increasing media mistrust in recent years has provoked scholars to examine the correlates of declining trust (e.g., Kohut and Toth 1998; Watts et al. 1999; Bennett et al. 2001). Bennett, Rhine, and Flickinger (2001) provide a detailed summary of the literature on this topic, which I summarize below.

One factor suggested to decrease public trust in the media was coverage of negative political events and issues, and whether the public perceived that coverage as biased. Robinson (1974) found that the American public's perception of Richard Nixon, politicians in general, and the news media became increasingly negative during the first televised Watergate hearing. Becker, Cobbey, and Sobowale (1978) suggested that conservative Republicans that approved of Nixon's job performance were also likely to criticize the news media over Watergate. Robinson and Kohut (1988) report that when disputes occur between the government and the press over the validity of factual information, that these disputes tend to weaken the credibility of both institutions in the minds of the public. Robinson and Petrella (1988) find that the public looks at the severity of the crime committed by a politician when making a determination of the

⁵ See Levi and Stoker (2000) for review of literature on declining levels of social and political trust in the United States.

credibility of the media in reporting said story. Specifically, if the public perceives the politician's alleged crime as nonsensical, personal in nature (personal indiscretion), politically-motivated, or untrue then public assessment of the media's credibility becomes undermined. Research by Ornstein and Robinson (1990) suggested that the media's reporting of politics has increasingly become sensationalist in format, while de-emphasizing the news. Sensationalist-oriented reporting in turn has hurt the media's credibility among the American public. Other scholars find that the news media's negative coverage of politics has led to a decline in public confidence toward the press (e.g., Sabato 1993, Fallows 1996, Lichter and Noyes 1996, Cappella and Jamieson 1997).

Scholars have also explored the impact of various demographic and political predisposition variables shaping one's level of media trust. The results from this research literature tend to indicate a generally weak relationship between demography and media trust. Schneider and Lewis (1985) reported that the more one knew about the media, the less credible s/he found the press. Robinson and Kohut (1988) found little evidence supporting the thesis that demographic and partisanship factors predicted one's trust in the media. However, higher education levels did relate to less press credibility. Utilizing ANES data from 1996 and 1998, Bennett et al. (2001) were able to statistically isolate two relevant independent forces predicting respondents' trust in the media's ability to report the news fairly. ANES respondents who supported traditional moral values and who were highly misanthropic tended not to trust the news media to report the news fairly.⁶ The independent impact of traditional moral values and misanthropy on lower

⁶ Misanthropy is conceptualized as one who increasingly mistrusts people. Bennett et al. (2001, 168-169) misanthropy measure is based on Morris Rosenberg's *Faith in People* scale (1956, 1957, 1965). Two items from this scale were used to create the misanthropy measure: 1) to what extent do you believe people can be trusted or that people couldn't be too careful when dealing with others, and 2) do people generally try to

levels of trust in the news media were observed controlling for respondents' ideology, partisanship, and evaluations of presidential and congressional job performance along with several other demographic variables. Contrary to expectations, these scholars did not find a statistically significant relationship between ideology and partisanship on one's level of media trust.

Bennett et al. findings were a major step forward in establishing the first comprehensive empirical model that defined "who trusts the news media"; however, their results are problematic in at least three methodological respects. First, the data was time-dependent. The analysis included only two ANES surveys: 1996 and 1998. The inclusion of additional survey years would add further external validity to their original findings. Second, binary logistic regression analysis was used to generate the estimated parameter coefficients in the model. Bennett et al. collapsed the ANES media trust variable, originally scaled along a five-point continuum, into a dichotomous variable. A more appropriate modeling technique for an ordinal dependent variable such as the ANES media trust question is ordinal logistic regression, or "ordered logit."⁷ Third, Bennett et al. included two measures of one's political ideology: the standard 7-point Likert liberal-conservative scale as well a 3-point Likert scale measuring the extent to which one held a

be helpful or do they try to take advantage of others. Bennett et al. (p. 169) also cite work by Putnam (1995a, 1995b) that suggests the decline in people's trust of others is due to a loss of "social capital". Misanthropy is hypothesized, and as the results of both Bennett et al. and my analyses indicates, is a key predictor of one's trust (or lack thereof) in the news media.

⁷ Bennett et. al argue that the use of a binary dummy variable was due to the skewed nature of the ANES media trust responses during 1996 and 1998. The majority of respondents indicated skeptical opinions toward the media's ability to report the news fairly in both surveys. However, the use of ordinal logistic regression techniques is considered the more appropriate methodological approach to generate estimated parameter coefficients when the dependent variable is ordinal. See Long (1997) for a detailed summary supporting the use of ordinal logistic regression. See also the research design section of chapter five of this dissertation for a detailed explanation and argument for the application of this method of analysis when regressing ordinal-scaled dependent variables.

traditional moral versus a secular-modernist predisposition. The use of both ideology measures, however, suggests that multi-collinearity may have biased their results. Accordingly, I have re-run the original Bennett et al. regression model using the pooled time-series ANES dataset. This dataset includes the years 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2004. Moreover, I estimate the parameter coefficients via ordinal logistic regression techniques along with the original binary logistic regression approach used by Bennett et al. Third, I simply enter into the model the standard 7-point liberal-conservative ideology measure to control for the potential problem of multi-collinearity.⁸

Table 1.1 provides the results of these regression analyses. The dependent variable asked respondents to what extent they believed the media reported the news fairly? Responses ranged from "just about always" to "none of the time". The ordinal logistic model maintained the five-point media fairness scale; whereas, the binary logistic model collapsed the responses into two categories: "just about always/most of the time" and "only some of the time/almost never/none of the time". The results from both models indicate that age, family income, party identification, presidential and congressional approval, along with possessing a misanthropic predisposition were all statistically significant predictors of one's belief that the media reported the news unfairly. The ordinal logistic model indicated that ideology was a statistically significant predictor, while the binary logistic model found education as a statistically significant predictor.

⁸ The 2002 ANES did not ask respondents the media fairness question. I follow the same coding procedures that Bennett et al. (2001) used to create their independent variables. The Bennett et al. media trust model included several measures of media exposure, including one's level of exposure to political talk radio and the number days that one watched local TV news. These question were not included in the ANES cumulative dataset and therefore do not appear in my explanatory model of media trust.

The values of the estimated parameter coefficients for each model were relatively similar with exception of partisanship, ideology, presidential approval and misanthropy.

My results confirm the importance of misanthropy predicting one's belief in the fairness of the media. My results indicate, though, that misanthropy is an even stronger influence predicting one's belief in media fairness than what was originally reported by Bennett et al. Moreover, I find contrary to Bennett et al. that party identification and ideology are also statistically significant predictors of media fairness. Stronger Republican and conservative identifiers tended to express stronger belief that the media reports the news unfairly.⁹ Also, Bennett et al. did not find age and family income as relevant demographic predictors in their original model. Thus, utilizing the ANES cumulative pooled time-series data versus individual survey datasets, the inclusion of two additional survey years of data to analyze, and utilizing a more applicable parameter coefficient estimation technique appears to generate a more nuanced composite of "who trust the news media":

- lower education levels
- younger age
- lower family incomes
- stronger liberal and Democratic identifiers
- stronger approvers of Congressional and Presidential job performance

⁹ Bennett et al. did find that those respondents who held stronger traditional moral values were more likely to express stronger negative views of media fairness, while finding no statistically significant support for the impact of traditional liberal-conservative ideology predicting media fairness. That finding, however, is more likely due to the result of multi-collinearity between the two measures of ideology. That is why I left out the traditional moral versus modernist measure of ideology in my media trust models and relied solely on the 7-point Likert scale liberal-conservative measure.

Table 1.1: Ordinal & Binary Logistic Regression Predictors of ANES Respondents' Belief in the News Media's Fairness (1996-2004)

Predictors	Ordinal	Binary	Bennett et al. (2001) Binary	
	Logistic Model	Logistic Model	Logistic Models	
	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)
	NES Cumulative	NES Cumulative	NES 1996	NES 1998
Age	.007*** (.002)	.006** (.002)	.004 (.005)	.005 (.005)
Education	.065** (.024)	.056* (.026)	.002 (.032)	.101** (.036)
Family Income	.106*** (.032)	.117*** (.035)	.006 (.012)	.009 (.012)
Race (White)	-.003 (.086)	-.025 (.094)	-.254 (.250)	-.399 (.247)
Gender (Male)	.000 (.066)	-.080 (.073)	-.215 (.140)	-.070 (.151)
Party ID	.131*** (.017)	.115*** (.019)	.025 (.044)	.011 (.045)
Ideology	.028 (.016)	.041* (.018)	.113 (.063)	.068 (.068)
# Days last week read newspaper	-.017 (.012)	-.014 (.014)	-.028 (.026)	-.025 (.030)
# Days last week viewed national TV news	-.013 (.013)	.003 (.014)	.002 (.031)	.038 (.033)
Congressional Approval	-.337*** (.067)	-.301*** (.073)	-.033 (.040)	-.437** (.154)
Presidential Approval	-.506*** (.073)	-.475*** (.082)	-1.053** (.197)	-.322 (.191)
Misanthropy	.306*** (.043)	.256*** (.047)	.071* (.022)	.091** (.024)
1996 dummy	-.004 (.093)	-.002 (.103)		
1998 dummy	.119 (.097)	.026 (.107)		
2000 dummy	-.428*** (.112)	-.497*** (.122)		
<i>N</i>	3,541	3,541	857	857
-2 Log Likelihood	7,662.04	4,505.38	1,291.19	1,071.60
Model Chi ²	294.82***	218.88***	124.59***	55.60***
Pseudo R ² (Nagerlkerke)	.089	.081	.149	.086

Significance levels: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed test)

Note: Dependent variable asked respondents to what extent they trust that the news media reported the news fairly. The dependent variable in the ordinal logistic model is a five-point scale ranging from *just about always* to *none of the time*; whereas, the dependent variable in the binary logistic model and in the Bennett et al. model was binary where 1 equals *only some of the time/ almost never/ none of the time* and 0 equals *just about always/most of the time*.

- stronger trust in people

Of these, the strongest predictors tend to be misanthropy and partisan/ideological predisposition.

The Consequences of Trust in the News Media

While significant attention has been paid to explaining the determinants of declining media trust over the past several decades, Tsfati (p. 65, italics from the original) posits:

“very little attention has been devoted to the *consequences* of mistrust in the media. Audience skepticism has been particularly ignored when it comes to media theory building. Not many scholars studying the interactions between news messages and their receivers have incorporated audience mistrust of the media as a covariate into their models, despite strong social scientific evidence that trust generally plays a role in various social phenomenon from persuasion (Hovland & Weiss 1951; Hovland, Janis, and Kelly 1953, pp. 19-55) to social cooperation in prisoner-dilemma game theoretic situations (Coleman 1990).”

Likewise, Bennett, Rhine, and Flickinger (2001, 164), referring to early media studies conducted by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953), note that “[l]ong ago, experiments showed that ‘communicator credibility’ has significant consequences for the audience’s reaction to mass media messages”. Tsfati, to date, has completed the most thorough research on this topic. Tsfati and Cappella (2003) examined whether people watched what they did not trust? They found that people who are increasingly skeptical of the mainstream news media consumed less information from these sources, and instead, turned to non-mainstream news sources such as the Internet. Likewise, Tsfati (2003) found that increased media skepticism moderated the impact of agenda setting. At the individual-level, Tsfati found that the more skeptical one was of the media, the less likely s/he was to mention issues receiving extensive media attention as “the most important

problem” in related survey questions. Tsfati (2005) also established that individuals who are increasingly skeptical of the press tend to reject media reports of public opinion. By examining public opinion during the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, Tsfati found that regardless of alternative explanations such as ideology, political knowledge, media exposure, and demographics that media skepticism was negatively associated with the “perceived opinion climate” presented by the press about those elections. For example, those who were increasingly skeptical of the press were also increasingly likely to reject claims by the press that Bill Clinton held a “huge” lead in the presidential race (p. 77). Thus, Tsfati’s work on this topic illustrates some of the consequences of media trust shaping one’s opinions.

Following in this research tradition and call for greater focus on the “consequences” of mistrust in the news media, this dissertation examines a simple yet complex question: Does one’s level of trust in the news media influence one’s political attitudes? I theorize that media trust plays an important *moderating* influence on the probability that individuals either accept or resist new political information that they receive from the media and, in turn, that media messages then influence individuals’ expressed political opinions.

The RAS Model of Communication Effects and the Introduction of Media Trust

This dissertation follows in a theoretical tradition established by political scientist John Zaller (1992). Zaller developed what is referred to as the Reception-Acceptance-Sample (RAS) model of communication effects. Zaller (1992, 40) has constructed a coherent theoretical explanation detailing the process by which individuals “acquire information and convert it into public opinion”. Briefly stated, the RAS model posits that media

messages exert a potentially powerful influence over public opinion. The likelihood of a media effect is contingent, however, on individual-level variations in *reception* of political messages delivered via the mass media and *acceptance* or *resistance* to those messages. Reception of media messages is a function of one's level of political awareness along with how intensely the media focuses attention on political issues that it reports to the public. Acceptance and resistance of media messages is a function of one's partisan predisposition and political awareness level. The RAS model's specific axioms and propositions are detailed in greater length in chapter two. A moderating factor that has not been directly examined within the context of the RAS model is media trust. The news media are central to the RAS model, given that they are the primary sources from which the public obtains political communications. Studies have found that trustworthy sources are more persuasive than those believed less trustworthy (e.g., Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Accordingly, if one does not trust the source of the political message – in this case, the news media – then one should be more likely to resist having his or her political attitudes affected by information obtained from the source. For example, if one does not trust information received from the *New York Times*, s/he should tend to resist that information as persuasive and, in turn, not allow that information to alter his or her political attitudes and vice versa.

Going Forward

To date, little attention has been paid among media effects scholars on the implications of public trust of the news media and the potential impact that trust plays in shaping political attitudes. Doing so will help refine our understanding for how the public forms its political evaluations and opinions. In light of the negative trends depicted in this

opening chapter concerning public perception of the press, it is my contention throughout this dissertation that public trust in the news media plays a significant role in the process of attitude formation.

Accordingly, the remainder of the dissertation is organized into the following chapters. Chapter two provides a detailed summary of the literature concerning media effects as well as describes in greater detail the main axioms and propositions put forth by the RAS model of persuasion effects. Chapter two also discusses how media trust is a theoretically new and important variable that fits within the RAS model's broader axioms and propositions. Chapter's three through five develop both experimental and large-N survey research designs in order to test the impact of media trust on one's political opinions. Chapter three develops an experiment that examines the impact of subjects' policy preferences toward the United Nations, along with the moderating effects of media trust, political awareness, and partisanship as potential factors that explain treatment group subjects' specific policy preferences toward the United Nations. Chapter four utilizes a large-N national survey to explain American's unusually high level of support for military intervention into Iraq during the fall of 2002. This was a time period in which significant attention by the press was directed at the Bush administration's arguments for the invasion. This chapter also highlights current literature indicating that the news media provided the American public with a one-sided flow of information that was generally uncritical of the Bush administration's linkage between Iraq, al-Qaeda, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Once again, one's level of media trust is tested alongside other theoretically relevant variables as key predictors for supporting military intervention. Chapter five focuses on the aftermath of the 1998 Monica Lewinsky affair and

impeachment debate, which received extensive media coverage. This chapter employs a large-N national survey to examine whether one's assessment of news media coverage of the Lewinsky affair played a role in shaping one's overall job approval evaluations of President Bill Clinton. Chapter six concludes the dissertation by arguing, based on the evidence presented in chapter's three through five, whether too much trust in the news media is in fact the appropriate prescription for a healthy democracy.

Chapter Two

The Impact of Mass Media Messages on Public Opinion – An Overview of Research on Public Opinion and the Mass Media

“The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It has to be explored, reported, and imagined.”

Walter Lippmann (1922, 29)

“Hypodermic” and “Minimal” Media Effects Perspectives

Walter Lippmann believed that the media provide the “pictures” that the average citizen, with limited political knowledge and access to political affairs, uses to make sense of the political world. Lippmann and other early twentieth century social scientists (e.g., Lasswell 1927) postulated that the relationship between mass media and public opinion resembled a “hypodermic” needle effect, whereby a manipulative mass media injected their views into a passive public whose opinions were mere reflections of what the media reported. Contrary to this view, early empirical studies on the mass media and public opinion found little evidence of the media “injecting” their views into citizens’ minds. Communications scholar Hadley Cantril (1940) conducted extensive interviews with listeners of H.G. Wells 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast, finding that only a small percentage of listeners were actually scared or panicked as a result of the infamous broadcast. Likewise, Carl Hovland (1949) conducted extensive experimental research on the persuasiveness of propaganda films viewed by American GIs during WWII. Hovland examined how persuasive these films were in motivating soldiers to fight and die for their country. The *Why We Fight* films’ effects on GIs varied. Soldiers learned much information about the events that led to the war. To a lesser degree, soldiers’

attitudes toward the enemy were altered. Most significantly, however, soldiers were no more willing to fight and die for their country.

Early survey data research conducted by scholars at Columbia University (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954) on voting behavior found that citizens did not rely on campaign messages obtained from the media to form their vote preferences. Drawing on successive interviews with citizens in Erie County, Pennsylvania, these scholars suggested that most voters already knew whom they would vote for prior to the election. Interpersonal communications among voters belonging to similar social groups (e.g., family, friends, church, unions) were more important for explaining the formation (as well as any shifts) in vote preferences during the campaign. Voters, if they did attend to election news, tended to read or listen to news about the candidates that they already supported.

A decade later, sociologist Joseph Klapper (1960) posited the “minimal effects” model of media influence. Klapper, relying on “cognitive dissonance” theory (Festinger 1957), argued that people selectively exposed themselves to and retained media messages with which they agreed. According to the theory, individuals reject information that is dissonant with their beliefs while accepting information that is consonant with those values. Partly as a result of Klapper’s and other scholars’ views that the media primarily reinforced individuals’ preexisting attitudes but do not directly alter those positions, the volume of research on media effects declined substantially during the remainder of the 1960s.

“Indirect” Media Effects Perspective

A renewed interest in media effects developed partly in reaction to the social changes and events during the 1960s. As such, an expansive research literature has emerged on media effects since the early 1970s. Two research approaches tend to characterize the literature. The first approach refers to the “indirect effects” of the media on public opinion. Political scientist Bernard Cohen (1963, 13) suggested that “[t]he press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) were the first to test this “agenda setting” theory of the news media. These scholars examined the correlation between the salience of political issues among voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and actual media content on those issues during the 1968 presidential campaign. McCombs and Shaw found that the importance rankings of issues among voters corresponded to a large degree with the amount of news that those issues received.

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) demonstrated that the impact of media messages may go beyond agenda setting to “priming effects” as well. According to Iyengar and Kinder (p. 63, italics from the original), priming “refers to changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations...*By calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television news influences the standards by which governments, presidents, policies, and candidates for public office are judged.*” Priming, according to these authors, is based on the theoretical assumption that people neither possess expansive knowledge about political affairs nor take into account all of what they know about politics when making decisions. Instead, most people make evaluations based on what information comes to mind most immediately – that is, what information is most

accessible. Thus, “the more attention television news pays to a particular problem – the more frequently a problem is primed – the more the viewers should incorporate what they know about that problem into their overall judgement” (p. 65).

Central to priming theory is the “accessibility hypothesis,” the notion that the information that people use to evaluate political actors and policies is that which they are able to recall from their minds most quickly – i.e., the most accessible information (e.g., Tesser 1978; Wyer and Hartwick 1980; Higgins and King 1981; Bargh and Pietromonaco 1982; Tversky and Kahneman 1982; Iyengar et al. 1984; Wyer and Srull 1989; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Fisk and Taylor 1991; Iyengar 1991; Ansolabehre et al. 1993; Price and Tewksbury 1997). Information can be made accessible in several ways; one is through constant media attention to a particular issue (at the expense of other stories). In a similar vein, Ansolabehre et al. (1993) argue that as the news media spend significant time reporting on particular issues, voters place additional weight on those issues when constructing political evaluations. Likewise, Iyengar (1991, 10) contends that “[t]he themes and issues that are repeated in television news coverage become the priorities of viewers. Issues and events highlighted by television news become especially influential as criteria for evaluating public officials.”

Studies of priming have focused extensively on the moderators of this effect with mixed findings. Focusing specifically on levels of political knowledge, some studies found evidence in support of increased priming among the least politically knowledgeable citizens (e.g., Iyengar et al. 1984; Krosnick and Kinder 1990); other scholars, however, found little evidence of differences in priming across levels of political knowledge (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Still others found evidence in support of

enhanced priming effects among the most politically knowledgeable and least exposed and attentive to political news (Krosnick and Brannon 1993) or among those both highly politically knowledgeable and trusting in the news media (Miller and Krosnick 2000).

Research on priming effects has also focused extensively on media coverage of the national economy and the impact of media messages on the public's prospective economic evaluations (e.g., MacKuen et al. 1992; Mutz 1992, 1994; Goidel and Langley 1995). Additionally, Hetherington's (1996) priming research suggested that increased media consumption and attention to the 1992 presidential campaign influenced voters' negative retrospective economic evaluations. According to Hetherington, this was due to the dominant focus on, and negative tone in coverage of, the state of the national economy by the national news media during the months leading up to the 1992 election cycle (even though actual economic conditions had begun to change for the better in the months leading up to the general election). Voters' negative performance evaluations of the state of the economy helped to explain their presidential vote choice.

“Direct” Effects Perspective

Many scholars not only reject outright the “minimal effects” perspective but also posit that the mass media possess the power to persuade – that is, to directly shape a person's opinions. This perspective is best summarized by Zaller (1996, 18), who proclaimed that “mass communication is a powerful [instrument] for shaping the attitudes of the citizens who are exposed to it, and it exercises this power on an essentially continuous basis.” Since the 1970s scholars sought to explain the absence of evidence for direct media effects during the 1950s and 1960s. Dalton et al. (1998, 112) cite several relevant findings. For example, Erikson (1976) found that a newspaper's editorial endorsements

correlated with county-level voting outcomes. Robinson (1974) and Coombs (1981) found similar relationships between editorial endorsements and voting patterns of subscribers. Noelle-Neumann (1984) suggested that the media have a direct effect on voting preferences if their messages are “clear and consistent”. Bartels (1993) suggested that measurement error led to underestimating the impact of media messages and that adjusting for that error can illuminate media effects on opinion change. Research by Dalton et al. (1998) on the 1992 presidential election found that editorial content from the dominant county-level newspaper was related to subscribers’ candidate preferences. Arguably the most influential theoretical contribution to the literature in recent years, however, is the Reception-Acceptance-Sample (RAS) model developed by John Zaller (1992).¹⁰

Attitudes as Considerations

According to Zaller (1992, 40), the RAS model explains how citizens obtain political information and then convert those ideas into opinions. A conceptually important element of the RAS model concerns the definition of attitudes. Zaller (p. 118) states that:

“within the RAS model, ‘attitudes,’ in the conventional sense of the term, do not exist. Rather, people make ‘attitude reports’ or ‘survey responses’ on the basis of momentarily salient considerations. Attitude change, then, cannot be understood within the RAS model as a conversion experience, the replacement of one crystallized opinion structure by another. It must instead be understood as a change in the balance of positive and negative considerations relating to a particular issue.”

Zaller (p. 40) conceptualizes a consideration to be “any reason that might induce an individual to decide a political issue one way or the other. Considerations, thus, are

¹⁰ While the RAS model is traditionally associated with direct attitude change, Zaller (1992, 80) argues that

[compounds] of cognition and affect – that is, a belief concerning an object and an evaluation of the belief”. The cognitive element of a consideration is factual information about the issue; the affective element comprises whether the person agrees with the position on the issue (p. 40). Building on this conceptualization of an attitude as a “consideration”, the following sections in this chapter detail the four main axioms that define the RAS model and related expectations concerning media effects.

The Reception Axiom

The “reception axiom” posits that “[t]he greater a person’s level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely he or she is to be exposed to and comprehend – in a word, receive – political messages about that issue” (p. 42). Zaller contends that increased reception of political information is positively associated with one’s level of intellectual engagement, or attentiveness, to politics. In this way, increased reception of political information is assumed to be a function of one’s *“general, or chronic awareness”* of politics (p. 43, italics from the original). The methodological question is: how does one accurately measure general levels of political awareness? For Zaller, general political awareness is operationalized based on an index of questions that capture one’s knowledge of neutral factual questions about politics. Zaller believes that this approach is more appropriate to assess one’s reception of political information than the use of traditional self-reported “media exposure” questions (e.g., how many days in the past week did you watch national network TV news programming?). Zaller criticizes the use of self-reported media exposure questions for at least two reasons. First, self-reported exposure questions are highly unreliable. Survey respondents may inflate the actual time s/he

the model “is also well suited to explaining... priming effects.”

spends reading newspapers or watching television news when answering said survey question. Second, and more importantly, reception is about more than exposure – it is about capturing "comprehension" of the political information that one receives. As Zaller (p.21) adroitly states, "Attention alone is not enough, since people who, for example, watch the TV news while lying on the couch after dinner and a couple of glasses of wine will typically fail to enhance their political awareness." Zaller (p. 21) goes on to explain that the use of neutral factual questions about politics is the best methodological approach to gauge reception since "tests of political information, more directly than any other of the alternative measures [e.g., media exposure, education level, political participation, interest in politics], capture exactly what has gotten into people's minds, which, in turn, is critical for intellectual engagement with politics."

The Resistance Axiom

The "resistance axiom" states that "[p]eople tend to resist arguments that are inconsistent with their political predispositions, but do so only to the extent that they possess the contextual information necessary to perceive a relationship between the message and their predispositions" (p. 44). Political awareness is key to this relationship. Specifically, individuals with higher political awareness should be able to more effectively process information that they receive from the media, critically evaluate its content and tone and, in turn, determine whether that information is (in)consistent with his or her partisan predisposition. Moreover, all things being equal, highly aware persons should exhibit stronger political predispositions given their high level of involvement in political affairs compared to less aware persons.

As suggested by Converse (1964), the RAS model assumes that most individuals do not use their own reasoning to determine whether the political communications that they encounter are persuasive. Instead, to the extent that people do think critically about political information that they receive, most individuals rely on external cues - or “cueing messages” - about the political implications of those communications in order to determine their persuasiveness. One example of an external cue is the political source of a communication. According to Zaller, then, individuals will be more likely to resist a persuasive message if they recognize that the source of the message is inconsistent with their political predispositions. Thus, a conservative is more likely to resist a persuasive political communication if he or she is able recognize that the source of the message is a liberal. Zaller also relies on the psychological literature to substantiate the claim that people tend not to rely on their own reasoning when deciding on the persuasiveness of new information they encounter. Instead, people tend to rely on the credibility of the source of the new information, and “simply tend to accept their opinion leadership more readily” over time (Zaller 1992: 45, citing McGuire 1969).¹¹

The Accessibility Axiom

The “accessibility axiom” posits that “[t]he more recently a consideration has been called to mind or thought about, the less time it takes to retrieve that consideration or related

¹¹ Zaller (1992, 46-47) cites evidence by Rhine and Severance (1970), Chaiken (1980), and Petty and Cacioppo (1986) challenging this view. The findings from these scholars suggest that individuals disregard the credibility of the source and instead rely on the “quality of the persuasive information they have been given” – that is, under certain situations individuals do rely on their own reasoning rather than on the credibility of the source. Zaller, however, criticizes this position. He points out that Petty’s and Cacioppo’s findings are not generalizable. Zaller argues that “the conditions that make possible Petty’s and Cacioppo’s encouraging findings – weak arguments, and ‘receivers’ who are both involved and well-informed about the issue at hand – are simply not present in typical situations of mass persuasion. On the contrary, real-world conditions, according to the work of Petty and Cacioppo and that of others, encourage reliance on peripheral cues...”

considerations from memory and bring them to the top of the head for use” (p. 48).¹² According to the RAS model, individuals, when asked to respond to a survey, do not conduct a holistic search of information to form their preferences on policies and evaluations of political actors; instead, they tend to rely on considerations that are most accessible in their memories. Which considerations will be immediately accessible – that is, “at the top” of a person’s head – at the moment one is asked to provide an opinion about an issue will be determined by such factors as exposure to news stories about a particular political issue that one has recently seen or read. Moreover, the valence (i.e., tone) of such stories will influence which considerations become accessible.

