Bumbling, Bluffing, and Bald-Faced Lies:

Mis-Leading and Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations

by

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William A. Boettcher III

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
Political Science in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2011
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

In a democratic society, does the electorate approve of truth and disapprove of deception, do opinion patterns exclusively mimic partisan elite views, or do opinion patterns react exclusively to successful or failed outcomes? Do citizens hold leaders accountable for the perceived truthfulness of foreign policy claims or do they only evaluate whether or not the policies were successful? The existing literature on public opinion and foreign policy calls the accountability role for the public “audience costs,” and specifies that concerns about audience costs constrain leaders. However, the literature is not clear on what role normative issues may play in generating audience costs. This gap in the literature is notable because so much of the debate surrounding significant policy issues, especially war-making and military action, is couched in retrospective, normative, moralizing language. These debates make no sense if the pragmatic, forward-looking dimensions of audience costs – reliability and success – are all that exist. Through a survey experiment and four historical case studies developed with primary and secondary historical sources, news articles, and polling data, I find that there is a complex dynamic at work between the public’s desire for successful outcomes and the high value placed upon truth-telling and transparency within a democracy. Studying justifications for military action and war, I find that the public will be motivated to punish leaders perceived as deceptive, but that imposition of audience costs will be moderated by factors including partisanship, degree of elite unity, and the leader’s damage control strategy in response to disapproval.
Dedication

For my parents and Hannah: you believed in me even when I did not.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The state never has any use for truth as such,

*but only for truth which is useful to it,*

*more precisely for anything whatever useful to it*

whether it be truth, half-truth, or error.

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Teacher* (1874)

*If falsehood, like truth, had but one face, we would be more on equal terms. For we would consider the contrary of what the liar said to be certain. But the opposite of truth has a hundred thousand faces and an infinite field.*

- Michel de Montaigne

*How praiseworthy it is for a prince to keep his faith, and to live with honesty and not by astuteness, everyone understands. Nonetheless one sees by experience in our times that the princes who have done great things are those who have taken little account of faith and have known how to get around men’s brains with their astuteness; and in the end they have overcome those who have founded themselves on loyalty. [...] So let a prince win and maintain his state: the means will always be judged honorable, and will be praised by everyone. For the vulgar are taken in by the appearance and the outcome of the thing, and in the world there is no one but the vulgar.*

- Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1532)
Nietzsche and Machiavelli’s pessimistic views of the incommensurability of truth-telling and effective statecraft stand in stark contrast with the democratic ideal that privileges transparency of process and of norms, claiming that leaders can and must be accountable to their electorates in order for society to function properly.¹

Do citizens hold leaders accountable for the perceived truthfulness of foreign policy claims or do they only evaluate whether or not the policies were successful? The existing literature on public opinion and foreign policy calls the accountability role for the public “audience costs,” and specifies that concerns about audience costs constrain leaders. However, the literature is not clear on what role normative issues may play in generating audience costs. This gap in the literature is notable because so much of the debate surrounding significant policy issues, especially war-making and military action, is couched in retrospective, normative, moralizing language. These debates make no sense if the pragmatic, forward-looking dimensions of audience costs – reliability and success – are all that exist. Through a survey experiment and four historical case studies developed with primary and secondary historical sources, news articles, and polling data, I find that there is a complex dynamic at work between the public’s desire for successful outcomes and the high value placed upon truth-telling and transparency within a democracy. Studying justifications for military action and war, I find that the public will be motivated to punish

leaders perceived as deceptive, but that imposition of audience costs will be moderated by factors including partisanship, degree of elite unity, and the leader’s damage control strategy in response to disapproval.

**Plan of this Book**

**Theory**

In the theory chapter, I address the lacuna in the existing literature on public opinion and audience costs, arguing for the place of a normative dimension by which the public will judge leaders on the basis of the truth-quality of their statements, in addition to the pragmatic dimensions of consistency and outcome. To construct a broad-ranging theory of normative audience costs, I explore the connection between democratic society and the practical value of truth-telling and place it in the context of the moral philosophy and social psychology literature on truth-telling, deception, and trust. From these diverse strands of scholarship, I develop typologies of deception and public response and propose that the public will respond negatively to perceived deception from leaders. Although the basic theory is applicable across many policy domains, in this book I use test cases of justifications for military action by United States presidents (sometimes referred to as “war justifications,” because the historical cases selected are commonly called “wars,” even absent official Congressional declaration).