Response Axiom

In turn, the final axiom – the “response axiom” - states, “[i]ndividuals answer survey questions by averaging across the considerations that are *immediately salient* or accessible to them” (p. 49, emphasis added). A policy preference or political evaluation that one provides will be based on the mix of positive and negative considerations immediately accessible in a person’s mind at the moment of responding to a question about it. The distribution of positive and negative considerations in one’s mind at any moment will depend on individual-level and societal-level factors (p. 52). For example, a strong traditional moral values conservative, who is highly politically aware, is asked to provide her position on abortion. Being highly politically aware, she is exposed to a wide array of competing information on the topic of abortion. As a strong traditional moral

¹² The accessibility axiom is consistent with the “accessibility hypothesis” found in the cognitive psychological literature (e.g., Higgins and King 1981), whereby a recent event (e.g., a television news story about a political issue a person has recently seen) facilitates the accessibility of constructs about that issue in people’s memories. In turn, accessibility is presumed to magnify the importance of these constructs on a subsequent judgement. Accessibility of mental constructs about an issue is presumed to be a *mediator*, or antecedent condition, to individuals stated opinions.

values conservative, though, she tends to resist pro-abortion information, which is inconsistent with her ideological predisposition. Her mind, therefore, is dominated by anti-abortion "considerations" on this issue. Given the recent reception and acceptance of anti-abortion information, those considerations are also very salient in her mind. If asked to provide an opinion on abortion, she will scan her memory about that issue and, based on the predominant and salient anti-abortion considerations that exist in her mind, she will provide a corresponding anti-abortion survey response. However, let's assume that the fictional female survey respondent possesses a weak traditional moral values predisposition, that she is moderately politically aware, and that over the last week pro-abortion information has dominated in the media. She is inclined, being moderately aware, to receive only the pro-abortion information that has dominated in the media. Second, having a weak traditional moral values predisposition, she is inclined to accept the pro-abortion information as persuasive. Having received and accepted the pro-abortion messages, her mind is now filled with predominantly pro-abortion "considerations". Moreover, the pro-abortion considerations are particularly salient in her mind. Thus, if asked to provide a position on abortion, she will find that her mind is dominated by immediately accessible pro-abortion considerations that will, in turn, dictate her stated survey response on this issue.

The Information Environment: One-Sided versus Two-Sided Media Information Flows

The RAS model also highlights the impact of one-sided versus two-sided information flows, or what Zaller describes as the "information environment". A one-sided information flow is defined as a heavy, or "dominant," stream of media information on a given issue that include a clear positive or negative direction about the issue being reported. However, most media information flows on an issue are rarely one-sided over

any lengthy period of time. Most issues reported by the media contain both dominant and countervailing message flows. The relevant concern for attitude change is determining the relative intensity of competing media messages within the overall information environment. According to Zaller (p. 185), media messages possess both a positive and negative valence. The valenced message that is more heavily emphasized by the media is considered the “dominant message”, while the less intensely reported valenced message is referred to as the “countervailing message”. The dominant message pushes significant public opinion in the direction of the positive or negative valence, while the countervailing message tries to counteract the effects of the dominant message on public opinion. Zaller states that “public opinion can be understood as a response to the relative intensity and stability of opposing flows of liberal and conservative communications. (Again, I stress that the use of these ideological labels is meant to convey only directional thrust of the message)” (pp. 185-186).

The impact of dominant and countervailing message flows, in turn, will have different effects on public opinion given one’s political predispositions, political awareness levels, and the relative intensity levels of the two competing messages. Zaller posits at times the least aware persons in society may be most susceptible to attitude change if the intensity of the dominant message on an issue is so strong, that it is capable of reaching this segment of society taking into consideration their low overall engagement in political affairs. Zaller cites presidential elections as one example (p. 267). I would suggest that coverage of the Iraq war as another example of very intense opposing media information flows. At other times, moderately aware persons should be most susceptible to attitude change, particularly when the information flow is

“moderately intense and partisan orientations are activated, as in contested House elections, presidential popularity, and in the early stages of the Vietnam War)” (p. 267). Even highly aware individuals are most likely to be influenced by media messages under conditions when there is “little partisan or ideological basis for resistance to persuasion...or little access to countervailing information, as in the early stages of the Vietnam War)” (p. 267). The important components in attitude change then involve not only one’s level of political awareness, along with one’s political predispositions, but also the relative intensity of the dominant and opposing message flows. First, to what extent are individuals exposed to dominant and/or countervailing information flows? And second, if individuals are exposed to a two-sided information flow, is the intensity of the countervailing message strong enough to reach greater segments of the population (i.e., moderately and less aware persons) to offset the dominant media message.

One example that Zaller uses to highlight impact of political awareness, political predispositions and the intensity of opposing information flows on attitude formation is public support for the Vietnam War. Between 1964 and 1966 antiwar media messages were very low in intensity relative to prowar messages. The overall impact of the low-intensity antiwar messages should have been most influential on persons with high levels of political awareness possessing liberal ideological predispositions. Highly aware persons would have been the most likely to “receive” the weak antiwar message given their high level of exposure to countervailing sources of political information; moreover, highly aware liberals should have “accepted” the antiwar message given their antiwar stance. The dominant prowar message, however, should have been most influential on moderate and eventually least aware persons given increased media attention to the war

during that two year period; furthermore, moderate and least aware “doves” should have exhibited somewhat greater prowar attitudes relative to highly aware doves given the latter’s generally stronger antiwar predispositions along with their ability to relate the antiwar messages with their dovishness. As the media’s antiwar messages rose in intensity relative to the prowar message between 1966 and 1970, support for the war among moderate and less aware doves should have shifted in the direction of the antiwar message. As for self-identified “hawks” during this same time period, they should have indicated prowar attitudes consistent with their ideological predispositions; however, the strongest levels of support should have been exhibited among the most politically aware segment of the population. Zaller’s research confirms these propositions and illustrates how individual-level variations in political awareness, political predispositions, and the relative intensities of opposing information flows influence attitude formation.

The Role of Media Trust as a Moderating Factor on Acceptance and Resistance of Political Information

Beginning with the research by Carl Hovland in the 1950s (Hovland and Weiss 1951; Hovland et al. 1953), the literature has shown that information sources deemed more trustworthy are also more persuasive and vice versa.¹³ This includes Philip McGuire’s (1969) theoretical contributions to the RAS model concerning contextual cues and source credibility. McGuire, building directly on Hovland’s work, suggests that most people tend to judge the persuasiveness of a communication on the credibility of the source of the message – not on their own reasoning – and they become more reliant on the source of the opinion over time.

¹³ e.g., Eagly and Chaiken (1993)

Zaller (1992, 47) contends that even though McGuire did not directly examine political sources, other studies empirically substantiate that people do rely upon external political cues. For example, people tend to evaluate the persuasiveness of new political information that they receive based on whether the source promoting the message is a liberal or conservative, Republican or Democratic, a hawk or a dove (e.g., Belknap and Campbell 1951-52; Campbell et al. 1960; Key 1961; Mueller 1973; Price 1989; Gerber and Jackson 1990; Pollock et al. 1991; Page and Shapiro 1992). Thus, the RAS model would predict that a Republican is more likely than a Democrat to resist political messages from a Democratic source. Political elites help to manifest this belief within the public by claiming that the sources of political messages – in this case the media themselves - are biased by favoring a particular partisan or ideological position in the stories that they report. Thus, given the importance of high-credibility versus low-credibility source cues in the RAS model, another important external source cue that may affect resistance or acceptance of political communications is *media trust*. The news media are central to the RAS model, given that they are the primary sources from which the public obtains political communications. If one does not trust the source of the political message - here the media themselves – then one should be more likely to resist the communication.

The implication of trust is that one's political attitudes should be further *reinforced* if a) political messages are *received* from the news media, b) those messages are *consistent* with one's political predispositions and c) one *trusts* the source of those messages – the news media. Attitude reinforcement should be particularly evident among highly aware persons. Highly aware persons are increasingly exposed to political

information from the news media, they possess the ability to more accurately connect these political messages with their political predispositions, and they tend to possess stronger overall partisan attachments relative less aware persons. Whereas, higher levels of media trust should *attenuate* the impact of partisan resistance among highly aware persons. That is, if political messages delivered by the news media are contrary to a highly aware person's political predispositions, yet s/he trusts the messenger – i.e., the media - then s/he should be increasingly likely to accept the message. Doing so, the highly aware person should tend to direct their political opinions in the direction of the message itself.

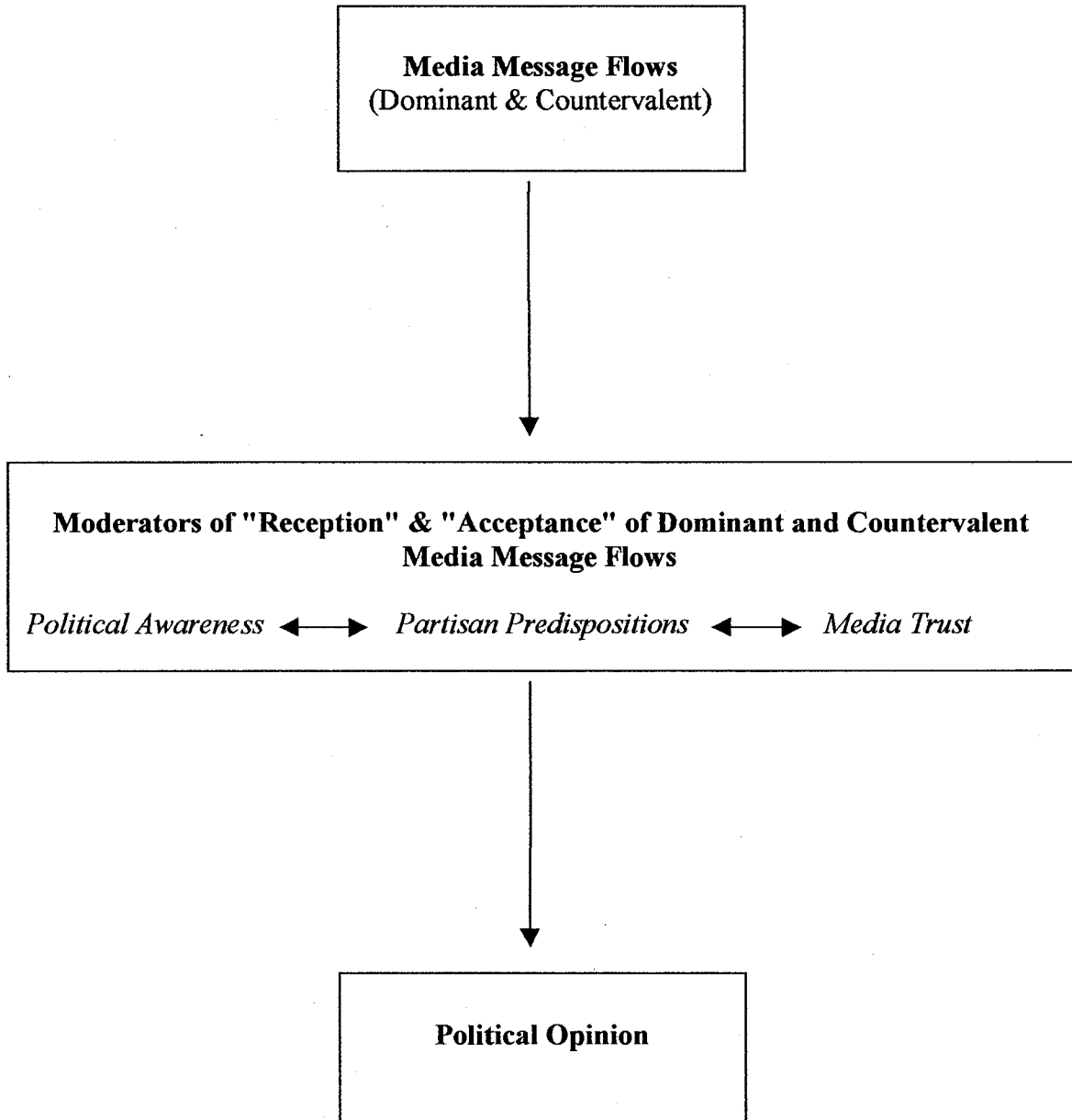
As for less aware persons, higher levels of trust should also further reinforce their political attitudes assuming that the message is in fact received and consistent with their partisan predispositions. Less aware persons, however, are not as capable of accurately connecting political information that they receive from the media with their political predispositions; moreover, less aware persons also generally tend to hold weaker partisan positions relative to their highly aware counterparts. Higher levels of trust in the news media should, on the one hand, help mitigate the probability that less aware persons resist information that is consistent with his or her partisan positions; on the other hand, higher levels of trust should also increase the potential that these same less aware persons also accept information that is inconsistent with his or her partisan positions. Whether the impact of trust is more evident among individuals with average or low awareness is a function of the intensity level of the dominant political message. That is, whether the dominant political message was so intense that it was received by even those persons with low awareness levels. To date, media trust has not been integrated within the RAS

model of communication effects, and it is the major contribution of this dissertation to the field.¹⁴

Based on this chapter's theoretical discussion concerning the RAS model and the impact of media trust shaping one's political opinions and evaluations, Figure 2.1 provides a schematic depiction of the RAS model of communication effects that includes media trust as a new moderating factor on attitude formation. Chapter's three through five develop experimental and large-N research designs intended to test the propositions laid out in this chapter regarding the RAS model, with specific emphasis on the role of media trust as a moderating force on one's political opinions.

¹⁴ Miller and Krosnick (2000) found through experimental research that among the most politically knowledgeable individuals, those expressing high levels of media trust were particularly likely to experience priming and agenda setting effects. Similarly, Tsfati (2003a) found that when audiences trusted the media, they tended to accept the climate of opinions expressed by the media and vice versa. Iyengar and Kinder (1985) found through experimentation that subjects who trusted the media were more likely to exhibit agenda setting effects. Likewise, Tsfati (2003b) found that individuals who were more skeptical of the media were also more likely to resist agenda setting. Miller and Wanta (1996), however, found no relationship between agenda setting and media trust. Additionally, Tsfati and Cappella (2003) found that people who do not trust the mainstream news media are more likely to expose themselves to non-mainstream sources, whereas those who trust the mainstream media remain a loyal audience.

Figure 2.1 Schematic Depiction of RAS Model of Communication Effects (including media trust moderator)



Chapter Three

Assembling Public Support for the United Nations

"Most Americans believe the United Nations should be stronger and that it plays a necessary role in the world. Americans are dissatisfied, however, with how well the United Nations is carrying out its mission."

World Public Opinion.org, (9 May 2007)

Introduction

Chapter three presents the first of three specific empirical studies designed to test whether one's level of trust in the news media, along with political awareness and political predispositions, condition the impact that media messages have on one's political opinions. This chapter develops an experimental research design that manipulates news about the United Nations, as well as the specific media sources of that information, to ascertain whether said manipulations influence subjects' opinions about this international institution. Of particular interest is whether one's level of trust in the news media moderates the impact of the treatments on subjects' stated UN policy preferences. Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. First, I provide a brief summary of current opinions that the American public exhibits toward the UN. I then outline propositions that are to be tested. Next, I describe the research design. I then assess both descriptive statistics and the overall findings of OLS regressions. I conclude with a summary of the central findings prior to moving to the second empirical study in chapter four.

A Brief Summary of Current American Attitudes toward the UN

In a 2007 survey published by World Public Opinion.org the University of Maryland based survey organization, in conjunction with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs,

found that the American public holds two general opinions toward the United Nations. First, the American public overwhelmingly supports the general principles upon which the international organization was founded. A majority of respondents stated that the UN should take on a dominant role in international affairs. Moreover, the UN's dominant role in international affairs holds up even when respondents are told that American leaders may need to accept less than optimal compromises with the international body in the broader pursuit toward global cooperation. Specifically, 60% of Americans surveyed responded that the "United States should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations even if it means agreeing to a policy that is not their country's first choice". Likewise, 69% of survey respondents suggested that it was not in the best interests of U.S. leaders to avoid working with international institutions. The support among the American public for the principle of multilateralism was an increase of 13 percentage points from the last time World Public Opinion.org asked the public this question in 1999.

Given the American public's support for the general principles of international cooperation and multilateralism in solving global issues, Americans are not as approving of the UN's ability to effectively carry out those principles. Recent scandals, opposition to U.S. military intervention in Iraq, and the perception that the institution struggles to effectively perform its duties potentially contribute to American's low job approval evaluations of the United Nations. The report found that public satisfaction with the UN's job performance peaked with the 9/11 attacks, then dropped and has consistently

been above 60% disapproval since the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. This was also the period of time when the UN "Oil for Food" scandal was revealed.¹⁵

Propositions

Could the divergent opinions expressed by the American public regarding the role and efficacy of the UN be explained by the tone of media messages that the American public receives about the UN? To examine this question, I propose an experimental study that exposes subjects to positive news about the work of the UN in order to examine what effect, if any, that message has on subjects' stated UN policy preferences. I expect that the impact of exposure to positive information about the UN should lead these subjects to provide stronger positive policy preferences compared to subjects in the control group; however, the specific impact of the treatment should not be ubiquitous across all treatment group subjects: the impact of the treatment should be *conditional* on individual-level variations in treatment group subjects' political awareness, partisan predispositions, and media trust. The following paragraphs detail specific propositions concerning the impact of these three moderators on treatment group subjects' stated UN policy preference.

Partisanship Propositions

One's partisan predisposition should condition the impact of exposure to the positive UN message. A Republican who philosophically doubts the role of this international institution to promote global security and socioeconomic development should tend to

¹⁵ Survey data and quotes obtained from World Public Opinion.org:
<http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brunitedstatescanadara/356.php?lb=btun&pnt=356&nid=&id=>

resist the positive valence of the UN information and, in turn, provide generally negative UN policy preferences in line with their partisan predisposition. Stronger negative policy preferences should be associated with treatment group subjects who identify themselves as strong versus weak Republicans. Self-identified Democratic treatment group subjects should tend to accept the UN information, given the article's positive message is consistent with Democrats beliefs about the positive role that the UN and other international institutions play in promoting global security and socioeconomic development among the world's nations. Stronger positive policy preferences should be associated with strong versus weak Democrats. As for self-described Independents, without any partisan predisposition to resist or accept the positive UN information, these treatment group subjects should illustrate generally positive UN policy preferences in line with the positive tone of the treatment article.

Political Awareness Propositions

Political awareness along with one's partisanship should also condition the impact of exposure to the positive UN article. As discussed in chapter two, Zaller (1992) points out that individuals with higher political awareness should be able to more effectively process information that they receive from the media, critically evaluate its content and tone and, in turn, resist the persuasive impact of the dominant message. Moreover, highly aware persons are more likely to be able to make an appropriate connection as to whether the dominant message is (in)consistent with his or her partisan predisposition. Therefore, I expect that highly aware treatment group subjects should be more likely to resist the positive UN message relative to their less aware counterparts. However, one's partisan predisposition must also be taken into consideration in conjunction with political

awareness. Republican and Democratic subjects with higher awareness levels should therefore tend to pay closer attention to the treatment article's content and tone, be more likely to pick up the partisan cues within the article, and ultimately be more likely to determine whether the article's message is (in)consistent with their partisan beliefs. Thus, higher awareness among Democratic treatment group subjects should relate to stronger positive UN policy preferences compared to their less aware Democratic treatment group counterparts. Whereas, higher awareness among Republican treatment group subjects should relate to stronger negative UN policy preferences compared to their less aware Republican treatment group counterparts. Independent treatment group subjects with lower levels of political awareness should provide stronger positive policy preferences relative to their highly aware counterparts. Highly aware Independent treatment group subjects should be able to more effectively process the treatment information, critically evaluate its content and tone and, in turn, exhibit an increased level of skepticism toward the persuasiveness of the treatment information that they receive compared to their less aware counterparts.

Media Trust Propositions

The final moderator is one's level of media trust. One's level of trust in the news media serves as another "perceptual screen" filtering out information that might be incorporated into the formation of one's political opinions. A person who expresses higher levels of trust in the news media should be more likely than someone with lower levels of trust to accept information from the media and, in turn, incorporate the messages as part of forming his or her political opinions. Higher levels of media trust among Democratic treatment group subjects should relate to stronger positive preferences relative to less

trusting Democrats. The strongest positive UN policy preferences should be associated with highly aware, highly trusting, strong Democratic treatment group subjects. Less trusting Republicans should exhibit stronger negative policy preferences relative to their more trusting counterparts. The implication here is that although Republicans should tend to resist the message, particularly as one exhibits greater political awareness, higher levels of media trust should increase the likelihood that these subjects more readily accept the positive UN information. This, in turn, should relate to highly trusting treatment group Republicans providing weaker negative UN policy preferences as compared to treatment group Republicans with lower levels of trust. I would expect that the strongest negative UN policy preferences should be associated with strong Republican treatment group subjects with high political awareness and low media trust. Finally, highly trusting Independents should exhibit stronger positive policy preferences relative to their less trusting counterparts. Any potential resistance to the UN information among highly aware Independent treatment group subjects should be less apparent among those subjects with higher versus lower levels of media trust. This should relate to highly aware Independent treatment group subjects with higher levels of media trust providing stronger positive policy preferences compared to highly aware Independent treatment group subjects with lower levels of trust.

Research Design

Overview

I develop an experiment to test whether positive messages about the United Nations shape subjects' preferences for U.S. governmental policies that support United Nations efforts. I manipulate exposure to an actual news story about the United Nations in order

to test whether the positive message of the story lead treatment group subjects to provide stronger supportive policy preferences compared to control group subjects. I also manipulate the source attributed to that story to test whether treatment group subjects' level of trust in that specific source moderates the persuasiveness of the message and, in turn, potentially impact his or her UN evaluation. I also test whether one's partisanship and level of political awareness act as moderators on the impact of the story on subjects' stated UN policy preferences.

Subjects

Subjects involved in this experiment were 284 students from Midwestern colleges and universities in the United States between January 2007 and May 2007.¹⁶ The use of students as subjects raises concerns regarding the external validity of the findings. While students may differ in how they think about the United Nations, and international affairs more generally, this is not a methodological impediment. First, extreme care was taken to create a realistic setting for conducting the experiment and to mask the true purpose of the study until after the experiment was completed when students were fully debriefed. Second, the focus of the experiment addresses the psychological processes by which one forms political opinions. Students and the general population alike should not differ dramatically in these psychological processes. Third, chapter's four and five of this dissertation employs large-N national survey data to examine the impact of media trust on one's political attitudes. As will be observed, the findings from the large-N studies, which are generally considered to promote stronger external validity, confirm the media

¹⁶ The majority of students in the experiment were recruited to participate from political science and mass communications courses during the spring semester, 2007. Specific demographic information concerning the subjects is detailed in the Analysis Section of this chapter.

trust related findings that are observed in this chapter's experimental research design (see Mook 1983 for a discussion concerning experiments and external validity; see also Tetlock 1983 concerning the strengths and weaknesses of experimental research in the social sciences).

Procedure & Experimental Instrument

The experiment was conducted during students' normally assigned class hours in their respective classrooms.¹⁷ Students were informed that they would be participating in a research study assessing student opinions about current events in the news in order to avoid guessing the true purpose of the experiment. Students voluntarily participating in the study were then provided the experimental instrument - a packet that contained the following items: 1) a pre-experimental questionnaire, 2) a selection of news articles, and 3) a post-experimental questionnaire. Students were randomly assigned to receive a packet that placed them into treatment or control groups. Once completed, all participating students received a handout that provided them with a detailed experimental debriefing. A copy of the entire experimental instrument is attached in the appendix located at the end of the dissertation.

Factorial Design

A four (exposure to a specific news source: CNN, Fox News, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*) X two (exposure to treatment/control news stories: United Nations treatment article/control articles) between-groups factorial design was employed.

¹⁷ No monetary or course extra credit was offered as an incentive for participation. Prior to conducting the experiment students listened to a recruitment script presented by the principal investigator, and were then provided an informed consent form to read, acknowledge and maintain for their records. After listening to

Treatments

Two experimental manipulations were conducted in this study. The first treatment was exposure to a positive news story about the United Nations embedded among two distracter stories. The distracter stories related to topics on computers and astronomy, which seemingly were totally unrelated in students' minds about the issue at hand.¹⁸ All students read the distracter stories; however, only students randomly assigned to the treatment group read the United Nations article. To mask the true purpose of the study, the post-test questionnaire began with an unrelated question asking students how interesting they thought the news articles were; moreover, questions concerning student's government policy preferences toward the United Nations were disbursed among many other distracter policy questions. The second treatment involved the source of the articles. All subjects were also randomly assigned to an additional set of treatment conditions in which the name of the news media source reporting the story was manipulated. The name of a different news media source appeared at the beginning of the story, along with its Internet address at the end of the story, depending on the respective treatment condition. All stories were actually reported by the *New York Times*.

Measures

The pretest questionnaire gathered information about students' sociodemographic characteristics (gender, age, and years of education), partisanship, ideology, political

the recruitment script and reading the informed consent form, those students who did wish to participate were provided the experimental instrument and proceeded to complete the experiment.

¹⁸ The articles used in the experiment were based on actual *New York Times* articles (Chang 2006; Markoff 2006; Strom 2006). Some of the articles were rewritten to be between approximately 350 and 500 words long.

knowledge, and distracter questions concerning their knowledge about current television and sports figures in the news. The post-test questionnaire gathered information in order to conduct experimental manipulation tests, questions tapping student policy preferences toward the United Nations, questions gauging students' general and specific levels of media trust, as well as a variety of distracter questions surveying students' evaluations of U.S. political figures, institutions and government policies.

Dependent Variable

The experiment was interested in comparing the impact of exposure to the UN article on subjects' stated policy preferences toward the UN. In particular, do treatment group subjects provide more positive policy preferences toward the UN compared to subjects in the control group taking into account key moderators? Accordingly, the dependent variable was an additive index of two policy-related questions concerning the American government's involvement with the UN. The post-test survey asked students the following questions:

“[W]e would now like to ask you some questions about America's place in the world. Please tell us whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or don't know with each of the following statements: The United States government should increase funding for the United Nations...The United States government should cooperate fully with the United Nations.”

Each question was measured on a four-point scale. Responses for each question were summed and then standardized to range between 0 and 1, where a higher score on the index indicates a stronger positive UN policy preference. The reliability of the scale was .70 (Cronbach's alpha).

Independent Variables

The pretest and post-test questionnaire contained several questions meant to capture the impact of key variables that potentially affect one's stated UN policy preference. A dummy variable was used to indicate whether subjects were participating in the control or treatment group, where 1 = treatment group and 0 = control group. Subjects' level of political awareness was based on Zaller's (1992) work. It was the main indicator of subjects' cognitive ability to critically evaluate political information that they were exposed to in the experiment, along with subjects' capacity to accurately link the political cues within the treatment article to their partisan predisposition. The political awareness index was developed by asking subjects six questions identifying the public offices of various political figures, one question identifying who was more liberal (Hilary Clinton or Condoleeza Rice), one question stating which political party held the majority of seats in the U.S. Senate, and one question asking students to name the member of the U.S. House of Representatives who represented the district in which the college or university was located.¹⁹ Each correct response was coded as 1 and incorrect response 0. Responses were summed to create an overall index of political awareness. The index was then re-scaled to range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating higher levels of political awareness. The reliability of the political awareness scale was .75 (Cronbach's alpha).

Subjects' general level of trust toward the news media was measured based on Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) News Credibility Scale. This scale assesses one's views of the news media's fairness, accuracy, the degree to which the news media tell the whole

¹⁹ There is a debate among scholars over the appropriate method to measure one's political awareness. I follow the approach put forth by Zaller (1992) who relies on the use of responses to factual political questions to assess this concept.

story, and the extent to which the news media can be trusted.²⁰ A series of questions appeared at the very end of the post-test questionnaire asking students the following:

“Thinking about the news media in general – that is, the national news, the daily newspaper you are most familiar with, and news magazines – please indicate whether you think they a) are fair, b) tell the whole story, c) are accurate, and d) can be trusted?”

Responses to each item in the question above ranged from “just about always”, “most of the time”, “only some of the time” to “none of the time”. Each response was coded from 0 (none of the time) to 3 (just about always), and then summed to create an index of subjects’ general level of media trust. The general media trust index was then re-scaled to range from 0 or *most distrusting* to 1 or *most trusting*. The reliability of the scale for the general media trust index was .82 (Cronbach’s alpha).

Subjects were also asked to indicate similar evaluations toward four selected news media organizations: CNN, Fox News, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. This was done to explore the possibility that the impact of media trust was dependent upon one’s attitude toward a specific media “brand name” and not the institution as whole (or some combination of both). Similar indexes were created for each of the four news organizations based on the exact same questions and procedures used to develop the general measure of media trust. Subjects were then organized into distinct groups in order to indicate which news organization s/he was exposed to in the experiment. Subjects’ specific media trust score was measured based on the difference in his or her

²⁰ I obtained Gaziano and McGrath’s (1986) News Credibility Scale via a review of research conducted by Tsfati (2003a, 2003b) and Tsfati and Cappella (2003). These authors explore the concept of media skepticism. They develop a scale that utilizes Gaziano and McGrath’s (1986) News Credibility Scale, along with other measures, to operationalize media skepticism.

level of trust in the specific source that s/he was exposed to in the experiment and his or her mean level of trust in the other three media sources.

Lastly, partisanship was measured based on a likert scale similar to the one used by the American National Election Study. For purposes of this analysis the partisanship scale was re-coded to range from 0 or *strong Republican* to 1 or *strong Democrat*.²¹ Accordingly, the following equation explains treatment group subjects' UN policy preference:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{UN Policy Preference} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ Treatment Group} + \beta_2 \text{ Gender} + \beta_3 \text{ Age} + \\ & \beta_4 \text{ Education Level} + \beta_5 \text{ Political Awareness} + \beta_6 \text{ Party ID} + \\ & \beta_7 \text{ Media Trust} + \beta_8 \text{ Political Awareness X Party ID} + \\ & \beta_9 \text{ Political Awareness X Media Trust} + \\ & \beta_{10} \text{ Party ID X Media Trust} + \\ & \beta_{11} \text{ Political Awareness X Party ID X Media Trust} + \\ & \beta_{12} \text{ Treatment Group X Political Awareness} + \\ & \beta_{13} \text{ Treatment Group X Party ID} + \\ & \beta_{14} \text{ Treatment Group X Media Trust} + \\ & \beta_{15} \text{ Treatment Group X Political Awareness X Party ID} + \\ & \beta_{16} \text{ Treatment Group X Political Awareness X Media Trust} + \\ & \beta_{17} \text{ Treatment Group X Party ID X Media Trust} + \\ & \beta_{18} \text{ Treatment Group X Political Awareness X} \\ & \text{Party ID X Media Trust} \end{aligned}$$

Analysis

Descriptive Statistics & Treatment Sensitivity Test

I begin the analysis by highlighting key descriptive statistics obtained from the experiment. Table 3.1 reports the number of subjects in the control and treatment groups. Of the 284 subjects that participated in the experiment, 138 (49%) were randomly

²¹ In addition, student gender, age, and years of education were included as control variables in each regression model.

assigned to the UN article treatment group and 146 (51%) were assigned to the control group.²²

Table 3.1: Number of Subjects in Control Group and Treatment Group

Experimental Group	<i>N</i>
Control Group	146
Treatment Group	138
Total	284

Table 3.2 provides the means, standard deviations, and valid responses for each independent variable. On a scale from 0, or strong Republican, to 1, or strong Democrat, the mean response was .53 (s.d. = .33). 37 (13%) subjects identified themselves as strong Republicans, 79 (28%) as Independents that leaned Republican, 26 (9%) as Independents/Other Party, 95 (36%) as Independents leaning Democrat, and 46 (16%) as strong Democrats. Turning to subjects' political awareness, it was observed that the majority of subjects exhibited average levels. On a scale from 0 to 1, where higher values indicated higher levels of awareness, the mean was .45 (s.d. = .24). 74 subjects (26%) exhibited low levels, 137 (48%) displayed average levels, and 73 (26%) subjects indicated high levels of political awareness.

A summary of subjects' demographic characteristics revealed that their average age was 20.76 years (s.d. = 3.61). Approximately 15.5% of students were 16-18 years old, 26% were 19 years old, 18% were 20 years old, and 40% of students were 21 years of age or older. The actual ages ranged from 16 to 52 years. The gender distribution was

²² The slight difference in sample sizes between the treatment and control groups was a result of the principle investigator planning on a larger number of actual participants. There were additional treatment and control group experimental instruments that were not utilized as part of this experiment.

slightly skewed toward males. Roughly 53% of subjects were male while 47% were female. The mean number of years of education among the subjects was 14.45 (s.d. = 1.78).

Of particular interest were subjects stated levels of trust in the news media, both in general and for specific news organizations. On a scale from 0 to 1, where higher values indicated higher levels of media trust, the mean level of general trust was .48 (s.d. = .17). Which news organizations received the highest and lowest ratings among the student subjects? The news organization that received the highest level of overall trust was the *Wall Street Journal*, with a mean rating of .58 (s.d. = .16). Next was the *New York Times* with a mean rating of .56 (s.d. = .21). Third was CNN with a mean rating of .54 (s.d. = .21). Subjects reported that Fox News was the least trusted news outlet of the four organizations surveyed in the experiment. The mean Fox News trust rating was .47 (s.d. = .24). The descriptive data suggests that subjects did possess varying opinions about 1) their level of trust across specific news media outlets and 2) their level of trust in the media in general as compared to specific organizations. These findings were consistent with data from large national survey organizations, such as Pew, highlighted in chapter one.

Finally, did the treatment group correctly identify the positive valence associated with the UN article? Figure 3.1 presents the results of a manipulation sensitivity test. As the bar chart indicates, 70% (97) subjects in the treatment group did correctly identify the article as positive in tone, whereas 30% (41) believed the article to be either negative or neutral in tone. One possible factor leading to the difference between those who correctly and incorrectly identified the positive tone of the story is political awareness. As

previously stated, individuals with higher levels of political awareness should tend to possess the cognitive capacity to process information more effectively than less aware persons. This may include paying closer attention to information that they are exposed to from the media. Accordingly, were highly aware subjects more likely to provide correct responses than less aware subjects to the UN article tone question? The results depicted in Figure 3.2 indicated that 11 out of 50 highly aware respondents, or 22%, responded incorrectly to the tone question; whereas, 30 out 58 less aware subjects, or 34%, incorrectly identified the tone of the article. Put another way, of the 97 subjects out of a 138 total who were exposed to the UN treatment, 78% of highly aware subjects correctly identified the positive tone of the article compared to 66% of less aware subjects. It appears, then, that political awareness did play some role in the ability of subjects to appropriately identify the tone of the article. As I will demonstrate in the next section, regression analysis further illustrates the moderating role of political awareness on the impact of exposure to the UN article. Given the findings above, the next section examines the results of an Independent Samples T-test and OLS regressions concerning subjects' stated UN policy preferences.

Independent Sample Difference of Means T-Test and OLS Regression Results

To review, this experiment was designed to examine the impact of exposure to positive information about the United Nations on subjects' stated UN policy preferences. Of particular interest was the role that key moderators might play on treatment group subjects' stated UN opinion – political awareness, partisanship, and media trust. An Independent Samples T-Test was generated in order to test whether observed differences

among treatment and control group subjects' UN policy preferences were a statistically significant difference. On a scale from 0 to 1, where a higher score reflects a stronger

Table 3.2: Means, Standard Deviations and Valid Responses for Independent Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	# Valid Responses
Treatment (1 = Received Treatment; 0 = Control Group)	.49	.50	284
Partisanship (0 = strong Republican to 1 = strong Democrat)	.53	.33	283
Political Awareness (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher political awareness)	.45	.24	284
Overall Level of Trust in the News Media (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of trust)	.48	.17	282
Level of Trust in CNN (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of trust)	.54	.21	275
Level of Trust in Fox News (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of trust)	.47	.24	277
Level of Trust in NY Times (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of trust)	.56	.21	261
Level of Trust in Wall Street Journal (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of trust)	.58	.16	251
Gender (1=female; 0=male)	.48	.50	284
Age (total years)	20.76	3.61	284
Years of Education (total years)	14.45	1.78	279

Figure 3.1: Percent of Treatment Group Subjects Stating UN Article Positive or Negative/Neutral in Tone

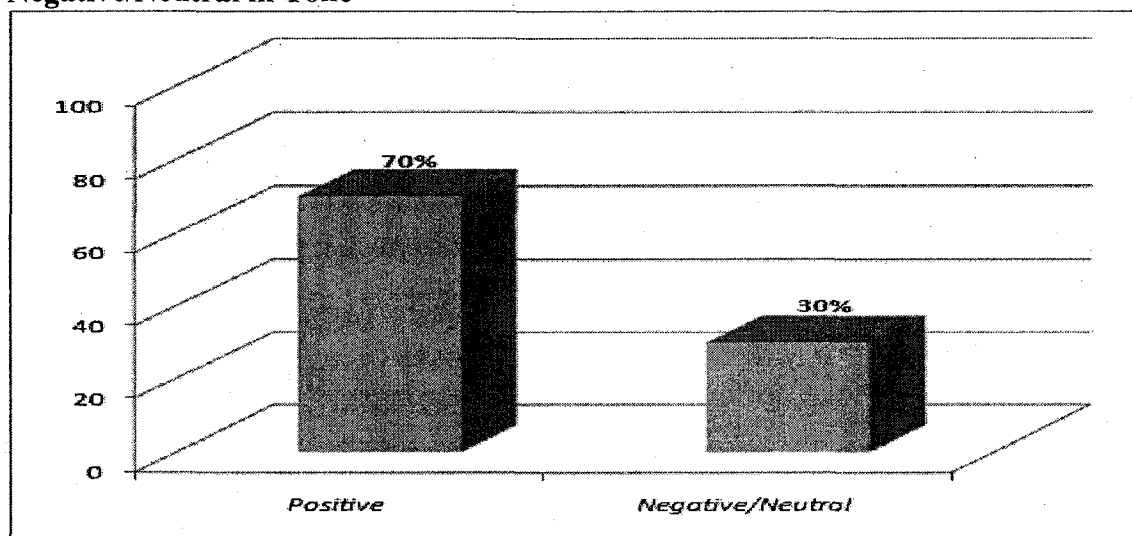
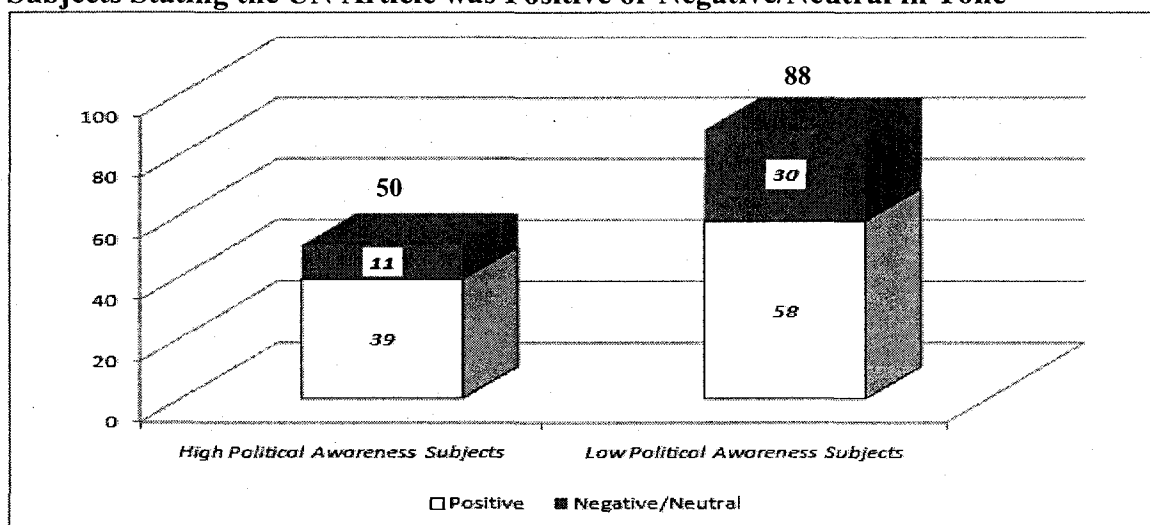


Figure 3.2: Percent of High versus Low Political Awareness Treatment Group Subjects Stating the UN Article was Positive or Negative/Neutral in Tone



positive policy preference, the mean scores for the treatment and control groups were .58 and .51 respectively. The T-test, however, indicated that the observed differences in the two groups mean policy preference scores was not statistically significant (sig. = .11) however, the statistical significance was close to an acceptable .10 cutoff level. Moreover, as I illustrated in the previous section regarding treatment group subjects'

ability to correctly identify the positive tone of the UN article, the regression analysis results in the next section also indicate that higher political awareness levels among treatment group subjects played an important role in picking up on the political source cues with the UN article. Highly aware treatment group subjects should have given greater attention to, and examination of, the UN article's content and tone. In turn, highly aware treatment group subjects should have been better able to identify the political source cues within the story, relate whether those cues were (in)consistent with their partisan beliefs as part of influencing their UN policy preferences. As the results in the next section indicate, the impact of the treatment on subjects' UN policy preference is a function of his or her political awareness level, partisan predisposition, and level of media trust. Thus, the impact of the treatment alone, while important, must nonetheless be understood in the context of key moderating forces that make the treatment more or less effective in shaping subjects' stated policy preference.

OLS regression was applied to test whether the impact of the article on treatment group's stated policy preference was conditional. Political awareness, partisanship, and media trust should interact to condition the impact of exposure to the treatment. Table 3.3 provides the estimated OLS parameter coefficients and standard errors for each independent variable included in the regression model. The key variable in the model was the four-way interaction term located at the end of Table 3.3. A statistically significant interaction term coefficient indicates that the value of the estimated treatment group coefficient was conditional on varying levels of subjects' political awareness, partisanship, and media trust. As expected, the four-way interaction term's estimated coefficient was statistically significant (β 3.590**, se 1.719, one-tailed test)

Table 3.3: OLS Regression Results on Subjects' UN Policy Preferences

Variable	β (SE)
Constant	.619** (.280)
Gender	.022 (.026)
Age	-.008* (.004)
Education	.010 (.008)
Treatment Group	-.212 (.299)
Party ID	-.349 (.384)
Political Awareness	-.475 (.439)
Media Trust	-.205 (.554)
Party ID X Political Awareness	1.255* (.651)
Party ID X Media Trust	.819 (.802)
Political Awareness X Media Trust	.255 (.941)
Party ID X Political Awareness X Media Trust	-1.566 (1.310)
Treatment Group X Party ID	.831* (.483)
Treatment Group X Political Awareness	.245 (.511)
Treatment Group X Media Trust	.728 (.636)

Table 3.3: OLS Regression Results on Subjects' UN Policy Preferences (continued)²³

Variable	β (SE)
Treatment Group X Party ID X Political Awareness	-1.440 (.888)
Treatment Group X Party ID X Media Trust	-2.032** (.982)
Treatment Group X Political Awareness X Media Trust	-.808 (1.069)
Treatment Group X Party ID X Political Awareness X Media Trust	3.590** (1.719)
<i>N</i>	205
Adjusted R ²	.361
F-Test	7.399***
Significance levels: * $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$ (one-tailed test)	

In order to assist interpreting how the impact of the treatment was conditional on the interaction of these three variables, predicted UN policy preference scores were computed in order to provide graphical illustration for the differences in slopes of the regression lines. UN policy preference scores were computed for subjects with the following characteristics:

- Treatment versus control group subjects;
- Independent versus strong/weak Democratic versus strong/weak Republican identifiers (values ranged along a five-point scale from strong Republican to strong Democrat);
- high versus average versus low political awareness (1 standard deviation above the mean, mean, and 1 standard deviation below the mean respectively);
- high versus low media trust (1 standard deviation above and below the mean respectively).

²³ The bivariate correlation between media trust and party identification was .103* (sig. .01 level, one-tailed test), indicating that there was only a slight positive association between these variables.

Figure's 3.3 through 3.6 graphically depict the estimated UN policy preference slopes for strong versus weak Democratic treatment and control group subjects, with low versus average versus high political awareness, and low versus high levels of media trust. The solid line represents the regression slope for Democrats with high media trust at increasing levels of political awareness; whereas, the dashed line represents the regression slope for Democrats with low media trust at increasing levels of political awareness. It was hypothesized that Democratic treatment group subjects should exhibit stronger positive UN policy preferences compared to their control group counterparts. Likewise, strong Democratic treatment group subjects should exhibit stronger positive policy preferences relative to weak treatment group Democrats. Higher political awareness levels among Democratic treatment group subjects should relate to stronger policy preferences. Higher media trust among Democratic treatment group subjects should relate to stronger positive policy preferences relative to less trusting treatment group Democrats. Finally, Democratic treatment group subjects with higher political awareness and higher media trust should provide stronger UN policy preferences relative to less aware and less trusting treatment group Democrats.

Comparing the graphs in Figure's 3.3 through 3.6, treatment group Democratic subjects were generally associated with stronger positive UN policy preferences relative to control group Democratic subjects. Among highly trusting Democratic treatment group subjects, higher levels of political awareness were associated with more positive UN policy preferences; whereas, the opposite effect was found among control group Democratic subjects. Comparing strong versus weak Democratic treatment group subjects, stronger partisanship was associated with stronger positive UN policy

preferences. Higher political awareness was associated with stronger policy preferences as well. Moreover, Democratic treatment group subjects with higher media trust tended to provide stronger positive policy preferences compared to their less trusting treatment group counterparts. Among strong treatment group Democrats, however, average and low awareness treatment group subjects with low media trust were associated with stronger positive UN policy preferences relative to their highly trusting counterparts. Among weak treatment group Democrats, the least aware subjects with low media trust were associated with stronger policy preferences relative to the least aware with high trust. The expectation was that regardless of awareness level higher trusting treatment group subjects should provide stronger positive policy preferences relative to their less trusting counterparts. When examining the low media trust regression slopes, it appeared that differences across awareness levels among strong and weak Democratic treatment subjects did not significantly moderate their policy preferences. The expectation was that greater awareness should have been related to higher UN policy preference scores. While this was evident among weak Democratic treatment group subjects, a more noticeable positive slope would have been expected. When comparing all of the graphs (Figure's 3.3-3.12), strong Democratic treatment group subjects with high levels of political awareness and high media trust were associated with the strongest overall estimated UN policy preference score (.81).

Figure 3.3: Estimated UN policy preference scores for strong Democratic subjects exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust

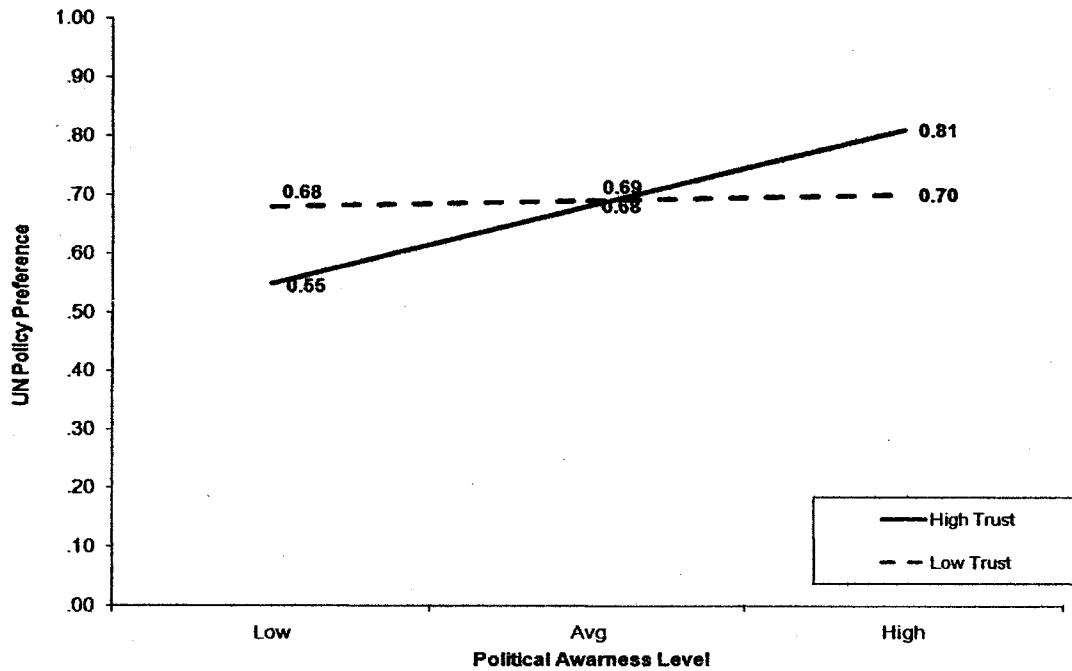


Figure 3.4: Estimated UN policy preference scores for strong Democratic subjects not exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust

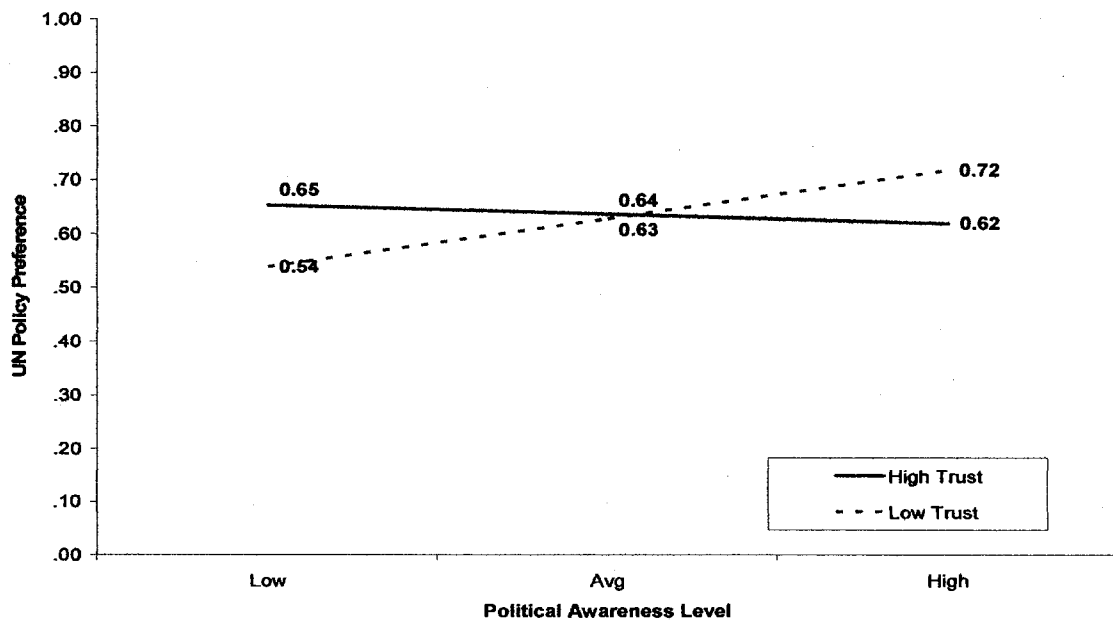


Figure 3.5: Estimated UN policy preference scores for weak Democratic subjects exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust

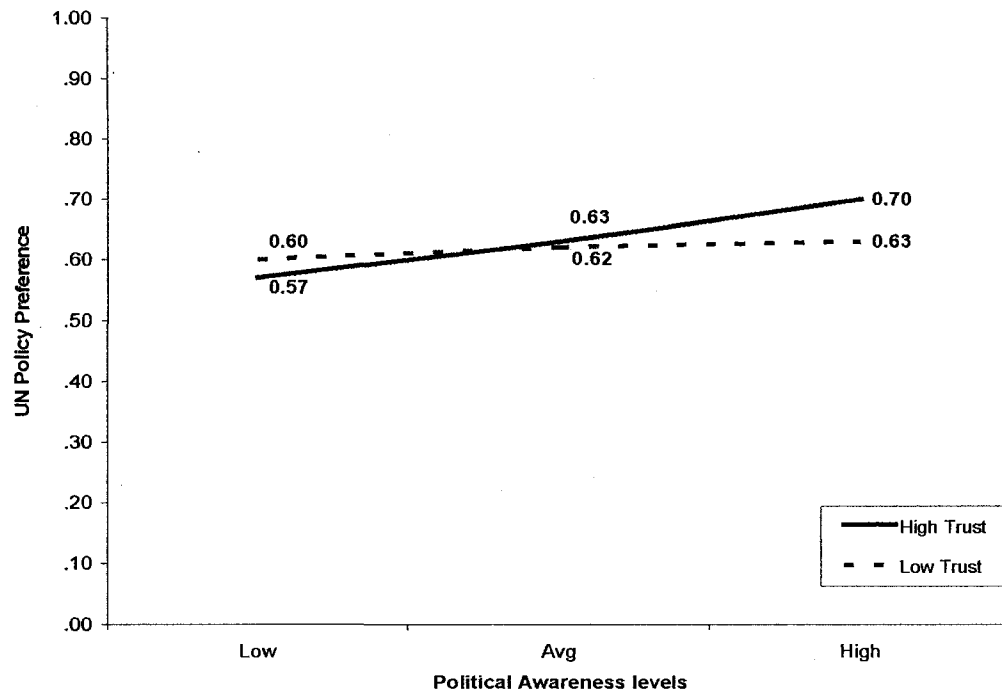
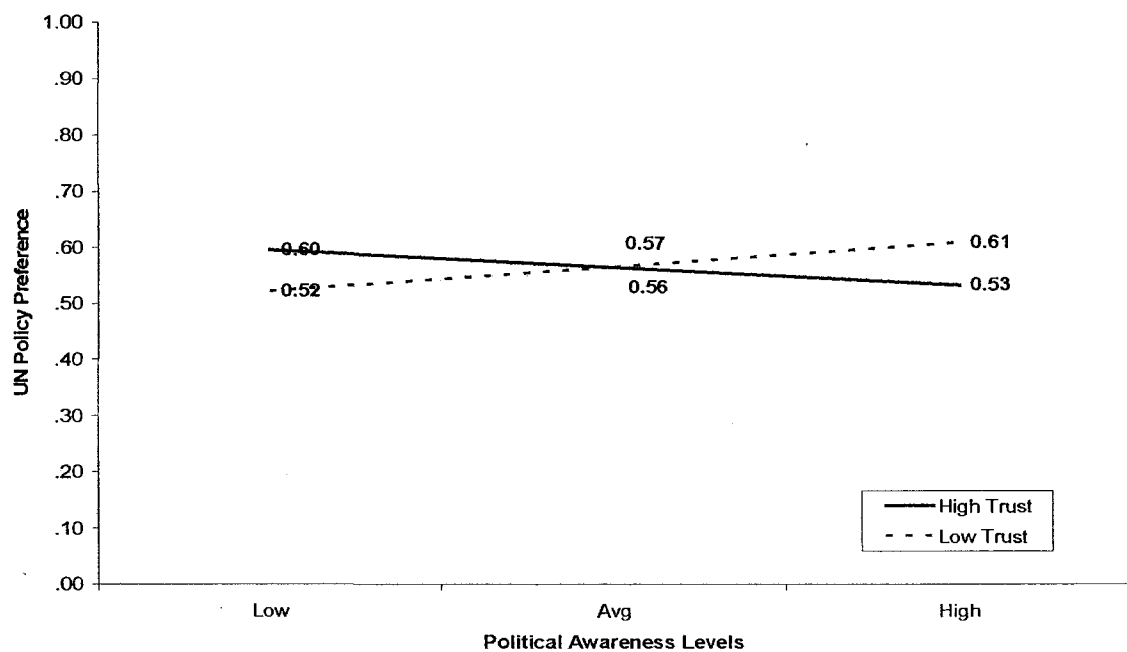


Figure 3.6: Estimated UN policy preference scores for weak Democratic subjects not exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust



Figure's 3.7 and 3.8 graphically depict UN policy preference slopes for Independent treatment and control group subjects at increasing levels of political awareness and media trust. The solid line represents the regression slope for Independents with high media trust at increasing levels of political awareness; whereas, the dashed line represents the regression slope for Independents with low media trust at increasing levels of political awareness. It was hypothesized treatment group Independents should provide generally stronger positive UN policy preferences compared to the control group. Lacking any partisan filter to resist or accept the treatment message, treatment group Independents should accept the treatment and provide policy preferences that were in line with the positive treatment message. Highly trusting treatment group Independents should exhibit stronger positive policy preferences relative to their less trusting counterparts. Treatment group Independents with lower levels of political awareness should provide stronger positive policy preferences relative to their more highly aware counterparts. Highly aware Independent treatment group subjects should be able to more effectively process the treatment information, critically evaluate its content and tone and, in turn, exhibit an increased level of skepticism toward the persuasiveness of the treatment information that they received compared to their less aware counterparts. Any resistance to the message, however, should be less apparent among highly aware Independents with higher levels of media trust.