**Experiments**

In the “Voters’ Responses to Leaders’ War Justifications” experiment, I conducted a survey-based experiment to dig deeper into the microfoundations of public opinion
formation and responses to perceived deception in the president’s justifications for military action. I find that regardless of outcome, the presence of deception makes respondents significantly less likely to approve of the military actions ordered by the president; that respondents are most likely to approve of military actions ordered by the president when the president’s justifications are truthful and the mission has a successful outcome; and that across all outcome conditions, negative cues from an elite co-partisan have no identifiable impact on a respondent’s likelihood of approving of the president’s military actions. This study’s findings expand the theoretical literature by identifying the role deception or truthfulness plays in how the public evaluates justifications for military action, as well as indicating whether or not the public’s disapproval will translate into active willingness to punish the president if deception is perceived. This study reveals previously undisclosed mechanisms of opinion formation and audience costs, a finding with practical implications for policymakers.

**Vietnam**

Studying the Vietnam War beginning with the Gulf of Tonkin Incident and extending through Richard Nixon’s presidency, I find that public perceptions of deception and concomitant disapproval grew over time, even aside from the increasing casualty rate and diminishing expectation for success. As the public grew doubtful that the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was an adequate justification for expanding US commitments in Vietnam, disapproval of President Johnson’s handling of the war increased, which compounded over time as they began to doubt his honesty in explaining the rationales for continued involvement. Ultimately, public disapproval made a reelection bid untenable for Johnson.
When President Nixon took office, initial perceptions of him as more honest than President Johnson garnered him more support, but this too diminished as the public began to doubt they were being told the truth about the need for continued involvement in Vietnam. The growing perception of failure contributed to public disapproval as well until US involvement could no longer be sustained.

**Grenada**

In 1983 President Reagan sent US forces to Grenada to rescue American medical students and overturn the radical revolutionary government after the island's Caribbean neighbors requested US assistance out of fears regarding the new regime. The president was accused of hypocrisy and concealment by some members of Congress and the news media, but although some believed that Regan had been deceptive, and participated in protests in response, the majority of the public believed the president’s justifications for the intervention and did not perceive deception. This belief in the president’s truthfulness in justifying the mission contributed to strong initial support, which later increased when the goals of the mission were successfully achieved.

**The Persian Gulf War**

The US involvement in the Persian Gulf War is selected as a case in which the president's justifications were generally perceived to be truthful and which was a military success. Although some protesters doubted that the president was seeking to expel Iraq from Kuwait out of concern for that country's independence, and believed instead that US interests in acquiring better control of oil were at stake, the majority of the public believed
the president’s justifications, supported the war initially, and approved of its successful completion.

**Somalia**

The case of Somalia is selected as a case in which the presidents’ justifications for involvement were perceived as truthful, leading to high initial support. In this chapter, I argue that despite the perceived success of the humanitarian objectives of Operation Restore Hope, the subsequent mission shift and apparent inability to meet the new goals, combined with President Clinton’s inability to make a compelling case after the Battle of Mogadishu for staying in Somalia, the public ultimately perceived the mission as a failure and so disapproved and withdrew their support.

**Conclusion**

Overall, this dissertation makes the case that there is evidence to support a space for a normative dimension to audience costs. Public disapproval is triggered by perceived deception, and the public prefers for the president to give honest justifications for military action. The consequences for presidents who seek to use deception are somewhat ambiguous in terms of when and to what extent public disapproval caused by perceived deception will translate into other actions, including voting against the president’s party in the next election or participating in a protest. The evidence from the cases and experiment suggests that there is a wide range of potential willingness to take action, but that it is difficult to predict in a given circumstance how it will look. Certainly, presidents who care about their public approval levels should be warned by the public’s distaste for deception.
Chapter 2: Dissecting Deception: A Theory of Normative Audience Costs

Introduction and Puzzle

In a democratic society, does the public seek transparency in the foreign policy-making process, or does it only seek successful outcomes? Do electorates hold leaders accountable for the perceived truthfulness of foreign policy claims or do they only evaluate whether the policies were successful? The existing literature on public opinion and foreign policy calls the accountability role for the public “audience costs,” and specifies that concerns about audience costs constrain leaders. But the literature is not clear on what sorts of foreign policy actions incur the most audience costs and in particular whether publics are prone to hold leaders accountable for statements that fall short of the truth. This gap in the literature is notable because so much of the debate surrounding significant policy issues is couched in retrospective, normative, moralizing language. These debates make no sense if the pragmatic, forward-looking dimensions of audience costs – reliability and success – are all that exist. Rather, as I will show through a set of experiments and historical case studies, there is a complex dynamic at work between the public’s desire for successful outcomes and the high value placed upon truth-telling and transparency within a democracy. Studying cases of justifications for military action, I argue that the public will be motivated to punish leaders perceived as deceptive, but that the severity of audience costs imposed will be affected by factors including partisanship, degree of elite unity, and the leader’s response to threatened punishments.