Once again, the results generally confirmed these expectations. The treatment group subjects generally provided stronger positive policy preferences compared to the control group. Moreover, highly trusting treatment group subjects exhibited stronger policy preferences relative to their highly trusting control group counterparts. Looking

specifically at the Independent treatment group subjects, lower political awareness levels were associated with stronger positive policy preferences. Likewise, highly trusting subjects provided comparatively stronger positive preferences to less trusting subjects. Of particular interest were the comparative differences between highly aware treatment group Independents at low versus high media trust levels, as well as between highly aware treatment versus control group Independents exhibiting high levels of media trust. There was a .08 difference in the policy preference scores between highly aware Independents at low versus high levels of trust, with the higher trusting subjects providing the stronger positive preferences. Higher levels of media trust, as hypothesized, appeared to offset the impact of greater political awareness. Likewise, there was a .13 difference in the policy preference scores between highly aware treatment versus control group Independents exhibiting high levels of media trust. Exposure to the positive treatment article, a lack of any partisan filter to resist the treatment, high political awareness, and high media trust appeared to be key forces shaping these subjects' UN policy preference.

Figure 3.7: Estimated UN policy preference scores for Independent subjects exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust

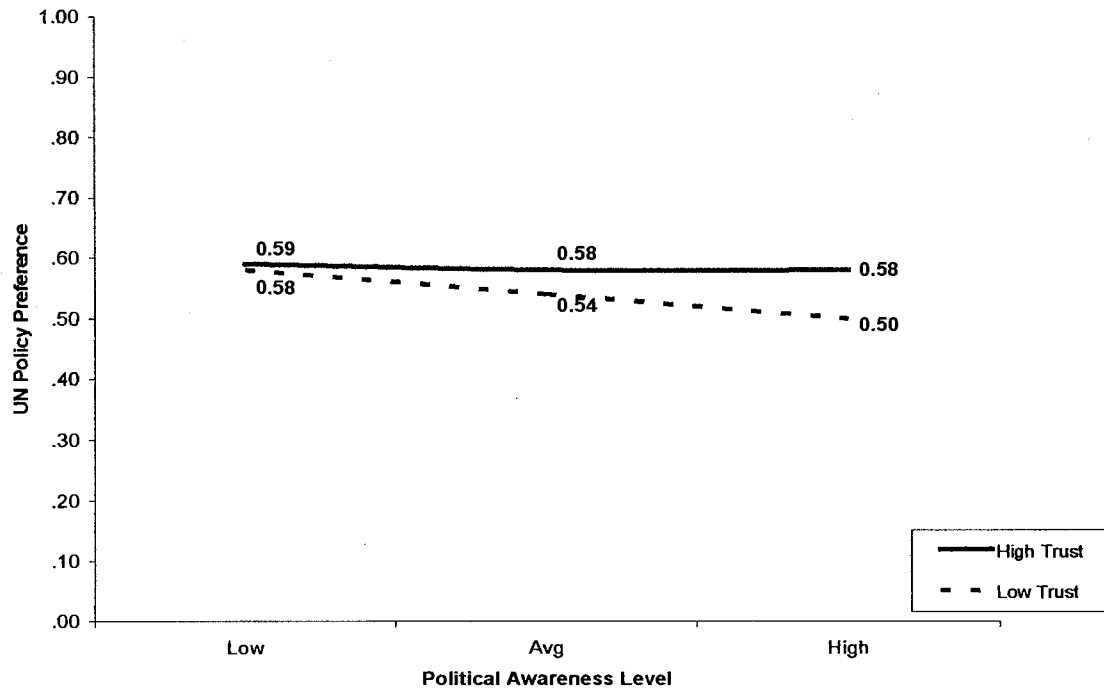
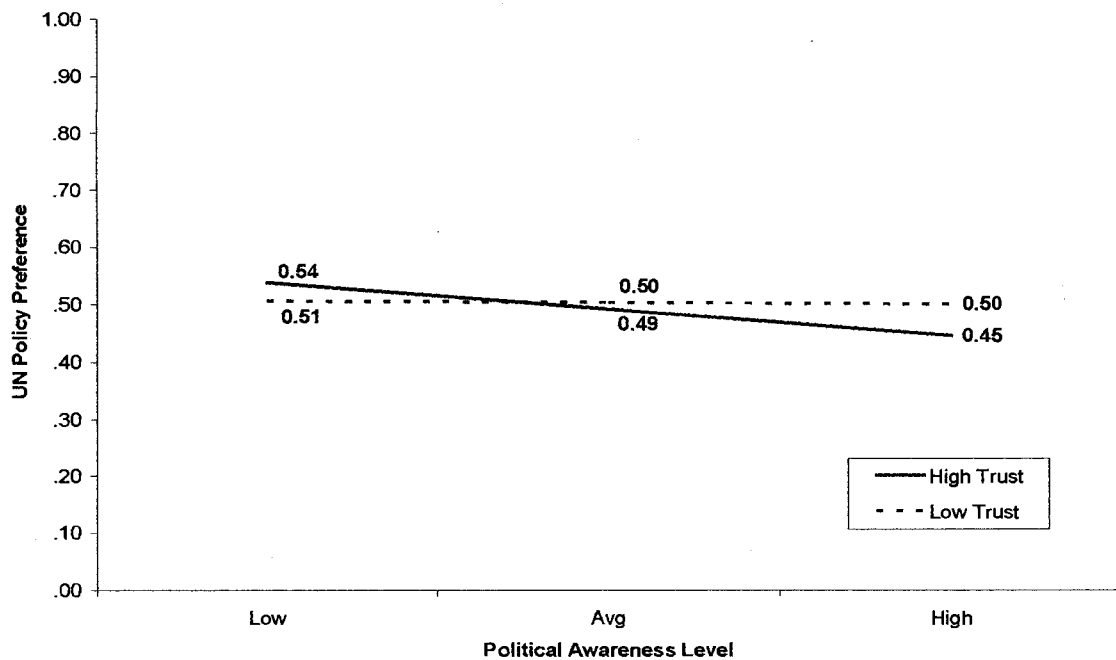


Figure 3.8: Estimated UN policy preference scores for Independent subjects not exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust



Figure's 3.9 through 3.12 graphically depict UN policy preference slopes for strong versus weak Republican treatment and control group subjects at increasing levels of political awareness and media trust. The solid lines represents the regression slopes for Republicans with high media trust at increasing levels of political awareness; whereas, the dashed lines represents the regression slopes for Republicans with low media trust at increasing levels of political awareness. It was hypothesized that treatment group Republicans should be associated with weaker negative UN policy preferences as compared to their control group counterparts given exposure to the positive UN article. However, treatment group Republicans should exhibit stronger negative UN policy preferences relative to their Democratic and Independent treatment group counterparts. Strong Republican treatment group subjects should exhibit stronger negative policy preferences relative to weak treatment group Republicans. Treatment group Republicans with higher political awareness should provide stronger negative policy preferences relative to their less aware counterparts. Finally, less trusting treatment group Republicans should exhibit stronger negative policy preferences relative to their more trusting counterparts.

Comparing the computed regression slopes in Figure's 3.9 through 3.12, it appeared that these expectations were generally confirmed. First, a comparison of all the partisan graphs indicated that treatment group Republicans did provide somewhat more positive UN policy preferences relative to the control group. At the same time, the Republican treatment group subjects were associated with stronger negative policy preferences relative to Democrat and Independent treatment group subjects' preferences. Strong Republican treatment group subjects tended to exhibit stronger negative policy

preferences relative to their weak Republican treatment group counterparts. Greater awareness among strong and weak Republican treatment group subjects related to stronger negative preferences relative to their less aware counterparts. However, highly trusting Republican treatment group subjects, regardless of partisan strength, expressed weaker negative policy preferences relative to their less trusting counterparts. This was particularly evident as one moved down the political awareness continuum; although, even weaker negative policy preference scores were evident when comparing highly aware subjects at high versus low levels of media trust. This is also apparent when comparing highly trusting treatment and control group Republicans. Highly trusting strong and weak treatment group Republicans provided weaker negative UN policy preferences compared to similar subjects in the control group at all levels of political awareness. These findings appear to illustrate, as hypothesized, that higher levels of media trust may work to attenuate the role that partisanship and awareness play in resistance to media messages— even among the most highly aware and strongly partisan individuals.

Could the impact of media trust be dependent upon subjects' attitudes toward a specific media “brand name”? To explore this possibility the next section of the analysis examines whether subjects' level of trust in specific news media organizations moderated exposure to the treatment article. As part of the experiment, the news organization reporting the story was manipulated. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four possible reporting outlets: CNN, Fox News, the *Wall Street Journal*, or the *New York Times*. The name and Internet address of the news media outlet reporting the story appeared at the top and bottom of the article respectively. A subject's level of trust in a

Figure 3.9: Estimated UN policy preference scores for strong Republican subjects exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust

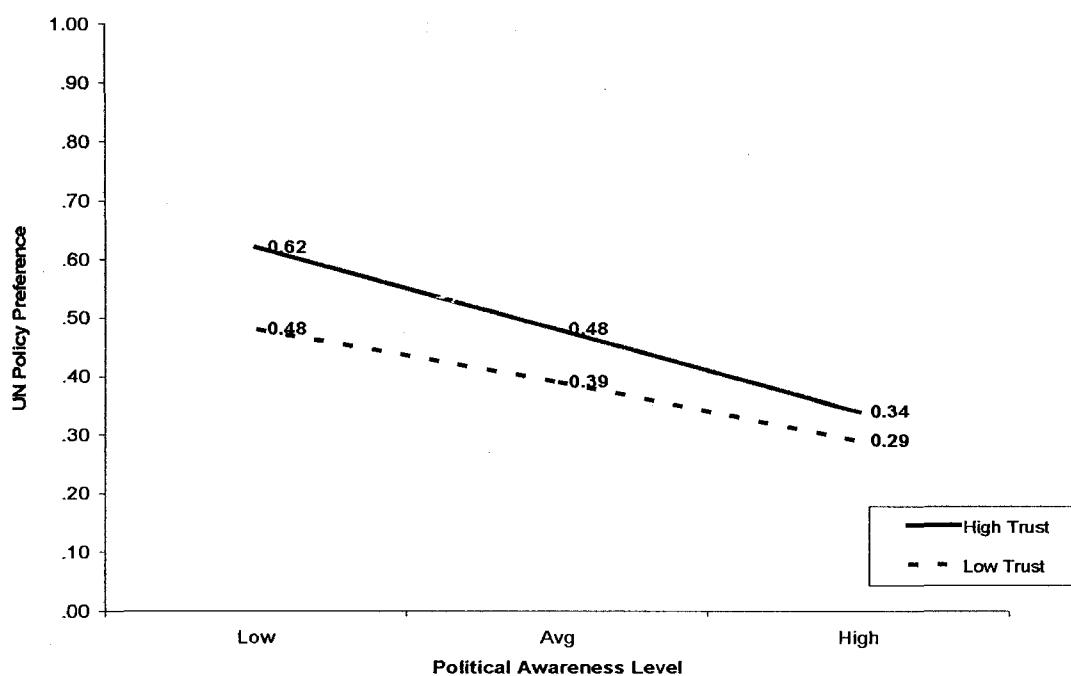


Figure 3.10: Estimated UN policy preference scores for strong Republican subjects not exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust

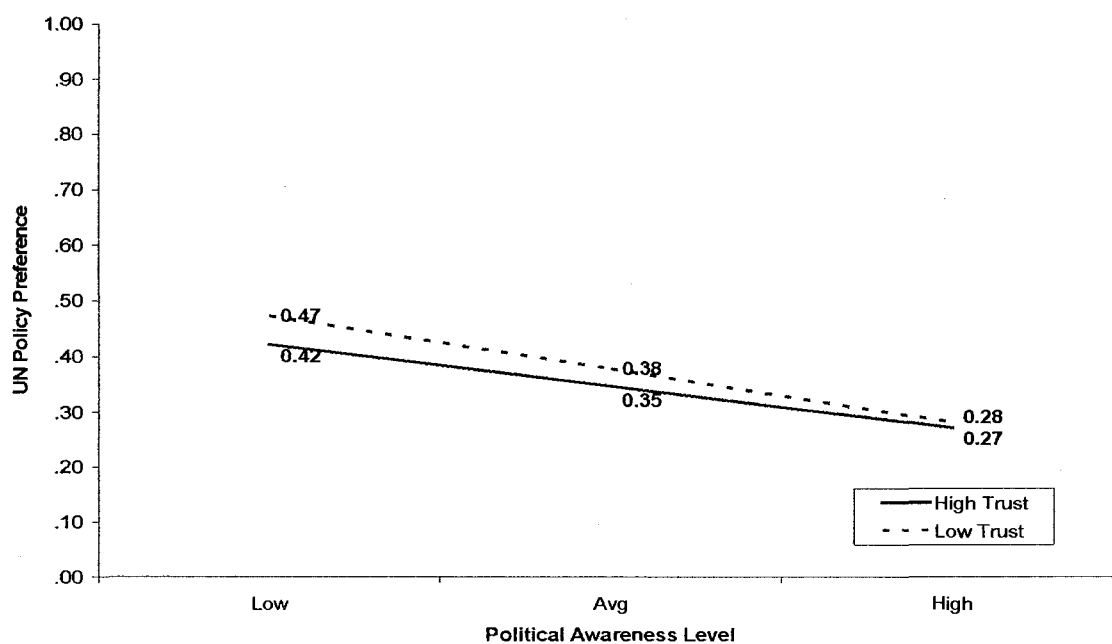


Figure 3.11: Estimated UN policy preference scores for weak Republican subjects exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust

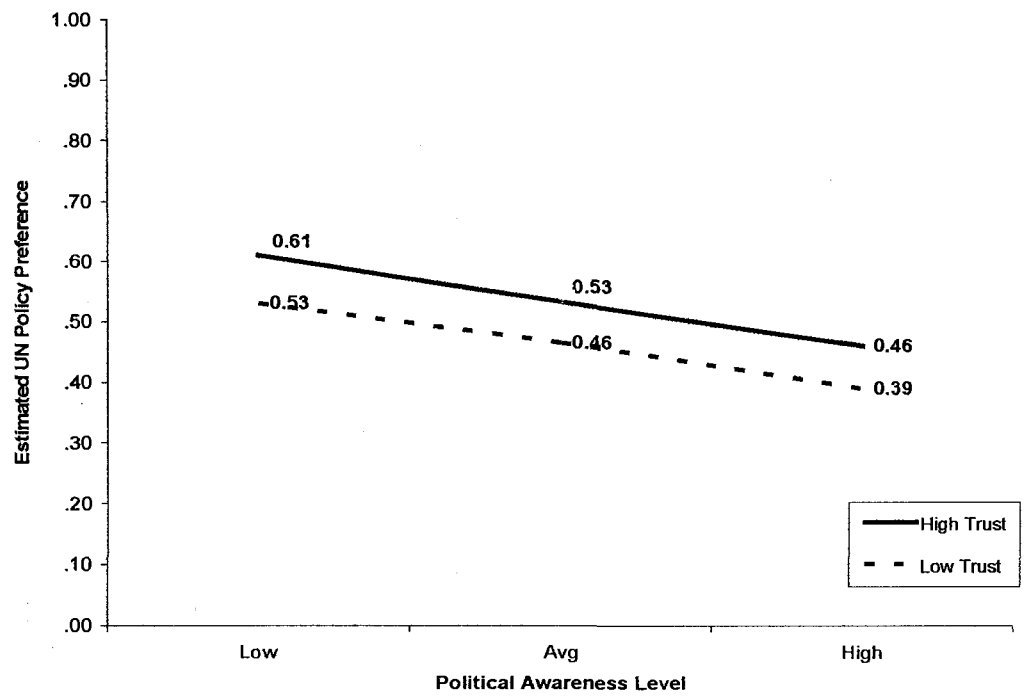
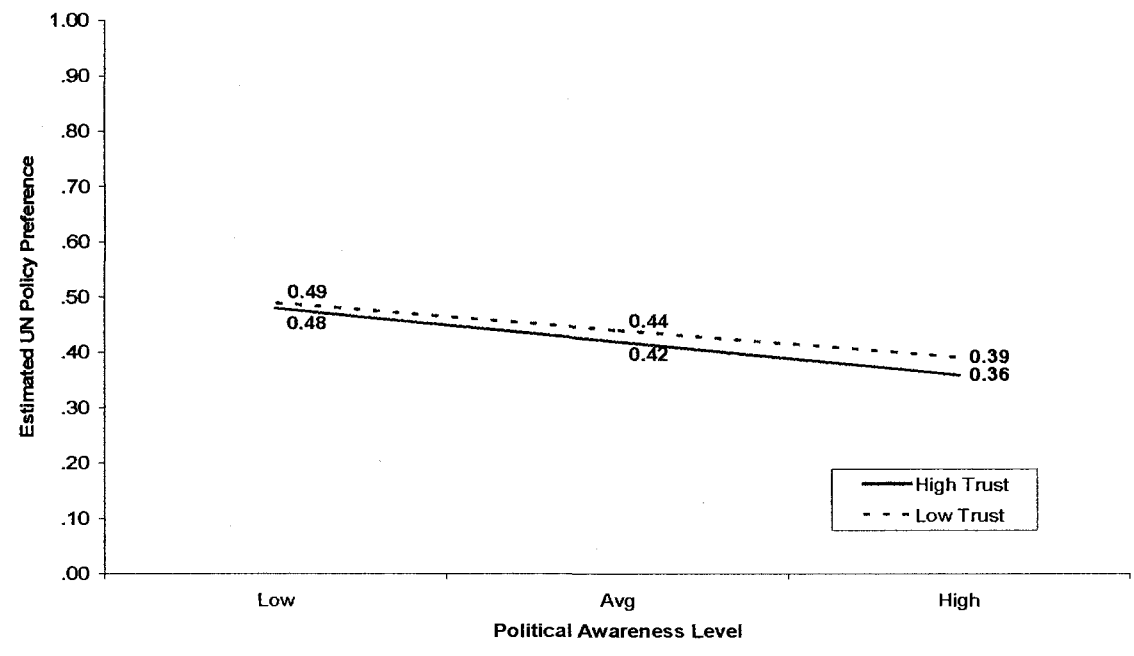


Figure 3.12: Estimated UN policy preference scores for weak Republican subjects not exposed to the treatment at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust



specific news outlet was determined by subtracting his or her stated level of trust in the specific news outlet that s/he was exposed to by his or her mean level of trust in the other three news outlets. OLS regression was once again used to generate the parameter coefficients following similar procedures conducted in the previous analysis.

Table 3.4 presents the results of these regressions. As before, the key variable in the model is the four-way interaction term located at the end of Table 3.4. A statistically significant interaction term coefficient indicates that the value of the estimated treatment group coefficient was conditional on varying levels of subjects' political awareness, partisanship, and specific media trust that s/he was exposed to during the experiment. As Table 3.4 indicates, however, the four-way interaction term was not statistically significant (β .796, se 1.645).

Table 3.4: OLS Regression Results on Subjects' UN Policy Preferences

Variable	β (SE)
Constant	.504*** (.132)
Gender	.022 (.028)
Age	-.007 (.005)
Education	.008 (.009)
Treatment Group	.126 (.119)
Party ID	.083 (.130)
Political Awareness	-.309** (.148)
Specific Media Trust	-.243 (.519)

Table 3.4: OLS Regression Results on Subjects' UN Policy Preferences (continued)²⁴

Variable	B (SE)
Party ID X Political Awareness	.402* (.215)
Party ID X Specific Media Trust	.824 (.821)
Political Awareness X Specific Media Trust	.161 (.840)
Party ID X Political Awareness X Specific Media Trust	-1.056 (1.280)
Treatment Group X Party ID	-.167 (.178)
Treatment Group X Political Awareness	-.139 (.195)
Treatment Group X Specific Media Trust	.012 (.629)
Treatment Group X Party ID X Political Awareness	.397 (.305)
Treatment Group X Party ID X Specific Media Trust	-.709 (1.032)
Treatment Group X Political Awareness X Specific Media Trust	.333 (.990)
Treatment Group X Party ID X Political Awareness X Specific Media Trust	.796 (1.645)
<i>N</i>	195
Adjusted R ²	.340
F-Test	6.564***
Significance levels: * $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$ (one-tailed test)	

What might explain the non-significant interaction term? One possible explanation might be that students, even highly aware students, may not obtain their news from CNN, Fox News, the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*. Local television

and newspapers, Internet news sources, and Internet weblogs might be more relevant news sources that students rely on to obtain their news. By surveying a wider array of news mediums and organizations (e.g., international versus national versus local news sources; television versus newspaper versus Internet sources), it is possible that the impact of one's specific level of media trust shaping one's political opinions would be more readily captured in empirical analyses. A second explanation might be that treatment group subjects did not pick up on the news media source cue manipulations. Unfortunately, a manipulation test was not conducted to confirm that subjects did in fact recognize the news source cues; however, the failure of the manipulation to take hold among treatment group subjects may very well be the underlying cause for the lack of statistical significance.

Conclusion

This chapter was a first attempt to empirically substantiate the claim that trust in the news media plays a central role in moderating the persuasive impact of political messages shaping one's political opinions. An experiment was designed to examine whether subjects' policy preferences toward the United Nations were shaped by exposure to a positive news story about that international institution. Building on the Reception-Acceptance-Sample model's theoretical axioms (Zaller 1992), it was hypothesized that the impact of the article on treatment group subjects' policy preferences should be conditional on individual-level variations in political awareness, partisanship, and my contention - media trust.

²⁴ The bivariate correlation between media trust and party identification was .033 (non-sig, one-tailed test), indicating that there was little association between these variables.

OLS regression results suggested that treatment group subjects' policy preferences were generally more positive compared to the control group, taking into consideration the relevant moderators. Democratic and Independent treatment group subjects provided stronger positive policy preferences relative to Republicans; greater political awareness levels appeared to assist treatment group subjects to accurately connect whether the positive UN message was (in)consistent with their partisan predisposition. Higher levels of general media trust among treatment group subjects was associated with stronger positive UN policy preferences relative to treatment group subjects with lower levels of trust. This finding was consistent across all partisan categories. In fact, as hypothesized, highly trusting Republican treatment group subjects provided somewhat weaker negative UN policy preferences relative to a) less trusting treatment group Republicans and b) both high and low trusting Republican control group subjects. The strongest positive policy preferences were associated with strong Democratic treatment group subjects with high political awareness and high media trust.

The experiment also attempted to test whether treatment group subjects' level of trust in specific news media outlets might moderate their UN policy preferences. Treatment group subjects were randomly assigned to four experimental groups. Each group was exposed to a different news outlet reporting the UN story: CNN, Fox News, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*. Results of OLS regression analysis did not indicate any statistically significant interaction effect among treatment group subjects' political awareness levels, partisanship, and specific level of media trust that they were exposed to in the experiment.

Overall, the experiment provided intriguing yet mixed results concerning the impact of general and specific media trust shaping one's political opinions. The next chapter continues to test the conditional impact of general media trust by delving into the debate over why a large majority of American citizens supported military intervention into Iraq in the months leading up to the actual March 2003 invasion.

Chapter Four

The March to War

“When historians take a look back on this period, the Iraq War will surely stand out as a remarkable event. A major power went to war, overthrew another government, and occupied the nation on the basis of stated assumptions that turned out to be false. Equally striking, following the invasion, large portions of the public of this major power – a democratic one no less – failed to get accurate messages about what had occurred, which raises compelling questions about the role and practice of the press in a democratic society.”

Steven Krull, Director
Program on International Policy Attitudes, or PIPA
(*Nieman Reports* 2004, 64)

Introduction

Between January 2002 and March 2003 the Bush administration increasingly shifted attention away from military operations in Afghanistan to military intervention into Iraq. The Bush administration began building a case for the necessity to invade Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Several reasons were put forth for military intervention during this period including Iraq’s assumed weapons of mass destruction, its support for terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, and the Iraq regime’s possible direct links to the 9/11 terrorists including Muhammad Attah. In January 2002 during the State of the Union Address, President Bush labeled Iraq as one of the “axis of evil” countries, along with North Korea and Iran, as rogue states supporting terrorist groups and activities around the world.

Looking back, it appears that the Bush administration's stated reasons for invading Iraq turned out to be false. To date, weapons of mass destruction have not been discovered in Iraq or any substantiated link between Iraq and al-Qaeda concerning the events of 9/11. Yet, a poll taken by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)

at the University of Maryland during the months leading up to the March 2003 invasion revealed that one in five Americans believed that Iraq had a direct involvement in 9/11; moreover, 13 percent stated they had seen conclusive evidence concerning the Iraq/al-Qaeda 9/11 relationship. Of those who believed in this link 58 percent stated they would support President Bush's decision to invade Iraq even without United Nations support. Among those who believed that Iraq was not directly involved with the 9/11 attacks, but had provided al-Qaeda with substantial support, the level of approval for use of force declined to 37 percent. Among those who stated they believed that only a few al-Qaeda members had some contact with Iraqi officials, approval dropped to 32 percent. Finally, those who stated that there was no connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda, only 25 percent approved the use of force against Iraq. Table 4.1 summarizes these results.

Table 4.1: 2003 PIPA Polling Data Concerning the Relationship between the American Public's Belief in an Iraq-9/11 Connection and Support for the Bush Administration's Call for Military Intervention into Iraq

Perceived Relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda with regard to the 9/11 attacks	Percent Support for the Bush Administration's Call for Military Intervention into Iraq
Among those who believed Iraq was directly involved with al-Qaeda members in carrying out the 9/11 attacks	58% supported military intervention
Among those who believed Iraq was not directly involved, but provided substantial support to al-Qaeda members	37% supported military intervention
Among those who believed a few al-Qaeda members had some contact with Iraqi officials	32% supported military intervention
Among those who believed there was no connection at all between Iraq and al-Qaeda	25% supported military intervention

In a similar survey conducted between June 2003 and September 2003, PIPA found that Americans held three general Iraq misperceptions: 49 percent believed the U.S. had

found evidence of a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda; 22 percent stated that the U.S. had found evidence of WMDs in Iraq; 23 percent believed that world opinion favored American use of force against Iraq (PIPA data above cited from Krull 2004: 64-65).

Academics, journalists and politicians are now looking back at the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq to understand why misperceptions existed amongst the American public and, in turn, how those misperceptions influenced citizen's opinions concerning their feelings toward Iraq and the Bush administration's decision to invade the country. Columnists (e.g., Massing 2004) and journalists (e.g., Krugman 2003) targeted the American press for its lack of critical evaluation toward the WMD justification and related evidence used by the Bush administration as an argument for military intervention. According to *New York Times* journalist, Paul Krugman, American and European differences over the war were part of a broader divide over opposing world views.²⁵ The reason for the world view/military intervention divide between the two "allies": differences in the information being reported by the European and American news media to their respective citizens. According to Krugman, either the European press held a "pervasive anti-American bias" in its reporting or that the U.S. press had "taken it as their assignment to sell the war, not to present a mix of information that might call the justification for the war into question" (Krugman summary and related quotes cited from Lehmann 2005: 63-64).

Scholars have picked up on the "uncritical media explanation" as well. In a May 2004 Internet article by John Hanrahan in the *Nieman Watchdog* (Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University) he highlights two scholarly publications that address

²⁵ See also Kagan (2004) regarding European and American foreign policy disagreements.

these misperceptions. The first is a 2004 study conducted by Susan Moeller of the University of Maryland. She suggests that the press were primarily to blame for the misperceptions concerning weapons of mass destruction. Moeller examined news reports from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *L.A. Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, National Public Radio (“Morning Edition and “All Things Considered”) in the United States, as well as *The Guardian* and *The Economist* in the United Kingdom. Moeller conducted content analysis of these newspapers and radio programs during three-week intervals: two periods during October 2002, a time in which the Congress had just completed debate over Iraq and provided the President with its approval for the use of force; the third period being May 2003, just after President Bush declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq. Among her findings, Moeller was highly critical of the press in its criticism of the WMD argument put forth by the Bush administration as a justification for invading Iraq. Specifically, she highlights the following findings (cited from Hanrahan 2004: 3-4, 6):

- “Many stories stenographically reported the incumbent administration’s perspective on WMD, giving too little critical examination of the way officials framed the events, issues, threats and policy options.”
- “Too few stories proffered alternative perspectives to [the] official line...[T]he tendency of the U.S. media to lead with the most ‘important’ information and the most ‘important’ players gave greater weight to the incumbent administration’s point of view on WMD issues, at the expense of alternative perspectives.”
- “Most journalists accepted the Bush administration’s formulation of the ‘War on Terror’ as a campaign against WMD...”
- “Most media outlets represented WMD as a monolithic menace, failing to adequately distinguish between weapons programs and actual weapons or to address the real differences among chemical, biological, and radiological weapons.”

- “If the White House acted like a WMD story was important...so too did the media...If the White House ignored a story (or an angle on a story), the media were likely to as well. When journalists did take on the administration – especially when the White House’s perspective formed the ‘conventional wisdom’ – their stories were often buried or their criticism was implicit than explicit.”

Moeller points out newspapers in the United Kingdom provided a more critical and balanced assessment of the WMD arguments put forth by President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair, particularly placing opposing views of WMD within their stories. Moeller opined that the U.S. media’s comparative lack of critical assessment was strongly associated with a lack of criticism from most Democratic members of Congress, who, by and large, went along with the Bush administration’s WMD assessment; whereas, “[t]here was more consistent and vocal opposition among senior British political figures to some of the Blair government’s WMD policies” (cited from Hanrahan 2004: 12).

Recently published works by other scholars confirm Moeller’s findings. Lehmann (2004) examined press reports and published opinions on UN weapons inspections in the months leading up to the Iraq invasion. Specifically, Lehmann compared nine key events or decisions between September 2002 and March 2003 and assessed how each was portrayed differently in the German and U.S. press.²⁶ Lehmann’s central finding was the lack of a critical press in both Germany and the U.S. allowed both Chancellor Schroeder and President Bush to set the agenda on the war: an opposition war message dominated in Germany, while a supportive war message was reported in the U.S. According to

²⁶ Lehmann sampled two print and two television media sources in each country: *New York Times*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and *Die Tagesschau*. The analysis was conducted via Lexis-Nexis database search engine.

Lehmann, “[t]he American media in particular neglected their watchdog function” (p. 63).

Gershkoff and Kushner (2005) noted that on March 19, 2003 (the day the United States began its military intervention) nearly 70% of the American public supported war. Moreover, support for the war was unusually high in the months leading up to the actual invasion. These authors point out that public opinion theories would predict relatively low levels of support for intervention— not the consistently high levels observed during the lead-up to the Iraq invasion. Concerns for massive casualties, economic decline, increased terror attacks, and a prolonged military conflict should have undermined support for intervention. To examine the high level of support for war with Iraq, Gershkoff and Kushner conducted content analysis of thirteen official speeches made by President Bush between 12 September 2001 and 1 May 2003 (the day President Bush declared an end to hostilities in Iraq). These authors also examined news reports that were published in the *New York Times* about the administration's speeches, assessing both the content and tone of these stories, in order to determine the level of criticism and/or support for the President's statements. Gershkoff and Kushner illustrated that beginning with a speech made to the United Nations Assembly on 12 September 2002 the President's rhetoric began to increasingly emphasize an Iraq/al-Qaeda terror frame, where previous post-9/11 speeches had only highlighted a terror frame excluding significant association with Iraq and Saddam Hussein. The authors compiled survey data from several organizations gauging American's support for war with Iraq. A spike in support for war was closely associated with the time period when the President gave a

speech dealing with terrorism and/or Iraq.²⁷ Gershkoff and Kushner suggest that alternative explanations including WMDs, the rally-around-the-flag effect, xenophobia, and desires to “complete the job” left over from the first Gulf War in 1991 were inadequate reasons for the public’s unusually high level of support for intervention during this time period. The strongest explanation was the ability of the Bush administration to establish an Iraq/al-Qaeda terror frame and that the news media were uncritical in their evaluation of that frame.

Robinson and Livingston (2006) also established an al-Qaeda/Baathist terror frame. These authors conducted content analysis of *New York Times* articles between 11 September 2001 and 31 December 2002. Their unit of analysis was an individual story, in which they searched for references containing “both Iraq and ‘Al Qaeda or bin Laden or terrorism’ ” (p. 26). Similar to other scholars, Robinson and Livingston found that the al-Qaeda/Iraq terror frame only began to appear in earnest during the fall 2002. The heaviest emphasis appeared during September 2002, falling in October, and then rising again during November and December.²⁸

Propositions

The failure of the mainstream news media, and Democratic political elites within the U.S. Congress, to communicate a clear countervailing message to the American public that criticized the Bush administration’s arguments for military intervention into Iraq provides a unique opportunity to empirically test the moderating influence of media trust. I expect that the predominantly uncritical information reported by the mainstream news media

²⁷ See graph on p. 529 (Gershkoff and Kushner 2005).

concerning the arguments put forth by the Bush administration for the Iraq invasion should play a key role in predicting one's support for military intervention. Per the RAS model, however, support for military intervention should be *conditional* on individual-level variations in political awareness, partisanship, and my contention – media trust.

Partisanship Propositions

I expect that stronger partisanship should moderate the impact of media messages on one's position for or against military intervention into Iraq. With little reason to doubt the Bush administration's arguments for military intervention, Republicans should tend to indicate strong support for military intervention. The stronger one identifies with the Republican Party, the stronger s/he should support military intervention. The opposite effect should appear among Democrats. As for self-described Independents, without any partisan predisposition to resist or accept the Bush administration's arguments for military intervention, these individuals should provide generally supportive interventionist positions in line with the dominant media messages at that time.

Political Awareness Propositions

Political awareness in conjunction with one's partisanship should also condition the impact of media messages on one's position for or against military intervention into Iraq. According to the RAS model, highly aware individuals are better able to accurately associate whether political information that they receive from the media is consistent with their partisan predispositions. Greater awareness among Republicans should relate to stronger support for intervention relative to their less aware Republican counterparts. Whereas, greater awareness among Democrats should relate to stronger opposition to

²⁸ See graph on p. 28 (Robinson and Livingston 2006).

military intervention compared to their less aware Democratic counterparts. Independents with lower levels of political awareness should provide stronger support for intervention compared to their highly aware counterparts. Highly aware Independents should have been more likely to have been exposed to any countervailing media information criticizing military intervention compared to their less aware counterparts. Exposure to countervailing information should lead these individuals to illustrate some resistance to the dominant media messages and, in turn, provide less support for intervention compared to their less aware Independent counterparts.

Media Trust Propositions

Higher levels of media trust among Republicans should relate to stronger support for intervention compared to Republicans with lower levels of trust. The strongest support for intervention should be associated with highly aware, highly trusting strong Republicans. Less trusting Democrats should indicate stronger opposition to intervention compared to their more trusting counterparts. While Democrats should tend to resist the dominant uncritical media message flow about the Bush administration's reasons for military intervention into Iraq, higher levels of media trust should increase the likelihood that Democrats might accept the dominant media message flow. This, in turn, should relate to highly trusting Democrats exhibiting weaker opposition to military intervention compared to Democrats with lower levels of trust. I would expect that the strongest opposition to military intervention should be observed among strong Democrats with high political awareness and low media trust. Finally, highly trusting Independents should exhibit stronger support for military intervention relative to their less trusting counterparts. Potential resistance to the dominant media messages among highly aware

Independents should be less apparent among those with higher versus lower levels of media trust. This should relate to highly aware Independents with higher levels of media trust providing stronger support for intervention compared to highly aware Independents with lower levels of trust.

Data

I utilize data from the 2002 American National Election Study to investigate this phenomenon. The data are appropriately suited for this investigation because of the specific time period in which the survey was conducted – 18 September 2002 through 4 November 2002. Gershkoff and Kushner's (2005) along with Robinson and Livingston's (2006) content analyses indicates that the Iraq/al-Qaeda terror frame began in earnest with President Bush's 12 September 2002 speech to the United Nations Assembly, and then followed up by a nationally televised speech in Cincinnati, Ohio on 7 October 2002. This was also the height of the 2002 mid-term general election period. As Gershkoff and Kushner (2005) highlight, Democrats were particularly concerned that if they went against the Bush administration's policies toward military intervention in Iraq that they would appear weak on national security matters and, in turn, provide the Republican's with a key political issue to exploit during the mid-term elections. Moreover, during October 2002 the House of Representatives and the Senate debated and approved the Iraq war resolution that authorized the use of military force. Accordingly, the 2002 ANES collected information during this critical period of time leading up to the actual invasion in March 2003, which provides an opportunity to analyze the role of media effects on public support for military intervention into Iraq.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is ANES respondents' level of support for U.S. military intervention into Iraq. In the fall of 2002 ANES respondents were asked the following question:

“As you may know, President Bush and his top advisers are discussing the possibility of taking military action against Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Do you favor or oppose military action against Iraq - or is this something you haven't thought about?”

Accordingly, the dependent variable equals 1 if a respondent *supported* military intervention into Iraq and 0 if s/he *opposed* the use of force.

Independent Variables

Political Awareness

Political awareness is based on Zaller's (1992) work, and is the main indicator of respondent's overall level of attentiveness to news and media information. Zaller argues that political awareness is a better indicator of one's overall level of exposure to news and media information as compared to alternative measures that gauge one's self-reported level of news media exposure. Following Zaller's approach, I develop a nine-point additive index of political knowledge. Four questions were based on respondent's answers to factual political questions. One question asked respondents to correctly identify which party held the majority of seats in the House of Representatives prior to the 2002 general election. A second question asked respondents whether Democrats supported the repeal of the death tax. A third question asked respondents whether they knew if the gap between rich and poor individuals in the United State had grown or

shrunk over the last twenty years. The fourth question asked respondents if they knew whether congressional Republicans supported or opposed President Bush's 2001 tax cut.²⁹ Each correct response equaled one point. The remaining five points were based on the ANES survey interviewer's evaluation of each respondent's level of information about politics and public affairs. Each respondent was identified as possessing either a very high, fairly high, average, fairly low or low level of information about politics and public affairs.³⁰ Respondents received five points in the index if they were categorized with a very high ranking, four points for a high score, three points for an average rating, two points for a low score, and one point for a very low ranking. The questions were summed and then re-scaled to range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater political awareness levels. The reliability of the scale was .43 (Cronbach's alpha).

Partisanship

Respondent's partisanship is based on the ANES seven-point likert scale. I re-code the original variable to range along a 0 to 1 scale from *strong Democrat* to *strong Republican*.

News Media Ratings

Respondents' attitudes toward the news media are gauged by using an ANES "thermometer" question. ANES asked respondents "how [they] would rate the news media" on a 0 to 100 scale (0-49 equals "cool rating", 50 equals a "neutral rating", and 51-100 a "warm rating"). The 2002 ANES did not specifically ask respondents their

²⁹ The 2002 ANES did not ask respondents to identify various political figures in the news. Such questions are typically incorporated into political awareness indexes associated with Zaller's (1992) work.

³⁰ Zaller (1992, 340-345) has used this ANES question as part of constructing political awareness indexes in several of his analyses.

level of trust in the news media; however, the media feeling thermometer scores should serve as a useful proxy capturing respondents' predisposition toward the news media. Since 1964 the ANES has incorporated feeling thermometer questions in order to capture respondents' general feelings toward specific political figures, political institutions, celebrities, social groups, and other important societal institutions. Scholars, in turn, have used feeling thermometer scores to assess trust. In his book, *the Moral Foundation of Trust*, Eric Uslaner utilized ANES feeling thermometers to construct measures of in-group and out-group particularized trust toward various social groups (e.g., blacks, whites, Asian-Americans, Catholics, Jews).³¹

Additional Control Variables

I include several variables to control for the effects of respondents' social and demographic characteristics. These include age, gender, household income, race/ethnicity, and education level. Accordingly, the following equation predicts ANES respondents support or opposition to U.S. military intervention into Iraq:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &\text{Support/Opposition to U.S. Military Intervention into Iraq} = \alpha \\
 &+ \beta_1 \text{ Gender} + \beta_2 \text{ Age} + \beta_3 \text{ Education Level} + \beta_4 \text{ Race/Ethnicity} \\
 &+ \beta_5 \text{ Household Income} + \beta_6 \text{ Political Awareness} + \beta_7 \text{ Party ID} \\
 &+ \beta_8 \text{ Media Trust} \\
 &+ \beta_9 \text{ Political Awareness X Party ID} \\
 &+ \beta_{10} \text{ Political Awareness X Media Trust} \\
 &+ \beta_{11} \text{ Party ID X Media Trust} \\
 &+ \beta_{12} \text{ Political Awareness X Party ID X Media Trust}
 \end{aligned}$$

³¹ In terms of establishing a positive correlation between the ANES feeling thermometer and the ANES media fairness question, the 1996 survey was the one time in which both questions were asked simultaneously. The bivariate association was .438** (sig. .01 level, two-tailed test), indicating a modest positive correlation between the two questions.

Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.2 provides descriptive statistics for the independent variables in the regression model. Table 4.3 provides a look into the percent level of support that existed among the ANES respondents for military intervention both for the entire sample and for specific independent variables. 66% of the entire ANES sample that provided a position for or against intervention stated that they would support, or strongly support, the use of force against Iraq. This finding coincides with other scholarly work noted at the beginning of this chapter that highlighted the unusually high level of support among the American public for military intervention during this pre-invasion time period. Breaking down the level of support by various independent variables some very interesting results were observed. The level of support for intervention across the political awareness categories was as follows: 79% level of support among the low political awareness respondents, 67% level of support among the moderately aware respondents, and 56% level of support among the highly aware respondents. 86% of Republicans supported intervention compared to 65% of Independents and 47% of Democrats. Finally, 66% of respondents who indicated warm feelings toward the media supported intervention, as compared to 64% support among those respondents who expressed neutral or cool ratings.

The descriptive data suggest somewhat mixed indications concerning the relationship between one's political awareness, partisanship and media trust levels and one's support for military intervention. While less aware respondents indicated more

Table 4.2: Means and Standard Deviations for Independent Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Political Awareness (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of political awareness)	.66	.18
News Media Thermometer (0-49 = cool; 50 = neutral; 51-100 = warm)	63.51	98.76
Partisanship (0 to 1 scale; strong Democrat to strong Republican)	.49	.36
Gender (1=male; 0=female)	.44	.50
Age (total years)	56.46	78.30
Race (1=white; 0=other)	.78	.41
Years of Education (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of education)	.64	.23
Household Income (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of income)	.60	.30

Table 4.3: Percent Level of Support for Military Intervention by Level of Political Awareness, Party Identification, and News Media Thermometer Categories

Variable	% Support for Military Intervention
Entire Sample	66%
Political Awareness	
High	56%
Average	67%
Low	79%
Party Identification	
Democrat	47%
Independent	65%
Republican	86%
News Media Thermometer Ratings	
Cool	64%
Neutral	64%
Warm	66%

supportive opinions, even a majority of highly aware respondents stated that they would support the military action. While Republicans and Independents supported intervention in greater numbers relative to Democrats, nearly half of all Democratic respondents still stated that they would support the military intervention. Finally, support for military intervention was relatively high regardless of respondents' general feelings toward the news media.

Binary Logistic Regression Analysis Results

Binary logistic regression analysis (“logit”) was used in order to assess the propositions concerning the probability of ANES respondents supporting military intervention based on individual-level differences in political awareness, partisanship, and media trust. The appropriate estimation method in situations where the dependent variable is dichotomous is the method of maximum likelihood estimation or MLE. Each estimated parameter coefficient in the regression model is interpreted as follows: for a one unit increase in an independent variable, the logarithm of the odds of the dependent variable increases/decreases by the value of the independent variable's estimated parameter coefficient (holding all other variables constant). Actual probabilities for obtaining a dependent variable value of 1 (as compared to 0) given specific values of the independent variables in the regression model may be calculated by summing the products of the estimated parameter coefficients at specific values of their associated independent variables. This computation generates the value of the logarithm of the odds for the entire model (i.e., $\ln[P_i/1-P_i]$). Exponentiating this value generates the odds ratio. The predicted probability for a dependent variable value of 1 (compared to 0) given the

specified independent variables' values is computed by dividing the odds ratio over 1 plus the odds ratio (Long1997; Pindyck and Rubinfeld 1998).

Table 4.4 reports estimated parameter coefficients and standard errors for each independent variable in the logit model. The relevant variables in the model to focus upon are the two-way and three-way interaction terms appearing at the end of Table 4.4. Looking first at the two-way interactions, as expected the media feeling thermometer was significant as a moderator in conjunction with political awareness (β .095*, se .043) and partisanship (β .131*, se .055). In each case, the independent impact of political awareness and partisanship on one's support for military intervention into Iraq was moderated by media trust, as depicted in the values of the respective two-way interaction term coefficients. Likewise, the independent impact of partisanship was moderated by its interaction with political awareness, as indicated by the value of the two-way interaction term coefficient (β 16.589***, se 4.534).

Turning to the three-way interaction, a statistically significant coefficient indicates that respondents' support for military intervention was conditional on individual-level variations in political awareness, partisanship, and media trust. As expected, the three-way interaction term's estimated parameter coefficient was statistically significant (β -.231*, se .081). To aid in the interpretation of the three-way interaction term, predicted probabilities were computed and graphed for specified values of the independent variables in the model. Predicted probabilities for ANES respondents supporting military intervention were computed based on respondents possessing the following characteristics:

- Partisan and Independent identifiers (values range along a seven-point scale from strong Democrat to strong Republican);

- high versus average versus low political awareness levels (values range from 1 standard deviation above the mean, mean, and 1 standard deviation below the mean respectively);
- high versus low media trust (1 standard deviation above and below the mean respectively).

Table 4.5 provides the computed predicted probabilities. Figure's 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 graphically depict the slopes for strong Democrats, weak Democrats, and Independent-Democratic leaners with high versus average versus low political awareness and high versus low media trust. The solid line represents the regression slope for Democrats with high media trust at increasing levels of political awareness; whereas, the dashed line represents the regression slope for Democrats with low media trust at increasing levels of political awareness. It was hypothesized that stronger opposition to intervention should be associated with stronger Democratic predispositions. Greater awareness among Democrats should relate to stronger opposition to intervention. Less trusting Democrats should be associated with stronger opposition to intervention relative to their more trusting counterparts. The strongest opposition to military intervention should be associated among strong Democrats with high political awareness and low media trust.

As expected, the probability table and related graphs indicate that Democrats exhibited the strongest likelihood for opposition to military intervention when compared to Independents and Republicans. Comparing the predicted probabilities across the three Democratic graphs, it was observed that the stronger a respondent identified himself or herself as a Democrat, the more likely that s/he opposed military intervention. Among all Democrats, greater awareness levels were associated with stronger opposition to military intervention. This is in line with the RAS model's second axiom that greater political

Table 4.4: Binary Logistic Regression Results for 2002 ANES Respondents Support for U.S. Military Intervention into Iraq³²

Variable	β	SE
Constant	4.946**	1.824
Gender	.358*	.184
Age	-.002	.001
Race	-.056	.215
Education	-2.342***	.449
Household Income	.621*	.321
Party ID	-6.950**	3.003
News Media Thermometer	-.040	.028
Political Awareness	-8.659***	2.592
Political Awareness X Party ID	16.589***	4.534
Party ID X News Media Thermometer	.131**	.055
Political Awareness X News Media Thermometer	.095**	.043
Political Awareness X Party ID X News Media Thermometer	-.231***	.081
<i>N</i>		813
-2 Log Likelihood		833.797
Model Chi ²		209.295***
Pseudo R ² (Nagerlkerke)		.314
Significance levels: * $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$ (one-tailed test)		

³² The bivariate correlation between media trust and party identification was $-.148^{**}$ (sig. .01 level, one-tailed test), indicating that there was only a slight negative association between these variables.

Table 4.5: 2002 ANES Respondents Predicted Probabilities for Supporting Military Intervention into Iraq

Partisanship	Predicted Probabilities (High Media Trust)	Predicted Probabilities (Low Media Trust)
<i>Strong Democrat</i>		
High Political Awareness	.63	.26
Avg Political Awareness	.71	.51
Low Political Awareness	.77	.73
<i>Weak Democrat</i>		
High Political Awareness	.78	.48
Avg Political Awareness	.82	.66
Low Political Awareness	.86	.80
<i>Independent – Leaning Democrat</i>		
High Political Awareness	.79	.70
Avg Political Awareness	.84	.78
Low Political Awareness	.88	.84
<i>Independent - Independent</i>		
High Political Awareness	.85	.81
Avg Political Awareness	.89	.84
Low Political Awareness	.92	.86
<i>Independent – Leaning Republican</i>		
High Political Awareness	.90	.91
Avg Political Awareness	.93	.90
Low Political Awareness	.95	.89

Table 4.5: 2002 ANES Respondents Predicted Probabilities for Supporting Military Intervention into Iraq (continued)

Partisanship	Predicted Probabilities (High Media Trust)	Predicted Probabilities (Low Media Trust)
<i>Weak Republican</i>		
High Political Awareness	.93	.96
Avg Political Awareness	.95	.94
Low Political Awareness	.96	.91
<i>Strong Republican</i>		
High Political Awareness	.95	.98
Avg Political Awareness	.97	.96
Low Political Awareness	.98	.93

awareness assists one to make more accurate connections whether the information that s/he received from the media is (in)consistent with his or her partisan predisposition.

The next hypothesis dealt with the impact of media trust. The predicted probabilities all indicated that Democrats with lower levels of trust were more likely to provide stronger opposition to military intervention when compared to Democrats with higher levels of trust. In fact, when comparing all three Democratic graphs, the predicted probabilities for supporting the intervention ranged from 63% among highly trusting, highly aware, strong Democrats to 79% probability among highly trusting, least aware, Independent-Democratic leaners. To illustrate the impact of trust another way, compare the gap in predicted probabilities among highly aware Democrats at high versus low

media trust levels. Again, greater awareness and partisan strength should assist Democrats in resisting the dominant media message. However, as you compare the three graphs higher levels of media trust appeared to weaken that effect. The predicted probability gap among highly aware Independent-Democratic leaners with low versus high trust was 79% to 70% respectively. The predicted probability gap among highly aware weak Democrats with low versus high trust was 78% to 48% respectively. Finally, and most vividly, the predicted probability gap among highly aware strong Democrats with low versus high trust was 63% to 26% respectively!

As hypothesized, strong Democrats with high awareness and low media trust were in fact the least likely to support the war at 26%. Lower trust in conjunction with greater awareness appeared to be associated with Democrats' ability to resist the dominant media information flow that was inconsistent with their partisan beliefs and, in turn, indicate a

Figure 4.1: Predicted probabilities for 2002 ANES respondents' support for military intervention into Iraq (strong Democrats at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust).

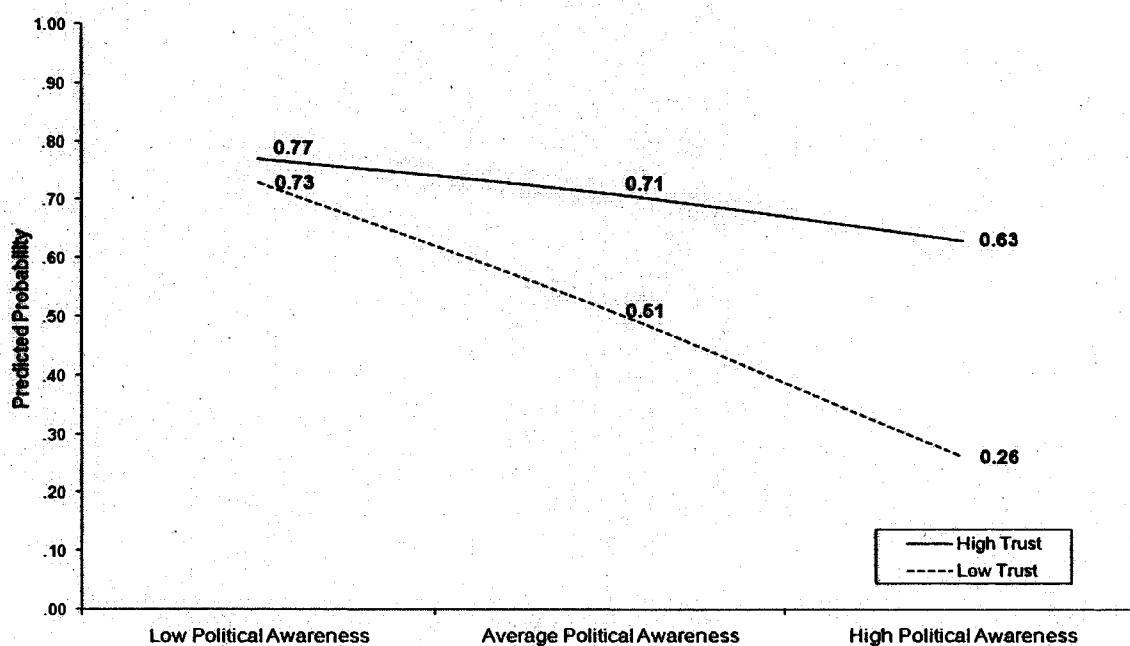


Figure 4.2: Predicted probabilities for 2002 ANES respondents' support for military intervention into Iraq (weak Democrats at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust).

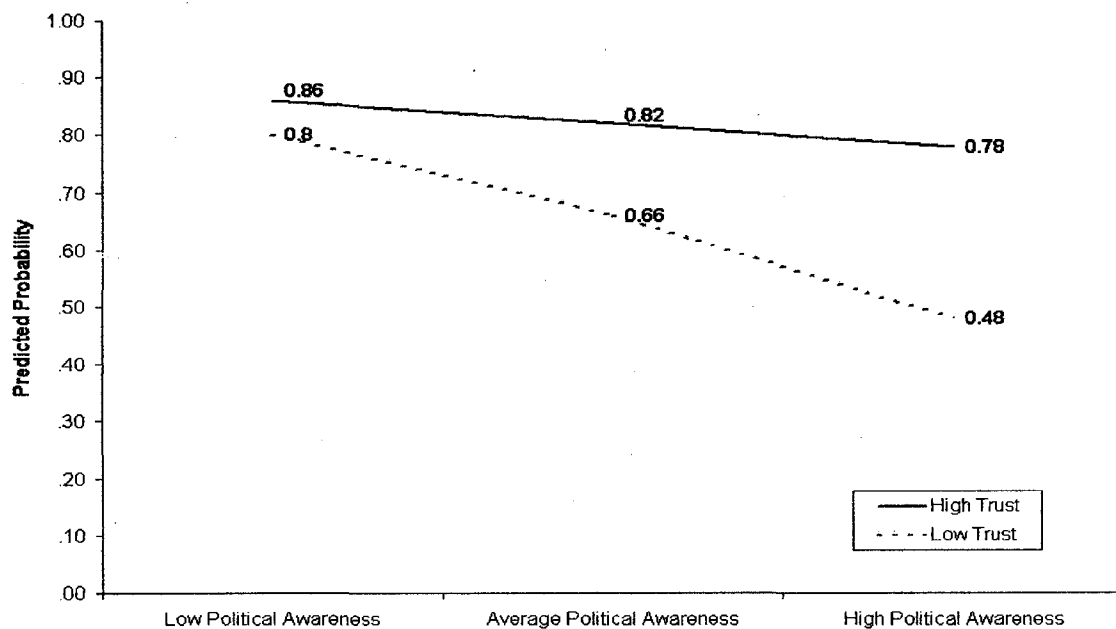
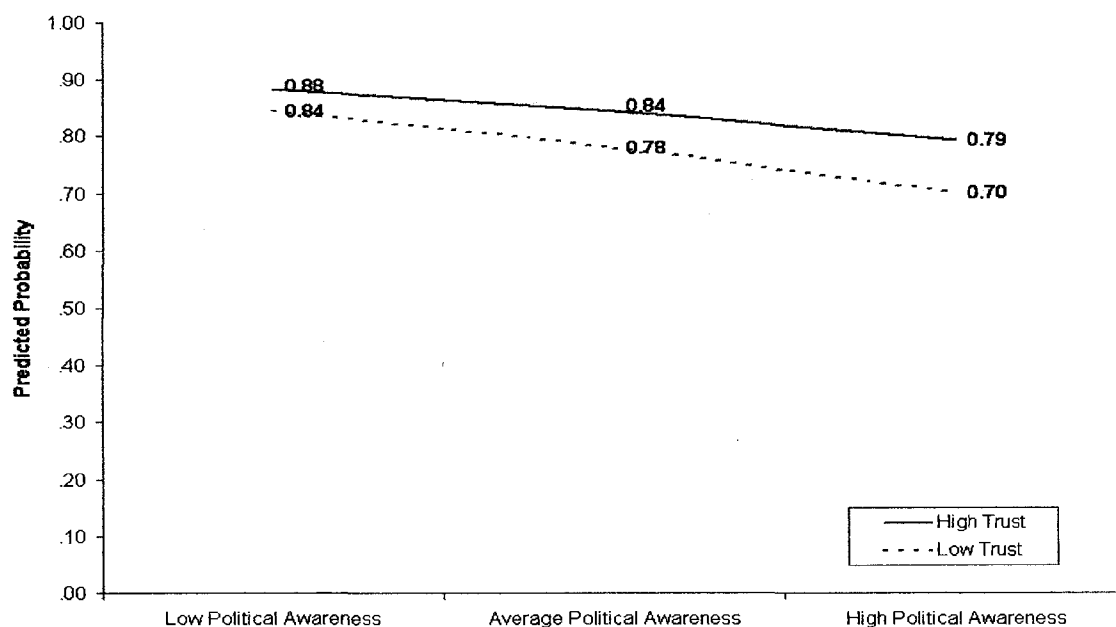


Figure 4.3: Predicted probabilities for 2002 ANES respondents' support for military intervention into Iraq (Independent-Democratic Leaners at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust).



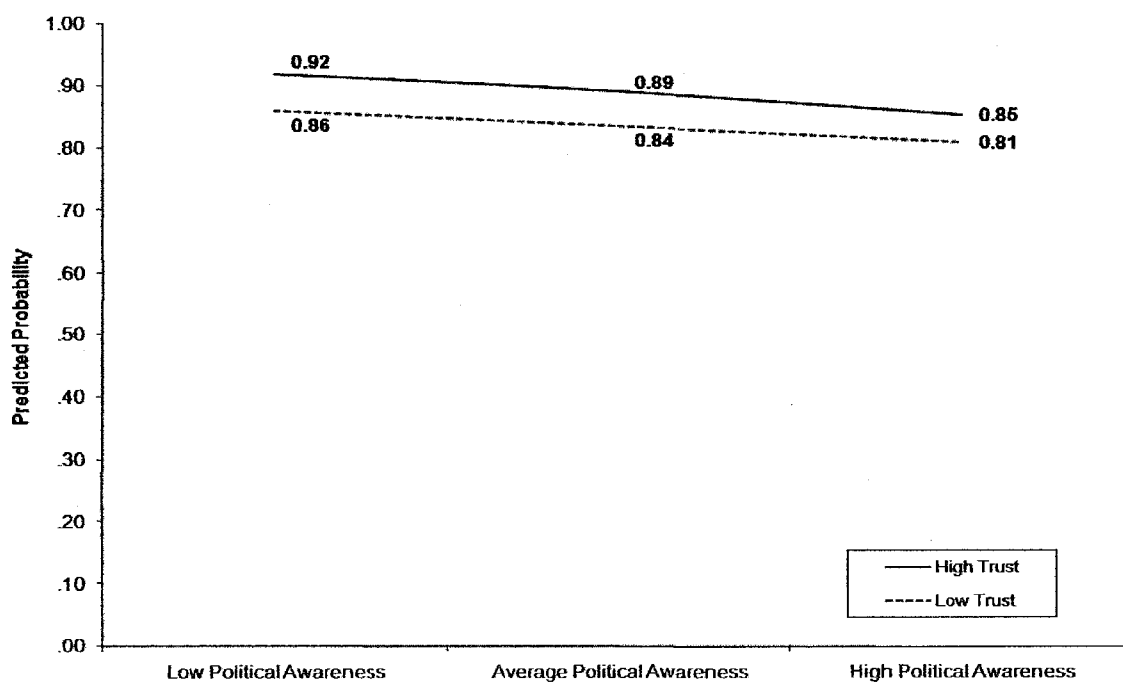
greater likelihood for opposing military intervention into Iraq compared to their highly trusting counterparts. One reason then why public support for military intervention may have been higher than expected was that a significant number of Democrats were likely to support that policy; particularly, those Democrats who *trusted* the dominant uncritical media information flow about the Bush administration's arguments for war.

Figure 4.4 plots the predicted probabilities for supporting military intervention among Independent-Independents at increasing levels of political awareness and media trust. The solid line represents the regression slope for Independents with high media trust at increasing levels of political awareness; whereas, the dashed line represents the regression slope for Independents with low media trust at increasing levels of political awareness. It was hypothesized that Independents should provide generally supportive interventionist positions. Lacking any partisan filter to resist or accept the dominant media information flow, Independents should generally support invading Iraq in line with the dominant media information flow at that time. Highly trusting Independents should be associated with stronger support relative to their less trusting counterparts. Independents with lower levels of political awareness should be associated with stronger support relative to their more highly aware counterparts. Highly aware Independents should be more likely to be exposed to any countervailing media information criticizing military intervention compared to their less aware counterparts. Exposure to countervailing information should lead these individuals to illustrate some resistance to the dominant media message flow and, in turn, provide weaker support for intervention compared to their less aware Independent counterparts. Resistance to the dominant media

information flow, however, should be less apparent among highly aware Independents with higher levels of media trust.

The regression slopes in Figure 4.4 generally confirmed these expectations. Independents appeared to indicate relatively strong support for intervention consistent with the dominant media information flow. As expected, there was a somewhat weaker level of support among highly aware Independents; however, highly aware respondents were still extremely likely to go along with the invasion. Once again, highly trusting Independents were more likely to provide support for intervention compared to their less trusting counterparts, although the difference was not as pronounced as it was with the Democratic respondents. Also, highly aware Independents with higher levels of trust were slightly more likely than their less trusting counterparts to support the invasion.

Figure 4.4: Predicted probabilities for 2002 ANES respondents' support for military intervention into Iraq (Independent-Independents at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust).



Figure's 4.5-4.7 plots the slopes for strong Republicans, weak Republicans, and Independent-Republican leaners at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust. The solid line represents the regression slope for Republicans with high media trust at increasing levels of political awareness; whereas, the dashed line represents the regression slope for Republicans with low media trust at increasing levels of political awareness. It was hypothesized that Republicans should be more likely than their Democratic or Independent counterparts to support the invasion. The stronger one identifies as a Republican, the more likely s/he should support intervention. Greater awareness among Republicans should relate to a higher likelihood for supporting intervention. Higher levels of media trust among Republicans should relate to a higher likelihood for supporting intervention relative to less trusting Republicans. The strongest likelihood for supporting the intervention should be associated with highly aware, highly trusting, strong Republican identifiers.

The predicted probability plots in Figure's 4.5-4.7 present mixed evidence confirming the previously stated Republican expectations. What stands out across all the graphs is that partisanship appeared to trump all other moderators. Regardless of partisan strength, Republican identifiers were very likely to support military intervention. The lowest predicted probability was at 89% among Independent-Republican leaners with low levels of political awareness and low levels of media trust. The strongest likelihood for supporting intervention was at 98%. This predicted probability was associated with strong Republican identifiers with high levels of political awareness and low levels of trust, as well as strong Republican identifiers with low levels of political awareness and high levels of trust respectively. That finding was contrary to expectations. In fact,

among all Republican identifiers, higher awareness and higher trust was associated with slightly weaker support. However, the predicted probability differences were typically quite small between high and low trusting Republicans. Republicans, regardless of their level of political awareness and level of media trust, appeared to rely heavily on their partisan predisposition when forming their position in support of military intervention into Iraq.

Figure 4.5: Predicted probabilities for 2002 ANES respondents' support for military intervention into Iraq (strong Republicans at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust).

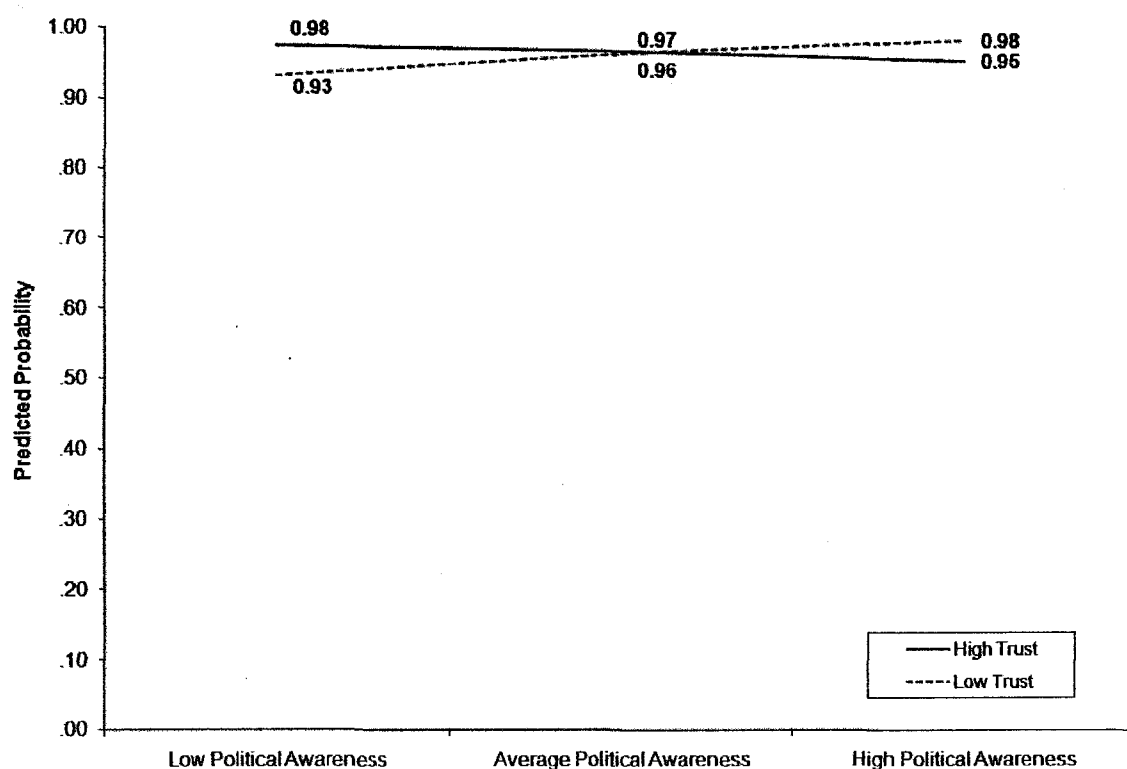


Figure 4.6: Predicted probabilities for 2002 ANES respondents' support for military intervention into Iraq (weak Republicans at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust).

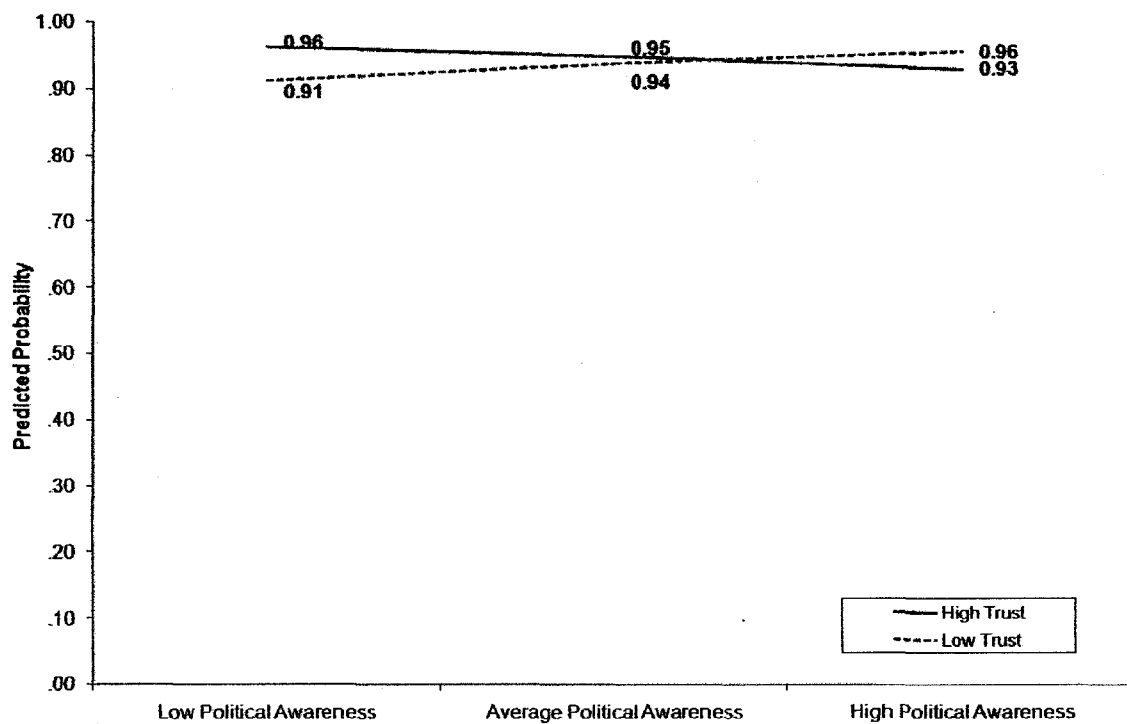
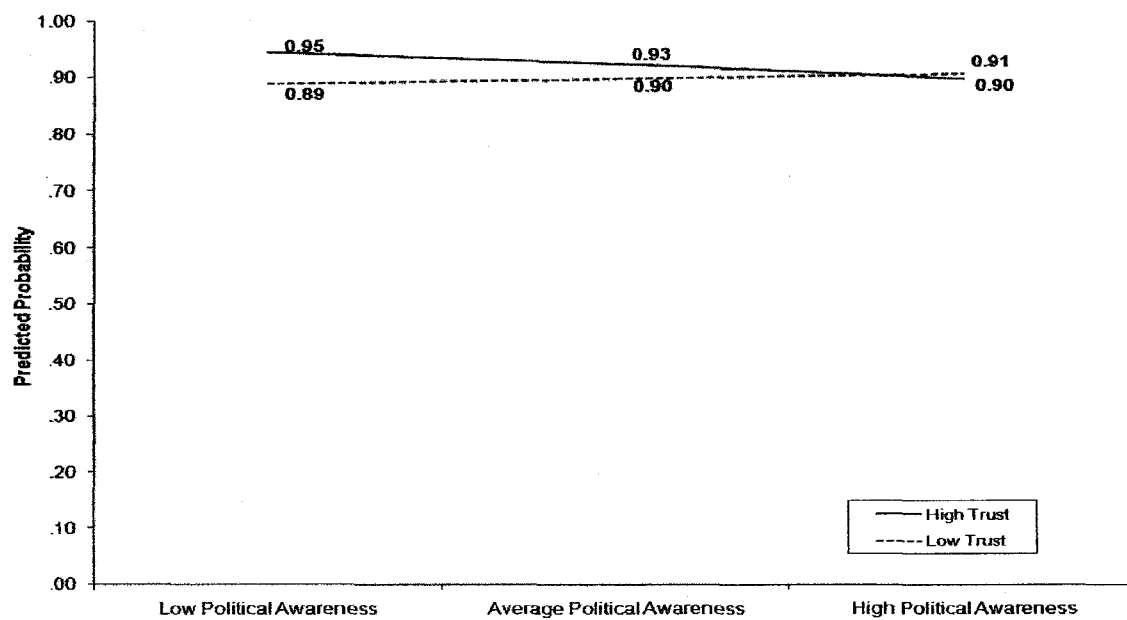


Figure 4.7: Predicted probabilities for 2002 ANES respondents' support for military intervention into Iraq (Independent-Republican leaners at low versus average versus high political awareness and low versus high media trust).



Summary

Journalists and scholars alike over the past few years have focused increased attention on explaining why the American public provided an unusually high level of support during the months leading up to the actual invasion for military intervention into Iraq. A growing literature indicates that the mainstream American media, along with Democratic congressional elites, failed to provide a critical countervailing message about the stated reasons that the Bush administration provided to the American public for invading Iraq. In this chapter, I set out to examine whether the “one-sided information flow” presented by the mainstream news media concerning the arguments put forth by the Bush administration for the Iraq invasion played a key role in predicting one’s support for military intervention. In line with the main thesis of this dissertation, one’s support for military intervention should be conditional on individual-level variations in three key moderating variables: political awareness, partisanship, and media trust.

The results indicated that Republicans appeared to rely mostly on their partisan predispositions. Regardless of political awareness or media trust levels, Republicans were highly likely to support military intervention in line with their party’s presidential foreign policy initiatives. Independents were also likely to support military intervention. The likelihood of supporting the invasion was particularly high among less aware Independent respondents with high levels of media trust. Finally, and possibly most telling, was the likelihood of Democratic support versus opposition to the invasion. Whether a Democrat provided stronger support or opposition to the military invasion was dependent to a large degree on whether they trusted the news media. The predicted probability gap among highly aware Independent-Democratic leaners with low versus

high trust was 70% to 79% respectively. The predicted probability gap among highly aware weak Democrats with low versus high trust was 48% to 78% respectively. The predicted probability gap among highly aware strong Democrats with low versus high trust was 26% to 63% respectively. One reason then why public support for military intervention may have been higher than expected was that a significant number of Democrats were likely to support that policy; particularly, those Democrats who trusted the dominant uncritical media information flow about the Bush administration's arguments for war.

Overall, the results in this chapter were generally consistent with the expectations concerning the moderating impact of partisanship, political awareness, and *media trust* shaping one's political opinions. Chapter six provides a final empirical test of these expectations by examining how the three moderators may have played a key role in explaining President Bill Clinton's unusually high job approval ratings during the height of the Monica Lewinsky affair.

Chapter Five

The Clinton Conundrum

"Contrary to the view offered by a number of pollsters, pundits, and scholars, our evidence suggests that the public *was* influenced by scandal coverage. Indeed, our modeling suggests that, while economic cues are important in explaining trends in presidential approval during the vast majority of Clinton's term, accounting for trends in public approval after Monica Lewinsky entered the public stage requires particular attention to the framing of scandal coverage in terms of conservative attacks and liberal responses."

(Shah et al. 2002: 368; italics from the original)

Introduction

At the height of the Monica Lewinsky affair former President Bill Clinton continued to receive unusually high public approval for his job performance. Clinton was able to maintain his high job approval ratings in spite of 24-7-365 news coverage emphasizing the lurid details of his Oval Office affair, the contentious congressional impeachment proceedings, and derisive debate over whether Clinton's perjury constituted a "constitutional" crime. Based on survey data compiled by the Roper polling organization (2008), President Clinton's job performance evaluations remained above 60% approval during most of 1998 and even rose above 70% approval by the end of the year.³³ While Clinton was able to sustain his high job approval ratings, public assessment of his personal character was not as fortunate. A Pew Research Center poll conducted 27 August 1998 found that 67% of the public did not like Clinton as a person – up from 53% in January 1998 (1998).³⁴ A similar poll conducted 13 September 1998 by *The*

³³ The Roper polling data is based on a compilation of weekly polls taken from major polling organizations over the course of Clinton's tenure in office. The Roper polling data is available online at: http://137.99.31.42/CFIDE/roper/presidential/webroot/presidential_rating_detail.cfm?allRate=True&presidentName=Clinton

³⁴ Pew polling data available at: <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=82>

Washington Post/ABC News found that three-quarters of the American public did not feel Clinton was "trustworthy and honest."³⁵ Yet, both polls indicated that the public strongly supported the President's overall job performance in spite of their negative assessments of Clinton's personal characteristics.

The sampling of polling data cited above illustrates that the American public made a clear distinction during the course of the Lewinsky affair with regard to both types of presidential evaluations. The public's assessment of Clinton's personal character appeared to be shaped to a large extent by his private indiscretions; yet, the public appeared to disregard Clinton's private peccadilloes when assessing his overall job performance. The dichotomy that existed within the American public concerning the impact of the President's affair with Monica Lewinsky raises an interesting conundrum when placed into the context of media effects. Why did the public continue to highly evaluate Clinton's job performance given saturated media coverage of the lurid personal and political details of the affair? The presumptive hypothesis would have been that the high level of negative coverage about the affair undermined Clinton's personal character *and* job approval ratings. Shah et al. (2002, 340-341) highlight various theories purported to explain why Clinton's job performance evaluations remained high while his personal character evaluations declined. Some of these theories suggest that Clinton experienced a "rally effect" reflecting public attitudes toward continuing the strong economy (Phillips 1999). Clinton's strong record of economic growth, domestic security, and pragmatic policies helped prop up his job approval ratings (Zaller 1998). The media's *uber-coverage*

³⁵ *Washington Post*/ABC News polling obtained from Brody (1998). Data available online: <http://www.pollingreport.com/brody.htm>

of the affair led the public to simply tune out (Lawrence, Bennett, and Hunt 1999). The public was also possibly reacting negatively to what it perceived as Republican attempts to impeach the President (Brownstein 1999; Phillips 1999; Rothenberg 1998).

Shah et al. (2002) argue, however, that these theories are incomplete. While the economy was a significant factor explaining the President's high job approval ratings, and negative coverage of the affair and post-affair impeachment process were broadcast extensively by the news media, one must also take into consideration the way in which the news media framed the Lewinsky coverage to the public. Content analysis conducted by these authors suggests that media coverage of the Lewinsky affair and impeachment process was framed in three specific ways to the public (p. 343): 1) *Clinton behavior frame*: media coverage highlighting Clinton's sexual behaviors and his responses to the affair; 2) *Conservative attack frame*: media coverage highlighting conservative attacks on the President for his actions; 3) *Liberal response frame*: media coverage highlighting liberal motivations for attacking Special Prosecutor Ken Starr and the Republican majority-led congressional impeachment proceedings as merely partisan machinations by conservatives to remove a popular president from office. Within the context of Zaller's RAS model, Shah et al. content analysis of the Lewinsky affair is a good example of a balanced, or "two-sided" information flow. The "dominant" media message reported to the public was in the form of the "Clinton behavior frame"; however, the media also reported a weaker, although still strong, "countervailing" message of the Lewinsky affair in the form of two alternate frames: the "conservative attack frame" and the "liberal response frame".

What is the importance of these competing scandal frames on public assessment of presidential job performance? Shah et al. cite research by Jamieson (1998) that the public makes a distinction between the “presidential” versus the “personal” aspects of character when forming presidential job performance evaluations (also Lawrence et al. 1999). Shah et al. also cite research by Cappella and Jamieson (1997) that suggests the manner in which the media frames political news coverage of presidents may lead the public to manifest a heightened level of cynicism. Specifically, Shah et al. (p. 345, italics from the original) summarize arguments by Cappella and Jamieson that,

“strategy framing is particularly likely to engender cynical responses from the public. That is, press attention to the game or strategy of politics – that is, a focus on competitive and tactical elements of governmental affairs, with particular attention to the motives and mastery of political actors – has been found to provoke hostile reactions among the citizenry (Jamieson 1992; Lawrence 2000; Patterson 1994). When news is presented through a strategic lens, the actions of political actors ‘are seen not as the by-product of a desire to solve social ills, redirect national goals, or create a better future for our offspring but are instead viewed in terms of winning’ (Cappella & Jamieson 1997, p. 34). Thus, the reaction of individuals exposed to such frames is to mistrust the intentions of political elites and, perhaps, reinterpret and recoil against their perspectives (Beck 1991; Patterson 1994).”

Cappella and Jamieson also point out that strategic framing of political coverage hurts the news media. According to Cappella and Jamieson (p. 209), “the public’s trust in [the press] is falling; in part, this may be due to the media’s own sowing the seeds of public distrust. In other words, the elevation of public distrust of political institutions and processes may have attached itself to the bearers of information about those institutions – the news media themselves.”

In the case of President Clinton, the news media framed the Lewinsky affair in terms of Clinton's private peccadilloes and reactions to his personal behaviors in the Oval Office; conservative machinations to politically injure, or even remove from office, a popular president; and liberal counter-attacks to protect their president from conservative motives to politically hurt Clinton via the Ken Starr investigation and congressional impeachment proceedings. Each of these news media frames take on the *strategic* characteristics highlighted by Cappella and Jamieson. Placing the Lewinsky affair in the context of the strategic framing perspective (Cappella and Jamieson 1997), as well as the public makes a distinction when forming private versus public evaluations of presidents (Jamieson 1998), public reaction to the scandal and its impact on Clinton's job performance becomes predictable. President Clinton's job performance evaluations are supported – even boosted – by the news media's strategic framing of the Lewinsky affair as partisan machinations by conservatives, counter-attacks by liberals to thwart conservative political motives toward Clinton, and saturated news coverage emphasizing the President's private indiscretions which the public perceives as having little to do with effectively fulfilling the functions of that office. Public reaction toward conservative/liberal political elites - and the news media - is also predictable: cynicism!

Propositions

The discussion highlights how the news media framed the Lewinsky affair in a balanced, or "two-sided" fashion to the American public: a dominant stream of stories reflecting Clinton's personal indiscretions competing against countervailing stories pitting conservative and liberal political motivations over their conduct of the Ken Starr investigation and related congressional impeachment proceedings. Assuming the press

had framed the Lewinsky affair around Clinton's personal indiscretions in the White House, without any significant countervailing conservative-liberal political motivation frame, then one should have expected the dominant Clinton bad behavior message flow to negatively impacted public approval of Clinton's job performance. However, the two-sided information flow of competing Lewinsky scandal frames should lead one to an opposite conclusion. The competing Lewinsky messages reported by the press engendered a heightened level of public cynicism toward conservative and liberal congressional representatives, political pundits, and the news media. This helped minimize the impact of stories concerning Clinton's personal behavior in the Oval Office; in fact, the competing Lewinsky news frames actually helped President Clinton to maintain his high job approval ratings during the course of the affair. The public, while not condoning Clinton's private indiscretions, came to view the post-Lewinsky Ken Starr investigation and congressional impeachment proceedings as "politically motivated". Accordingly, in the following section I identify several propositions that seek to explain President Clinton's job approval ratings during the Monica Lewinsky affair, with particular emphasis on the *conditional* impact that one's assessment of the news coverage of the affair might have played on shaping one's presidential job performance evaluations.

The Direct and Conditional Impact of Partisanship, Political Awareness, and Lewinsky News Coverage Evaluations on One's Assessment of President Clinton's Job Performance

Per the theoretical discussion above, I would expect that stronger disapproval of the news media's coverage of the Lewinsky affair should be associated with stronger approval of Clinton's job performance. Negative public reaction toward the news media's particular

scandal framing and uber-coverage of the Lewinsky affair should assist the President's ability to thwart any negative impact that the coverage might have had on his job approval ratings. I also expect that partisanship should be associated with one's presidential job performance evaluations. The more strongly one identifies as a Democrat, the stronger s/he should approve of the President's job performance. Whereas, the more strongly one identifies as a Republican, the stronger s/he should disapprove of the President's job performance. Moreover, the impact of partisanship on Clinton's job performance should be conditional on one's assessment of the Lewinsky news coverage. I would expect that Democrats and Republicans alike would exhibit generally negative evaluations of the Lewinsky news coverage but for different reasons. From a Republican perspective, the news media framed the affair, in part, as conservative attacks to bring down a popular president, rather than purely an issue over executive abuse of power and flawed personal character traits. From a Democratic perspective, the news media framed the affair, in part, as liberal counter-attacks toward conservatives while also emphasizing Clinton's personal peccadilloes. As a result, stronger disapproval of the Lewinsky media coverage among Democrats should be associated with stronger approval of Clinton's job performance, while stronger disapproval of the Lewinsky coverage among Republicans should be associated with stronger disapproval of Clinton's job performance (as compared to Republicans and Democrats expressing stronger approval of the Lewinsky media coverage).

Political awareness should also moderate one's job performance evaluations. I would expect, however, that the moderating impact of political awareness should be less important since the media reported a competing versus one-sided information flow of

Lewinsky news frames to the public. As such, I would expect that political awareness also conditions the impact of partisanship and media coverage on one's job approval ratings, but that impact of political awareness should be less influential given the media's balanced reporting on the Lewinsky affair. I would expect that the impact of partisanship and Lewinsky media coverage assessments should be more pronounced among those persons with greater levels of political awareness. As such, I would expect to associate stronger approval of Clinton's job performance among individuals with higher levels of political awareness, stronger Democratic identification, and stronger disapproval of the news media's coverage of the Lewinsky affair. Whereas, I would expect to associate stronger disapproval of Clinton's job performance among individuals with higher levels of political awareness, stronger Republican identification, and stronger disapproval of the news media's coverage of the Lewinsky affair.

Finally, I expect that self-described Independents would exhibit generally negative evaluations of the Lewinsky media coverage. The media's framing of the Lewinsky affair as partisan attack-counterattacks should manifest within Independents a heightened level of cynicism toward the press, as well as towards Republican and Democrat elites. Among Independents, stronger disapproval of the media's handling of the Lewinsky affair should be associated with stronger approval of Clinton's job performance as compared to Independents expressing stronger approval of the media coverage.

The Direct Impact of One's Retrospective National Economic Evaluations on One's Assessment of President Clinton's Job Performance

A leading alternative explanation for Clinton's high job performance evaluations during the Lewinsky affair was that the public was very satisfied with Clinton's handling of the

national economy. Clinton's tenure in office was associated with strong economic growth leading up to the Lewinsky affair. The public "rallied" around Clinton in order to avoid upsetting the strong economy it perceived Clinton had helped to establish (Phillips 1999). Accordingly, I would expect that the more positive one's retrospective evaluations of the state of the national economy, the stronger one's approval of President Clinton's job performance.

Research Design

Data

The 1998 American National Election Study data is used to test the propositions identified above. The 1998 ANES is appropriate because individuals were asked various questions that identify one's assessment of President Clinton's job performance, the state of the national economy, the news media's handling of the Lewinsky affair, partisan identification, and political awareness. The ANES also asked respondents to identify various socio-demographic characteristics that theoretically control for one's evaluation of President Clinton's job performance during this period of time. Finally, the ANES pre and post-surveys were conducted between September 1998 and December 1998, a period in time in which the news media provided extensive news coverage of the Lewinsky affair and congressional impeachment proceedings. According to content analysis by Shah et al. (2002, 354-357), media coverage prior to the Lewinsky affair had been generally positive toward Clinton, with an emphasis on national economic matters. However, during all of 1998 and the first two months of 1999 media coverage increased significantly, and negatively, about the Lewinsky affair. This was also the first time according to these authors that Clinton had received significant negative news coverage

since the very beginning of his presidential tenure in 1993.³⁶ The coverage itself was framed by the press, as previously described, in terms of Clinton's private peccadilloes and reactions to his personal behaviors in the Oval Office; conservative machinations to politically injure, or even remove from office, a popular president; and liberal counter-attacks to protect their president from conservative motives to politically hurt Clinton via the Ken Starr investigation and congressional impeachment proceedings. Once the Senate acquitted the President, news coverage of the affair dropped while positive national economic coverage continued to receive dominant attention, just as it had prior to the Lewinsky scandal breaking in January of 1998.

Dependent Variable

President Clinton's Job Approval

ANES asked respondents to provide their overall evaluations of President Clinton's job performance. ANES asked respondents whether they approved or disapproved of the President's handling of his job as president and how strongly they felt regarding that approval/disapproval rating. ANES originally measured presidential job approval along a four-point scale ranging from *strongly approves* to *strongly disapprove*. I reversed the order and revised the scale such that presidential job approval ranged from 0, or *strongly disapproves* to 1, or *strongly approves*.

³⁶ Shah et al. also note that the level and positive tone of news coverage about the state of the economy did not drop during this time period, but that economic coverage was challenged by Lewinsky coverage.

Independent Variables

Political Awareness

Respondents' level of political awareness is measured based on Zaller's (1992) work. Accordingly, an eleven-point additive index of factual political knowledge is created. Respondents were asked to 1) identify various positions of political figures in the news (i.e., Russian President Boris Yeltsin, Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rhenquist, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and Vice President Al Gore), 2) name which party held the majority in the House of Representatives, 3) identify the name and party of an individual candidate that ran for a respondent's respective House district seat. Each correct response counted as one point within the index. A fourth component included in the index was the ANES interviewer's assessment of each respondent's level of political knowledge. The ANES interviewer's assessment was measured along a five-point scale from very high to very low. Respondents received five points in the index if they were categorized with a very high ranking, four points for a high score, three points for an average rating, two points for a low score, and one point for a very low ranking. All questions were summed to complete the index. I then re-scaled the index to range from 0, or *very low levels of political awareness*, to 1, or *very high levels of political awareness*. The reliability of the scale was .70 (Cronbach's alpha).

Partisanship

Respondents' partisanship is based on the ANES seven-point likert scale. I re-code the original measure to range along a 0 to 1 scale from *strong Republicans* to *strong Democrat*.

Media Coverage Evaluations of the Monica Lewinsky Affair

ANES asked respondents to indicate whether and how strongly they approved/disapproved of the news media's handling of the Monica Lewinsky affair. This question is based on a four-point scale ranging from *approves strongly* to *disapproves strongly*. I revised the measure to range along a 0 to 1 scale. I also utilize an additional measure to gauge public trust in the press. ANES asked respondents to what extent they believed that the news media reports the news fairly. This question is based on a five-point scale ranging from *just about always* to *none of the time*. I revised the measure to range along a 0 to 1 scale.³⁷

Retrospective National Economic Evaluations

ANES asked respondents to provide their retrospective evaluations of the state of the national economy over the past year. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they thought the state of the national economy had become *much better*, *better*, *stayed the same*, *worse*, or *much worse* over the past year. I revised the scale to range from 0, or *much worse*, to 1, or *much better*. The inclusion of this variable into the model controls for the argument made by scholars (e.g., Phillips 1999) that Clinton's job approval ratings were supported during the course of the Lewinsky affair because the public rallied around Clinton in an effort to sustain the strong national economy.

Additional Control Variables

I include several variables to control for the effects of respondents' social and demographic characteristics. These include age, gender (female), household income,

³⁷The bivariate correlation between the Lewinsky news coverage and news media fairness question was .268** (sig. .01 level, one-tailed test).

race/ethnicity (African American/other), and education level. Accordingly, the following equation predicts ANES respondents overall job approval evaluations of President Bill Clinton:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Clinton Job Approval} = & \beta_1 \text{ Female} + \beta_2 \text{ Age} + \beta_3 \text{ Education Level} \\
 & + \beta_4 \text{ Household Income} + \beta_5 \text{ African American} \\
 & + \beta_6 \text{ Party ID} + \beta_7 \text{ Political Awareness} \\
 & + \beta_8 \text{ Lewinsky Media Coverage Evaluation} \\
 & + \beta_9 \text{ Party ID X Political Awareness} \\
 & + \beta_{10} \text{ Party ID X Lewinsky Media Coverage Evaluation} \\
 & + \beta_{11} \text{ Political Awareness X Lewinsky Media Coverage Evaluation} \\
 & + \beta_{12} \text{ Political Awareness X Party ID X Lewinsky Media} \\
 & \quad \text{Coverage Evaluation}
 \end{aligned}$$

Method of Analysis

Ordinal logistic regression, or “ordered logit”, is used to generate the parameter coefficients in this study. The dependent variable in this study is comprised of four categories: *strongly disapproves*, *disapproves*, *approves*, and *strongly approves*. The categories are ranked from low to high, yet the distance between each category is unknown. Traditionally, scholars have treated this type of variable as if it were interval. The categories are numbered sequentially and then OLS techniques are applied to generate the parameter coefficients. However, certain assumptions are made if this approach is followed. Specifically, one assumes that the distance between each category is in fact equal. Long (1997) cites research by various scholars (Winship and Mare 1984; McKelvey and Zavonia 1975) debating whether the OLS approach is appropriate. The argument against using OLS techniques is that the estimated parameter coefficients may provide misleading results, given the assumption of “equal distance between categories” is not an accurate characterization of the dependent variable. In order to avoid this

problem, Long (1997) suggest using ordinal logistic regression. Interpretation of the parameter coefficients is similar to binary logistic regression techniques.³⁸

Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

Table 5.1 provides descriptive statistics for the independent variables in the regression models. It appeared that respondents possessed average levels of political awareness. On a scale from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate higher awareness levels, the mean was .56 (sd = .22). 25% (313) of respondents exhibited low awareness levels, 43% (545) moderate awareness levels, and 32% (409) high awareness levels. Comparing respondents' party identification, 37% (469) of respondents identified themselves as strong, weak, or Independent-Republican leaners. 10% (127) of respondents identified themselves as Independent-Independents. 53% (659) as of respondents identified themselves as strong, weak, or Independent-Democratic leaners. Respondents also indicated that the state of the national economy over the past year had gotten better. On a scale from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate respondents felt that the national economy had gotten increasingly better over the past year, the mean response was .69 (sd = .19). This result tends to validate the information provided at the beginning of this chapter that the public held a predominately positive assessment of the state of the national economy during the course of the Lewinsky affair.

Table's 5.2 and 5.3 detail the number and percent of ANES respondents providing various assessments of the media's coverage of the Lewinsky affair, including a

³⁸ See chapter four for a detailed explanation of binary logistic regression interpretation. Also, see Long (1997) for an in-depth explanation of the mathematical derivation of ordinal logistic regression.

breakdown of those assessments by partisan categories. It is clear from the descriptive data that, as expected, public evaluation of the Lewinsky media coverage was very negative. On a scale from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate stronger disapproval of the news coverage, the mean evaluation for the entire sample was .79 (sd = .32). 64% (804) of respondents strongly disapproved of the coverage as compared to only 8% (95) respondents who strongly approved of the coverage. In fact, only 19% (237) of respondents stated that they strongly approved or approved of the coverage compared to 81% (1,020) of respondents who expressed strong disapproval or disapproval of the Lewinsky news coverage. Even more telling is the comparative analysis of Lewinsky news coverage across partisan categories. The expectation was that respondents in all three general partisan categories had a reason to express disapproval toward the press for its handling of the Lewinsky coverage, but for different reasons, given the competing scandal frames that the media used to report the affair to the public. As is readily apparent from Table 5.3, at least three-quarters of all respondents across the partisan categories expressed strong disapproval or disapproval toward the news coverage of the Lewinsky affair.

The negative media evaluations are in stark contrast to President Clinton's job approval ratings. On a scale from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate stronger approval of Clinton's job performance, the mean response for the entire sample was .68 (sd = .38). Table 5.4 provides a more detailed breakdown of each job performance category by selected independent variables. Approximately 74% (919) of the entire ANES sample providing an evaluation indicated that they either strongly approved or approved of

Clinton's job performance. This result is consistent with the polling data from the Pew and Roper organizations cited in this chapter that Clinton's job performance evaluations were not significantly undermined by the Lewinsky affair.

Across political awareness levels, the least aware respondents provided the strongest support as 79% of this group approved/strongly approved of Clinton's job performance. Likewise, 77% of moderately aware respondents also approved/strongly approved of Clinton's job performance. Although the weakest of the three political awareness categories, 65% of highly aware respondents still approved/strongly approved of Clinton's job performance. The level of approval increased across partisan categories, with Democrats providing the strongest approval and Republicans the weakest approval ratings (95% to 33% approval respectively). Clinton's job approval also increased across

Table 5.1: Means and Standard Deviations for Independent Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev
Political Awareness (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of political awareness)	.56	.22
Party Identification (0 to 1 scale; strong Republican to strong Democrat)	.56	.34
Lewinsky Media Coverage Evaluation (0 to 1 scale; strongly approves to strongly disapproves)	.79	.32
News Media Fairness (0 to 1 scale; just about always to none of the time)	.43	.20
Retrospective National Economic Evaluation (0 to 1 scale; much worse to much better)	.69	.19
Gender (1=female; 0=male)	.55	.50
Age (total years)	45.75	17.26
Race (1=African American; 0=other)	.12	.33
Years of Education (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of education)	.59	.24
Household Income (0 to 1 scale; higher values indicate higher levels of income)	.62	.30

Table 5.2: ANES Respondent Evaluations of the News Media's Coverage of the Monica Lewinsky Affair

Category	% of Entire Sample (N=1257)
Strongly Disapprove	64% (804)
Disapprove	17% (216)
Approve	11% (142)
Strongly Approve	8% (95)

Table 5.3: ANES Respondent Evaluations of the News Media's Coverage of the Monica Lewinsky Affair (by Partisan Category)

Partisan Category	% Disapprove/Strongly Disapprove
Strong Republican	78% (105/135)
Weak Republican	76% (150/197)
Independent-Lean Republican	85% (111/131)
Independent- Independent	82% (99/121)
Independent-Lean Democrat	76% (136/179)
Weak Democrat	84% (199/236)
Strong Democrat	87% (202/233)

Table 5.4: President Clinton's Job Performance Evaluations for the Entire ANES Sample and for Selected Independent Variables

Variable	% Approve/Strongly Approve of Clinton's Job Performance as President
Entire Sample	74% (919/1247)
Political Awareness	
High	65% (265/406)
Average	77% (409/528)
Low	79% (237/300)

Table 5.4: President Clinton's Job Performance Evaluations for the Entire ANES Sample and for Selected Independent Variables (continued)

Variable	% Approve/Strongly Approve of Clinton's Job Performance as President
Party Identification	
Strong Democrat	95% (226/237)
Weak Democrat	89% (209/235)
Independent-Leans Democrat	87% (153/175)
Independent- Independent	73% (85/116)
Independent-Leans Republican	50% (66/131)
Weak Republican	61% (118/194)
Strong Republican	33% (45/135)
News Media Fairness	
Just about always	85% (53/62)
Most of the time	76% (299/393)
Only some of the time	74% (461/626)
Almost never	62% (84/135)
None of the time	64% (14/22)
Lewinsky Media Coverage Evaluations	
Strongly Approve	68% (63/93)
Approve	70% (99/140)
Disapprove	66% (135/206)
Strongly Disapprove	77% (609/787)
Retrospective National Economic Evaluations	
Much Worse	59% (19/32)
Worse	52% (79/151)
Same	71% (330/465)
Better	81% (329/407)
Much Better	85% (151/178)

retrospective national economic categories. 85% of ANES respondents who stated that they felt the economy had gotten much better over the past year indicated that they approved/strongly approved of Clinton's job performance; whereas, 59% of respondents who stated that they felt the economy had gotten much worse over the past year indicated that they approved/strongly approved of Clinton's job performance. Finally, Clinton job approval was relatively high across the two media measures regardless of specific within-measure categories. Interestingly, the percentage of respondents providing approving job performance ratings tended to increase with the more positive media evaluations categories for the media fairness measure; whereas, the opposite percentages were exhibited within the Lewinsky media coverage evaluation categories.

Ordinal Logistic Regression Analysis

Table 5.5 provides the estimated parameter coefficients and standard errors based on an ordinal logistic regression predicting ANES respondents' evaluations of President Clinton's job performance. Separate models were generated for each media measure. The key variable in each model to focus upon is the three-way interaction term located at the end of Table 5.5. A statistically significant interaction term coefficient indicates that a respondent's presidential job performance evaluation was conditional on individual-level variations in political awareness, partisanship, and the respective media measure. As expected, the three-way interaction term's estimated parameter coefficient in the Lewinsky media coverage model was statistically significant (β 4.661*, se 2.608). However, contrary to expectations the three-way interaction term in the media fairness model was not a significant predictor of Clinton job approval (β .426, se 4.407). Why the contradictory findings? One possible reason for the opposite results may be that the

Lewinsky measure is gauging respondent's opinions toward the media's handling of a specific event that is very salient in respondent's minds. Whereas, the media fairness question is measuring one's general belief in the ability of the media's to report the news fairly beyond simply the Lewinsky coverage. Given that the dominant issue in the news during this time was the Lewinsky affair and related impeachment process, the Lewinsky new coverage evaluation may be picking up on the more immediate and salient "considerations" (to use Zaller's terminology) in people's minds regarding the news media. This is depicted in the public approval/disapproval percentages toward the media's handling of the Lewinsky coverage: 81% of the public stated that they strongly disapproved/disapproved of the coverage; moreover, this finding was consistent across partisan categories. Media fairness opinions while negative were not as skewed as the Lewinsky coverage; moreover, unlike the Lewinsky coverage results where stronger disapproval was associated with high Clinton job approval percentages, the opposite trend was found for the media fairness question. Likewise, the bivariate association between the Lewinsky coverage and general media fairness measure was only slightly correlated at $.268^{**}$ ($p \leq .01$, one-tailed); similarly, the Cronbach alpha reliability scale statistic was a mere .39.

Table 5.5: Ordinal Logistic Regression Results for 1998 ANES Respondents Evaluations of President Clinton's Overall Job Performance³⁹

Variable	Lewinsky News Coverage Model β (SE)	Media Fairness Model β (SE)
Female	-.066 (.130)	-.066 (.129)
African American	1.336*** (.271)	1.416*** (.268)
Age	.007* (.004)	.009** (.004)
Education	-.878*** (.320)	-.773** (.314)
Household Income	-.236 (.237)	-.171 (.233)
Retrospective National Economic Evaluation	1.890*** (.335)	1.907*** (.331)
Party ID	1.449 (1.276)	-.307 (1.196)
Political Awareness	.582 (1.263)	-2.137* (1.273)
Lewinsky Media Coverage Evaluation (News Media Fairness)	2.317** (.966)	-1.777 (1.584)
Political Awareness X Party ID	.910 (2.112)	3.681* (2.008)
Lewinsky Media Coverage Evaluation X Party ID (News Media Fairness X Party ID)	-1.287 (1.579)	2.291 (2.622)
Lewinsky Media Coverage Evaluation X Political Awareness (News Media Fairness X Political Awareness)	-4.331*** (1.542)	-.333 (2.586)
Political Awareness X Lewinsky Media Coverage Evaluation X Party ID (Political Awareness X News Media Fairness X Party ID)	4.661* (2.608)	.426 (4.407)
<i>N</i>	1101	1112
-2 Log Likelihood	2189.789	2232.322
Model Chi ²	493.122***	480.497***
Pseudo R ² (Nagelkerke)	.396	.384
Significance levels: * $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$ (one-tailed test)		

³⁹ The bivariate correlation between party identification and Lewinsky news coverage was .116* (sig. .01, one-tailed test), while the bivariate correlation between party identification and media fairness was -.047* (sig. .01, one-tailed test). This suggests that there was a slight association between party identification and the media measures.

To aid in the interpretation of the three-way interaction term, “logits” were computed and graphed for specified values of the independent variables and interaction terms in the model. Logits that estimated Clinton’s job approval were computed based on respondents possessing the following characteristics:

- strong Democrat, Independent-Independent, and strong Republican identifiers;
- high versus low political awareness levels (values range from 1 standard deviation above and below the mean respectively);
- disapproving versus approving evaluations of the Lewinsky news coverage (1 standard deviation above and below the mean respectively).

Figure's 5.1 and 5.2 graphically depict the change in Clinton job approval ratings for low versus high political awareness respondents who disapproved versus approved of the Lewinsky news coverage. The solid line represents the regression slope for low political awareness respondents moving from strong Republican to strong Democratic identifiers; whereas, the dashed line represents the regression slope for high political awareness respondents again moving from strong Republican to strong Democratic identifiers. It was hypothesized that stronger approval of Clinton’s job performance should be associated with strong Democrats as compared to Independents and strong Republicans. Higher political awareness among Democrats should relate to stronger Clinton job approval relative to less aware Democrats. Stronger disapproval of the Lewinsky coverage among Democrats should be associated with stronger Clinton job approval relative to Democrats who expressed stronger approval of the media coverage. The strongest approval ratings for Clinton’s job performance should be associated among strong Democrats, with high political awareness levels, who expressed strong disapproval of the Lewinsky media coverage.

Comparing both graphs illustrates that as expected strong Democrats, regardless of Lewinsky media coverage evaluations and political awareness levels, tended to provide the strongest overall Clinton job approval ratings. Comparing the high versus low political awareness slopes in both graphs, higher political awareness among strong Democrats was associated with stronger job approval ratings; whereas, higher awareness among strong Republicans was associated with stronger job disapproval ratings. The graphs also confirmed the expectation that the strongest job approval ratings were associated among strong Democrats, with high levels of political awareness, who expressed strong disapproval at the media's handling of the Lewinsky affair. In fact, the most notable finding is depicted in the slope differential between highly aware respondents in the disapproving versus approving Lewinsky coverage graphs. Compare the steepness of the respective slopes. Disapproval of the Lewinsky coverage appeared to help reinforce the impact of partisanship on one's job approval ratings. That is, stronger job approval ratings were associated with highly aware strong Democrats who disapproved of the media's coverage of Lewinsky affair as compared to highly aware strong Democrats expressing approval of the media coverage. Likewise, highly aware disapproving Republicans were associated with stronger Clinton job disapproval as compared to highly aware Republicans that expressed approval of the Lewinsky media coverage. Finally, Independents expressing disapproval of the Lewinsky affair coverage were generally more approving of Clinton's job performance compared to Independents expressing positive media evaluations. Contrary to expectations, though, less aware Independents who expressed disapproval of the Lewinsky media coverage were more

Figure 5.1: Estimated Clinton Job Approval Ratings for low versus high political awareness respondents who disapproved of the Lewinsky News Coverage (moving from strong Republican to strong Democratic identifiers)

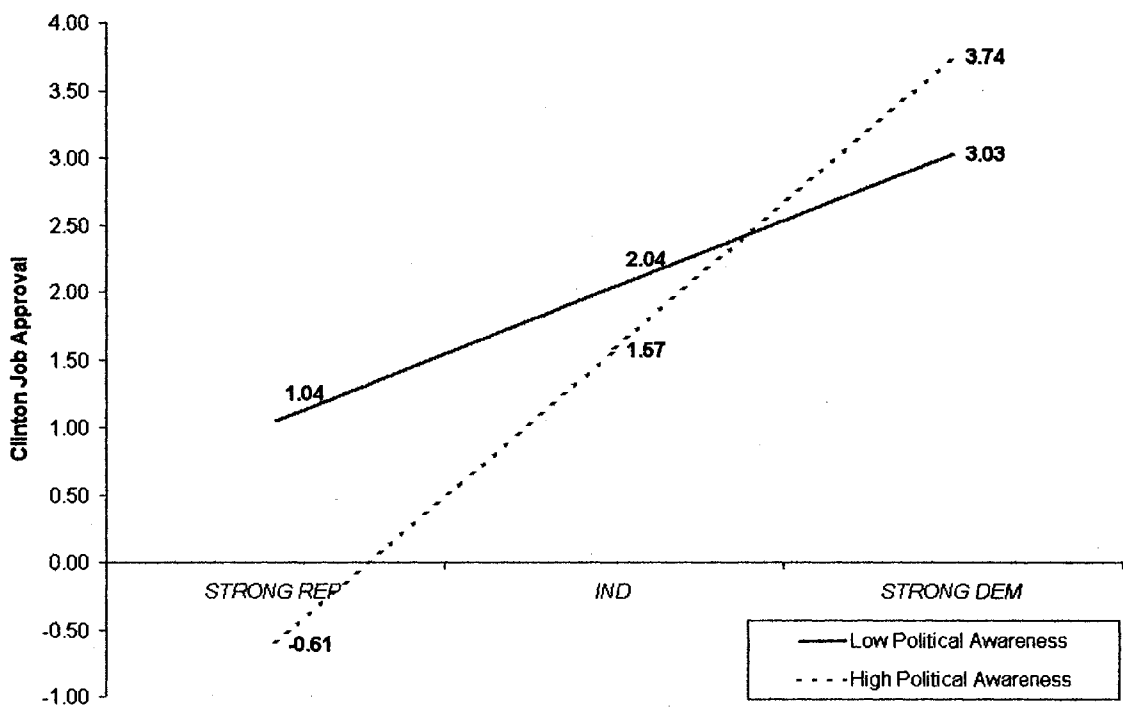
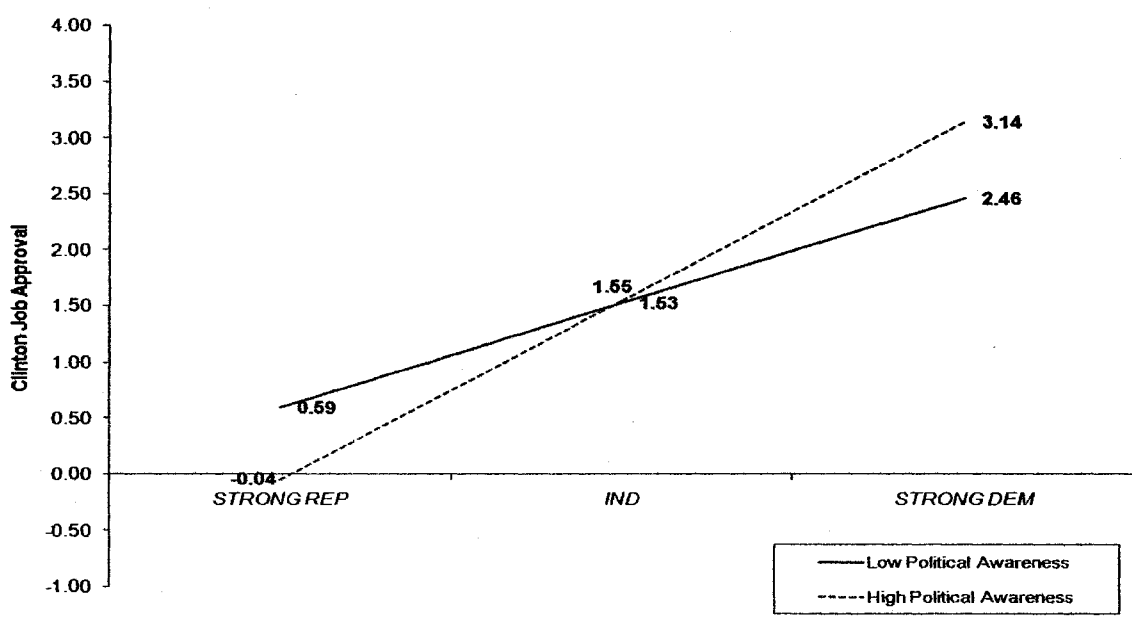


Figure 5.2: Estimated Clinton Job Approval Ratings for low versus high political awareness respondents who approved of the Lewinsky News Coverage (moving from strong Republican to strong Democratic identifiers)



likely to approve of Clinton's job performance relative to their highly aware Independent counterparts.

It is observed, then, that higher political awareness, partisanship, and one's perception of the news media's handling of the Lewinsky coverage appeared to moderate one's evaluation of Clinton's job performance at this time. Highly aware partisan Democrats and Republicans were more likely to approve or disapprove of Clinton's job performance as compared to less aware respondents; however, the impact of partisanship and political awareness on one's evaluation of Clinton's job approval was a function of one's assessment of the Lewinsky affair media coverage.

Finally, what about the impact of the economy on one's evaluation of Clinton's job performance? It was observed that retrospective national economic evaluations had a large and highly statistically significant effect predicting one's evaluation of President Clinton's job performance. For a unit increase in one's assessment of the state of the national economy over the past year (i.e., from *much worse* to *much better*), the log of the odds for approving Clinton's job performance rating rose by 1.890*** (se = .335, $p \leq .01$; one-tailed test). This result is consistent with theories by scholars such as Phillips (1999) that the American public's desire to sustain the strong national economy was a strong motivation to "rally around" Clinton, in an effort to stave off any negative effects to the economy. To borrow a phrase from former Clinton political adviser, James Carville, it appears that "the economy, stupid" did play a significant role in shaping one's job approval ratings of Clinton during this period of time. Yet, one's assessment of the Lewinsky media coverage, one's partisan predisposition, and one's level of political

awareness played a key role as well in shaping one's evaluation of Clinton's job performance alongside economic considerations.

Summary

This chapter provided a third in a series of studies that set out to test whether one's trust in the news media influences one's political attitudes. Specifically, this chapter set out to examine why President Clinton was able to maintain strong public approval for his job performance in the face of negative media coverage about his affair with Monica Lewinsky. This chapter highlighted work by Shah et al. (2002) that established that the news media organized its reporting of the Lewinsky affair largely around three scandal-related frames: one scandal frame that highlighted Clinton's behaviors and responses to the affair; a second scandal frame depicting the whole event as a conservative-led attack on Clinton to politically injure, and even remove, a popular president from office; and a third scandal frame emphasizing liberal counter-attacks against conservatives' attempts to politically damage Clinton. Research by Jamieson and Cappella (1997) was also highlighted in this chapter. These authors suggested that the public manifests a heightened level of cynicism at the press and political elites when political news coverage is framed to emphasize partisan "games" and "strategies." Accordingly, the net effect of the media's framing of the Lewinsky affair in this way was to increase public cynicism toward conservative and liberal elites for playing partisan politics over the affair, while bolstering support for Clinton's overall job performance.

In line with the main thesis of this dissertation, I hypothesized that one's evaluation of President Clinton's job approval during the Monica Lewinsky affair should be *conditional* on one's assessment of news coverage of the affair, one's partisan

predisposition, and one's political awareness level. The findings were mixed in this regard. Descriptive analyses of ANES survey data clearly indicated that the public disapproved of the media's handling of the Lewinsky coverage. Republicans, Independents, and Democrats alike were all fairly cynical of the media's Lewinsky coverage. At the same time, ANES respondents generally approved of Clinton's overall job performance. Ordinal regression analysis confirmed that Clinton's job approval ratings were comparatively higher among strong Democrats with greater awareness levels who expressed disapproval of the Lewinsky media coverage, as compared to similar respondents at greater awareness levels yet who expressed approval of the media coverage. The strongest Clinton job approval ratings were associated with strong Democrats, possessing high levels of political awareness, who expressed negative evaluations of the Lewinsky coverage.

Strong Republican identifiers, at greater levels of political awareness, who held negative evaluations of the Lewinsky media coverage, were also more likely to provide stronger disapproval of Clinton's job performance as compared to similar respondents who expressed positive Lewinsky media coverage evaluations. The strongest disapproval of Clinton's job performance was related to strong Republican identifiers, exhibiting high political awareness levels, and negative Lewinsky media coverage evaluations.

Finally, Independents expressing negative evaluations of the Lewinsky affair media coverage were generally more approving of Clinton's job performance compared to Independents expressing positive media evaluations. Yet, contrary to expectations less aware Independents who expressed negative media coverage evaluations of the Lewinsky

affair were more likely to approve of Clinton's job performance relative to their highly aware Independent counterparts.

I now transition to the final chapter of this dissertation and consider a normative question concerning the media and public opinion: Is too much trust in the news media a bad prescription for democracy?

Chapter Six

Conclusion:

Is too much Trust in the News Media a Bad Prescription for Democracy?

"Enlightenment is mankind's leaving behind its self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to employ one's own intelligence without being directed by someone else. This immaturity is self-imposed if it results not from a lack of intellect but from a lack of willingness and courage to use it without another's guidance. *Sapere Aude!* 'Have the courage to think for yourself!' – that is the motto of the Enlightenment."

Immanuel Kant,
What is Enlightenment? (1838; 2006)

In a democratic society the news media is assumed to possess specific responsibilities. One responsibility is to provide citizens with fair, accurate, and unbiased information about political issues and actors. Likewise, the press is to serve as a "watchdog" by ensuring that the public is aware of malfeasance among those entrusted with the power to make collective decisions over the body politic. In both roles, citizens are able to apply the information reported to them by the media in order to develop informed opinions and evaluations about political issues and actors. In doing so, the public is able to hold politicians accountable for their actions, make informed choices at the ballot box, and, to a varying degree, directly engage in the policy-making process.

As I have illustrated in this dissertation's methodological chapters, however, the ability of journalists, editors, and news organizations to "frame" and "prime" the news to their audience can have a potentially powerful effect shaping public opinion – sometimes in a manner that may not be in the best interests of the individual citizen or society. The ability of the news media to select what types of information and images are presented in stories versus those that are excluded, the valence or tone of news reports, and the extent

to which specific issues receive greater attention by the press relative to other concerns are all potent forces that can shape one's political opinions and evaluations.

When the media fails to present fair, accurate and unbiased information the public's ability to construct enlightened opinions and evaluations of public policies and elected leaders is severely hampered. The news media's failure to uphold its democratic responsibilities and the potential negative consequences that may result for the public's ability to develop informed opinions was particularly highlighted in chapter four. The poll results reported by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), conducted during the months leading up to the Iraq invasion, illustrated the degree to which the public was misinformed by the media regarding Iraq, al-Qaeda, and the possible connection to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. To restate the findings: one in five Americans believed that Iraq had a direct involvement in 9/11; 13 percent stated they had seen conclusive evidence concerning the Iraq/al-Qaeda 9/11 relationship; 58 percent of those who believed in an Iraq/al-Qaeda connection supported President Bush's decision to invade Iraq even without United Nations support; yet, only 25 percent of those who believed that there was no connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda approved military intervention. A post-Iraq war survey by PIPA in the summer of 2003 established that Americans held three general Iraq misperceptions: the U.S. had found evidence of a link between Iraq and al-Qaeda, the U.S. had found evidence of WMDs in Iraq, and a belief among Americans that world opinion favored military intervention (PIPA data above cited from Krull 2004: 64-65).

My own findings support the evidence from PIPA and other scholars that media misinformation appeared to have a relevant impact on one's support or opposition for

military intervention. In particular, the more one expressed very favorable ratings of the news media, the more supportive one was for military intervention. Most telling was the likelihood of Democratic support versus opposition to the invasion. Whether a Democrat provided stronger support or opposition to the military invasion was dependent to a large degree on whether they trusted the news media. Based on ANES data from the fall 2002, my findings suggested that there was a 70% probability that highly aware Independent-Democratic leaners with low media trust would support military intervention compared to a 79% probability among similar respondents with high media trust. The predicted probability gap among highly aware weak Democrats with low versus high trust was 48% to 78% respectively. The most telling statistical gap, however, appeared among highly aware strong Democrats exhibiting high versus low media trust. There was a 63% probability that highly aware strong Democrats with high media trust would support the use force against Iraq compared to only 26% among highly aware strong Democrats with low media trust. Similar to Democrats, Independents were also more likely to support military intervention if they trusted the news media compared to Independents who expressed mistrust in the press. One reason then why public support for military intervention may have been higher than many pundits and scholars might have expected was that a significant number of Democrats and Independents were likely to support the use of force; particularly, those Democrats and Independents who trusted a dominant uncritical media information flow about the Bush administration's arguments for war.

This leads me to the broader normative question concerning the relationship between the individual citizen, the news media, and public opinion. Unlike those who would simply blame the news media for its inaccuracies, biased reporting, and fairness

concerning their reporting of Iraq specifically, or political topics more generally, I suggest that individual citizens should first look in the mirror. In a democratic society citizens should not passively accept political information provided to them from any source – be it political parties, interest groups, friends, family, or the news media. It is the responsibility of the individual citizen to ensure s/he critically evaluates information when forming political opinions. Without critical assessment of political information, one is more apt to pursue public policies that are contrary to his or her core values and beliefs. Accepting information as gospel truth without careful consideration of the content can lead to misinformed political evaluations.

The results from this dissertation suggest that one's level of political awareness plays a fundamental role shaping one's political opinions and evaluations. Unfortunately, most Americans do not pay significant attention to political news and information. As a recent Pew survey illustrated, more American's were able to identify Beyonce Knowles and Peyton Manning than Nancy Pelosi or Harry Reid (Pew 2007b).⁴⁰ The experiment I conducted in chapter three found student subjects were more likely to correctly identify Barry Bonds and Terry Hatcher rather than the Speaker of the House of Representatives or which party held the majority of seats in the Senate. And even if the issues reported on by the media are so pervasive that the coverage reaches down to the less aware persons in society, typically that information portrays the dominant – not countervailing – perspective on the given issue. As Zaller (1992) points out, highly politically aware persons are a) more likely to be exposed to countervailing political information given their high levels of interest in politics, and b) are able to more effectively process the

⁴⁰ Pew survey data available online at: <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=319>

information that they receive from the media, critically evaluate its content and tone and, in turn, are better able to determine whether political information obtained from the media is consistent with their political values. Building on that line of reasoning, individuals who accept media information at face value without constant and vigil criticism may in turn develop political opinions that do not support their political values and beliefs. Whereas, citizens that are highly politically aware possess the requisite knowledge and skill set to critically examine and question media messages and, in so doing, develop political opinions and evaluations that are informed and consistent with their core values and beliefs.

Thus, I argue that a healthy dose of criticism toward the media serves democracy well. Citizens should expect the fourth estate to uphold its democratic duty to report the news fairly and watch over abuses of political power. However, this is not always the case. In the end, it is up to each and every American citizen to take an active role to ensure that the media upholds its democratic responsibilities. This means that each citizen must uphold his or her own democratic responsibility to be as informed as possible about public policy issues and elected officials activities, and to critically examine the information s/he receives from the press and political elites as part of forming those opinions and evaluations. Otherwise, one may accept political information that may lead one to form opinions and evaluations that are inconsistent with his or her best interests – or that of the body politic.

I conclude with a quote from Adrienne Russell (2005) posted on the weblog, *NetworkedPublics.org*, in which the author debates the relationship between the news media and democratic theory. One facet of that discussion was the role of individual trust

in the news media. Russell posits that too much trust in the news media may actually be unhealthy for democracy. Citing 19th century liberal political theorist John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), the author opines:

“healthy participatory democracy requires engaging difference of all sorts. Even if one is not for a participatory theory of democracy and for a liberal individualist theory of democracy where one is engaging in politics only rarely, through voting in elections (or some crisis that requires collective attention), it can be argued that such a liberal citizen-subject needs to engage differences in perspective and knowledge to know what best serves his/her values/goals and why he or she has those values/goals. For example, in *On Liberty* liberal theorist John Stuart Mill argued that one is not really free in any substantive sense unless one has considered alternatives to one's position/opinion/belief and can make arguments for one's position and against alternatives. Otherwise, one is under the sway of superstition, blind faith, brainwashing, brand or team loyalty, chauvinism/jingoism and all the other collective psychoses. Here, one might say that too much trust in a media form, too much brand loyalty in political parties (to paraphrase G. Washington's farewell address) is bad for democracy.”⁴¹

Let us all follow Mill's and Washington's prescription...

⁴¹ Russell (2005) weblog available online at: http://networkedpublics.org/truth_and_the_new_news

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Appendix

Experimental Instrument

Welcome

Thank you for participating in this research study. Your involvement will include three tasks. First, you will be asked to respond to an initial survey. Then, you will be asked to read a series of news stories on various topics. To conclude, you will be asked to respond to a second survey. Upon completion of the second survey, please remain seated until the investigators indicate that you may exit the classroom.

Proceed to next page



Task One

Please take a few moments and respond to a survey located on the next two pages.

Proceed to next page



Survey 1

We would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your background.

Gender: male female

Age (in years): _____

Education level (total number of years of schooling): _____

Turning now to another question. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Other party
- No preferences
- Don't know

If you consider yourself a Democrat/Republican would you call yourself a strong Democrat/Republican or a not very strong Democrat/Republican?

- Strong
- Not very strong
- Don't Know

If you consider yourself an Independent/Other Party/No Preference, do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

- Closer to Republican
- Closer to Democrat
- Neither
- Don't Know

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely Conservative
- Haven't thought much
- Don't know

Proceed to next page



Now we have a set of questions concerning various public figures. We want to see how much information about them gets out to the public from television, newspapers and the like.

Who is the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives?

Who is the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court?

Who is the Prime Minister of Great Britain?

Who is the President of Russia?

Who is the Prime Minister of Israel?

Who is the Vice President of the United States?

Who is the member of the U.S. House of Representatives that represents the district in which this college/university is located?

Which political party currently holds a majority in the U.S. Senate?

Who is more liberal?(circle) Condoleeza Rice

Hilary Clinton Don't know

What sport does Barry Bonds play?

Terri Hatcher appears in what current ABC television program?

Proceed to next page



Task Two

Take a few moments and read the news articles printed on the following pages.

Please read each news story only once.

Proceed to next page



INSERT NEWS MEDIA SOURCE]**A Chip That Can Move Data at the Speed of Laser Light⁴²**

September 18, 2006 - Researchers plan to announce on Monday that they have created a silicon-based chip that can produce laser beams. The advance will make it possible to use laser light rather than wires to send data between chips, removing the most significant bottleneck in computer design.

As a result, chip makers may be able to put the high-speed data communications industry on the same curve of increased processing speed and diminishing costs -- the phenomenon known as Moore's law -- that has driven the computer industry for the last four decades.

Lasers are already used to transmit high volumes of computer data over longer distances -- for example, between offices, cities and across oceans -- using fiber optic cables. But in computer chips, data moves at great speed over the wires inside, then slows to a snail's pace when it is sent chip-to-chip inside a computer.

With the barrier removed, computer designers will be able to rethink computers, packing chips more densely both in home systems and in giant data centers. Moreover, the laser-silicon chips -- composed of a spider's web of laser light in addition to metal wires -- portend a vastly more powerful and less expensive national computing infrastructure. For a few dollars apiece, such chips could transmit data at 100 times the speed of laser-based communications equipment, called optical transceivers, that typically cost several thousand dollars.

Currently fiber optic networks are used to transmit data to individual neighborhoods in cities where the data is then distributed by slower conventional wire-based communications gear. The laser chips will make it possible to send avalanches of data to and from individual homes at far less cost.

They could also give rise to a new class of supercomputers that could share data internally at speeds not possible today.

The breakthrough was achieved by bonding a layer of light-emitting indium phosphide onto the surface of a standard silicon chip etched with special channels that act as light-wave guides. The resulting sandwich has the potential to create on a computer chip hundreds and possibly thousands of tiny, bright lasers that can be switched on and off billions of times a second.

⁴² Actual source of article: Markoff, J. 2006. *New York Times* (September 18) Section C; Column 2; Business/ Financial Desk; Technology; pg. 1

"This is a field that has just begun exploding in the past 18 months," said Eli Yablonovitch, a physicist at the University of California, Los Angeles, a leading researcher in the field. "There is going to be a lot more optical communications in computing than people have thought."

Although commercial chips with built-in lasers are years away, Luxtera, a company in Carlsbad, Calif., is already selling test chips that incorporate most optical components directly into silicon and then inject laser light from a separate source.

[INSERT NEWS MEDIA SOURCE INTERNET ADDRESS]

INSERT NEWS MEDIA SOURCE!**Dwarf Planet, Cause of Strife, Gains 'the Perfect Name'⁴³**

September 15, 2006 - One dwarf planet received a new name on Thursday from the International Astronomical Union, and another, Pluto, has a new number.

Eris is the new permanent name for the solar body formerly known as Xena, while Pluto's new number reflects its loss of planetary status.

Dr. Michael E. Brown, a professor of planetary astronomy at the California Institute of Technology who discovered the distant ball of ice and rock that he nicknamed Xena and that had been designated 2003 UB313, chose the name Eris, after the goddess of discord and strife in Greek mythology.

"It is absolutely the perfect name," Dr. Brown said, given the continuing discord among astronomers and the public over whether Pluto should have retained its planetary status.

In mythology, Eris ignited discord that led to the Trojan War.

"She causes strife by causing arguments among men, by making them think their opinions are right and everyone else's is wrong," Dr. Brown said. "It really is just perfect."

Pluto, now that it is no longer a planet, has been assigned number 134340 in the catalog of minor planets. In 1999, the Minor Planet Center at the astronomical union proposed assigning Pluto the number 10000 in the same catalog, to give it dual citizenship as both a planet and a member of the Kuiper Belt, a ring of icy debris beyond Neptune. Brian Marsden, director of the center, said the number was meant as special recognition for Pluto, but he withdrew the idea after protests from people who saw it as a demotion.

But the discovery last year of Eris, which is slightly larger than Pluto and had been regarded by some as the solar system's 10th planet, led to the demotion and a minor-planet number after all.

Dr. Brown had nicknamed the object Xena after the title character in the television series "Xena: Warrior Princess" and partly as a nod to Planet X, a massive planet long theorized to exist in the outer solar system. Eris now has the catalog number 136199.

When Dr. Brown later discovered a moon around Xena, he nicknamed it Gabrielle, after Xena's sidekick on the television series. The moon is now officially named Dysnomia, after Eris's daughter, a daemon spirit of lawlessness. That name is also, in part, a nod to

⁴³ Actual source of article: Chang, K. 2006. *New York Times* (September 15) Section A; Column 5; National Desk; pg. 20.

Xena fans. Xena was played by Lucy Lawless.

Eris is actually the second name that Dr. Brown proposed. Immediately after announcing the discovery in July 2005, Dr. Brown submitted to the astronomical union the name Lila, a Hindu concept that says the universe is a playground of the gods.

The name was also for his newborn daughter, Lilah. Dr. Brown raised suspicions that this was his proposed name when he called the Web page about the body "planetlila," but he said that it was only whimsical and that he had accidentally misspelled his daughter's name.

Dr. Brown said his wife persuaded him to look for another name, telling him: "What if we have a second child? You'd have to go find another planet."

[INSERT NEWS MEDIA SOURCE INTERNET ADDRESS]

[INSERT NEWS MEDIA SOURCE]

New U.N. Fund To Streamline Disaster Relief⁴⁴

March 10, 2006 - The United Nations yesterday announced the creation of a \$500 million fund that will be used to respond to disasters sooner, saving lives and lowering the cost of providing relief.

The new pool of money, known as the Central Emergency Response Fund, has already attracted \$256 million in pledges from governments ranging from Britain, which has promised \$70 million, to Kazakhstan and Thailand, which are putting in \$25,000 and \$10,000, respectively. In the future, it will accept donations from corporations and eventually individuals.

Canada has pledged \$17.24 million, the United States \$10 million and on Thursday the Netherlands surprised United Nations officials by doubling its original \$11.9 million pledge.

The money will be made available to United Nations agencies responding to food, medical and other emergency needs following a disaster.

Long sought by aid workers, the new fund is an effort to alleviate the ups and downs of raising money for relief operations. At present, those appeals rely heavily on images of suffering transmitted by the news media. Aid agencies complain that news outlets often fail to pay attention to crises until babies are already dying of starvation, or they cover one disaster like a blanket while ignoring another completely.

"This fund will allow much quicker and more predictable responses," said Peter Walker, director of the Feinstein International Famine Center at Tufts University.

The question looming over the new fund is whether donors will replenish it as it is drawn down. While \$50 million of the fund will be released as loans to be repaid, the remainder will be given as grants.

Stephanie Bunker, a spokeswoman for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said several donor nations had already made multiyear pledges. Jan Egeland, who heads the humanitarian affairs office and campaigned for creation of the new fund, will manage it with a 12-member advisory group.

[INSERT NEWS MEDIA SOURCE INTERNET ADDRESS]

⁴⁴ Actual source of article: Strom, S. 2006. *New York Times* (March 10) Section A; Column 6; Foreign Desk; pg. 8.

Task Three

Please take a few moments to respond to a second survey. Once complete, please close your packet and place your pencil on the desk. This will indicate to the investigators that you have completed the tasks. Please remain seated in your desk until the investigators indicate that you may leave the classroom.

Proceed to next page



45

Survey 2

We would like to begin by asking you a few questions about the news stories you just read.

How interesting did you find the story about the computer chip?

- Very Interesting
- Interesting
- Uninteresting
- Very Uninteresting
- Don't Know

How interesting did you find the story about the dwarf planet and Pluto?

- Very Interesting
- Interesting
- Uninteresting
- Very Uninteresting
- Don't Know

How interesting did you find the story about the United Nations? (United Nations question appeared only to treatment group)

- Very Interesting
- Interesting
- Uninteresting
- Very Uninteresting
- Don't Know

How would you describe the overall tone of each story?

(United Nations question appeared only to treatment group)

Computer Chip:

- positive
- negative
- neutral

Dwarf Planet/Pluto:

- positive
- negative
- neutral

United Nations:

- positive
- negative
- neutral

Proceed to next page



45 The questions asked in the pre and post-experimental surveys, excluding the media trust questions, were modeled after questions appearing in the American National Election Studies as well as Pew Research Center surveys. The media trust questions were modeled after Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) News Media Credibility Scale.

Turning now to another topic, we would like to ask you some questions about America's place in the world. Please tell us whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or don't know with each of the following statements:

Since the U.S. is the most powerful nation in the world, we should go our own way in international matters, not worrying too much about whether other countries agree with us or not.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

The United States government should increase funding for the United Nations.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

The United States should put into effect a national missile defense system.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

The United States should cooperate fully with the United Nations.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

The United States government should increase economic aid to foreign countries.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

We would now like your views of some people and organizations. As I read from a list, please tell us which category best describes your overall opinion of who or what we name. Would you describe your opinion of each person or organization as very favorable, favorable, unfavorable, very unfavorable, or don't know?

The United States Congress

Very Favorable Favorable Unfavorable Very unfavorable Don't Know

Laura Bush


Very Favorable Favorable Unfavorable Very unfavorable Don't Know

The United Nations

Very Favorable Favorable Unfavorable Very unfavorable Don't Know

The United States Supreme Court

Very Favorable Favorable Unfavorable Very unfavorable Don't Know

Proceed to next page 

We would now like your opinion of some domestic programs and proposals being discussed in this country today. Please tell us whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or don't know with each of the following statements:

The federal government should provide incentives to oil companies to increase domestic oil exploration.

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

The federal government should provide universal health insurance for all citizens, even if that would mean raising taxes.

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

The federal government should allow oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

The federal government should provide funding for vouchers to help low and middle income parents send their children to private and parochial schools.

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

The federal government should reduce environmental regulations in order to increase oil production in the United States.

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

We would now like to ask you a question about President George W. Bush. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?

- Strongly approve Approve Disapprove Strongly Disapprove Don't Know

To conclude, we would like to ask you some questions about your news consumption habits, the news media in general, and some specific news organizations.

How many days in the past week did you watch news programming on CNN?

How many days in the past week did you watch news programming on the Fox News Channel?

How many days in the past week did you read news from the *New York Times*?

Proceed to next page



How many days in the past week did you read news from the *Wall Street Journal*?

Thinking about the news media in general - that is, national news, the daily newspaper you are most familiar with, and news magazines - please indicate whether you think they:

a) Are fair

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

b) Tell the whole story

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

c) Are accurate

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

d) Can be trusted

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

Thinking about CNN, please indicate whether you think they:

a) Are fair

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

b) Tell the whole story

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

c) Are accurate

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

d) Can be trusted

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

Proceed to next page



Thinking about the *Wall Street Journal*, please indicate whether you think they:

a) Are fair

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

b) Tell the whole story

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

c) Are accurate

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

d) Can be trusted

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

Thinking about the Fox News Channel, please indicate whether you think they:

a) Are fair

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

b) Tell the whole story

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

c) Are accurate

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

d) Can be trusted

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

Thinking about the *New York Times*, please indicate whether you think they:

a) Are fair

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

b) Tell the whole story

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

c) Are accurate

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

d) Can be trusted

Just about always Most of the time Only some of the time None of the time

Proceed to next page 

That's It!!!

Thank you. This concludes your participation in the study. Please close your packet and place your pencil on the desk. This will indicate to the investigators that you have completed the tasks. Please remain seated in your desk until the investigators indicate that you may leave the classroom.

Close packet and place pencils on desk



CURRICULUM VITAE

Jason M. Badura

Place of Birth: Fort Atkinson, WI

Education

Undergraduate Institution

Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN

Dates Attended: September 1990 – May 1994

BA Degree, Political Science, May 1994, *cum laude*

Graduate Institutions

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Dates Attended: September 2000 – present

MA Degree, May 2003

ABD, December 2005

Major areas: American Politics and International Relations

Dissertation Title: A Trusted Source: Does One's Level of Trust in the News Media Influence One's Political Attitudes?

Teaching Experience

Adjunct Instructor

Carroll College, Fall 2003 and Summer 2004

Course: Introduction to American Politics

Beloit College, Fall 2004 & Spring 2005

Courses: Introduction to Political Science

Introduction to International Relations

Visiting Assistant Professor

Carroll College, Fall 2005 - Present

Courses: Introduction to American Politics

Contemporary Global Politics (Introduction to International Relations)

Politics of the World's Nations (Introduction to Comparative Politics)

Topics in Politics: Interest Groups

Topics in Politics: Public Opinion, Media, Elections & Voting Behavior

Topics in Politics: The Future of Global Politics

Scholarly Papers

"Determinants of Militarized Interstate Disputes: An Integrated Theory and Empirical Test." 2006. (Co-authored, Dr. Uk Heo). Paper presented by Dr. Heo at the 2006 International Studies Association Conference in San Diego, CA.

Faculty Development Seminars

A two-week summer faculty development seminar in Berlin, Germany and Riga, Latvia during 2007 that was sponsored by the Studienforum-Berlin organization. The seminar discussed the future role of a united Germany within the European Union and a small EU country's perspective on Germany's EU role. I received one of two junior faculty scholarships to offset seminar expenses.

Academic Honor Society Membership

Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society: Inducted Spring 2005

Pi Sigma Alpha Political Science National Honor Society: Inducted April 2006

Major Professor

 
Date