The two major strands of the audience costs literature in international relations seem to elide the possibility for a purely normative basis for audience costs. One of these
branches focuses on consistency and reliability\textsuperscript{1}, while the other deals with successful outcomes.\textsuperscript{2} Both of these approaches are forward-looking and pragmatic, not normative. That is, the questions of interest in this literature are located in the future: “Will an actor continue to do the things it claims it will do?” “Will the outcome of this action be success or failure?” In contrast, I will make the case that there is also a retrospective, normative aspect to audience costs, such that the public does not want their leaders to deceive them because of the intrinsic value of truth-telling in a democratic polity.\textsuperscript{3}

This approach offers a way to explain why a significant amount of the debate that surrounds certain events (Iran-Contra, the Lewinsky scandal, the recent Iraq War, and others) focuses on normative concerns that should not be expected to matter from a purely pragmatic perspective. For example, those protesting in opposition to the 2003 Iraq War, chanting “Bush lied, people died,” were not simply claiming that the U.S. was failing to achieve its goals in Iraq or that the President had not been consistent in his position and actions regarding Iraq. They were asserting a deliberate, calculated deception by the President. If normative concerns do not matter, this debate frame makes no sense. If success or consistency is all that matters, then we should expect public approval as long as leaders


\textsuperscript{3} Note that I am not assuming a monolithic public, but rather will discuss predicted variation within the public in the theory development section further below.
are able to follow through on their stated courses of action. That is, we should not see as much rigorous debate or questions of approval over how these goals are justified. The fact that we have these debates at all indicates that the current literature does not fully explain the dynamic nature of audience costs. To the extent that the public cares about the reasons behind the goals, we should encounter normative, not pragmatic concerns, which is where the present study will extend the literature.

**Literature Review and Discussion**

Within the consistency/reliability branch of the literature, Sartori⁴ argues that diplomacy works even if domestic audience costs are absent because states with reputations for bluffing can communicate less effectively. Additionally, she expects them to be less likely to achieve their goals because other states will not accept their statements as honest. Therefore, state leaders do not want to be caught bluffing by their international counterparts; rather, they want a reputation for honesty. Guisinger and Smith⁵ amend and extend Sartori’s argument about states’ vulnerability to revelations of dishonest claims. The authors emphasize the capacity of the domestic public to remove dishonest leaders as the key to improving a state’s international reputation. In fact, they argue, domestic audiences are very important because they want to hold their leaders accountable because they do not want their state to suffer the consequences of an international reputation for dishonesty.

---

Further theorizing both international and domestic audiences’ push for consistency, Michael Tomz\(^6\) argues that a state’s reputation is founded on consistency. Any deviation from “typical” behavior causes either a positive or negative reputational shift during the “reputation-building” period, but after a long enough time, reputations become sufficiently established to permit deviant behavior without reputational effects. This line of argument connects to the research on leader image-building found in the American politics side of the political psychology literature. Here, studies have shown that as long as a leader’s image is well established, a scandal will not significantly alter overall public perceptions of the leader\(^7\). However, if normative concerns also matter, then a past reputation for consistency should not continuously compensate for future deviation. Additionally, in his experimental work on domestic audience costs, Tomz finds that domestic audiences disapprove of leaders who make threats or international commitments and then do not follow through\(^8\). Thus, leaders who frequently engage in bluffing are not expected to meet with approval.

On the side of successful outcomes, Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman\(^9\) find that democracies only escalate and enter conflicts they think they can win, and they are usually right in their assessments (they achieve success). Fearon’s work\(^10\) shows that democracies effectively claim domestic audience costs as coercive bargaining leverage and gain their preferred outcomes (they achieve success). The mitigating effects of success on other

---


\(^9\) Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman (1992), *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven, Yale University Press).

factors that might be expected to inspire negative responses from the public is documented in Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler’s recent study\textsuperscript{11}, where they find that the public is less casualty-sensitive when they strongly believe in the likelihood of success. Johnson and Tierney’s work\textsuperscript{12} builds on this literature by confirming that success matters, but that public and elite perceptions of success do not necessarily match material outcomes.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, bumbling leaders should also incur the disapproval of their publics.\textsuperscript{14}

In this project, I seek to develop our understanding of audience costs one step further by defining a normative basis for public opinion formation that values truth-telling as a good in itself as well as for instrumental reasons. Affirming the prior work done in the literature on the importance of success and consistency, I add a discussion of public opinion formation that responds to perception of a leader’s truthfulness or deception. This does not discount the importance of pragmatic factors in public opinion formation or in the exercise of audience costs, but it demonstrates a further dimension by which to explain behavior.

---


\textsuperscript{12} Dominic D.P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney (2006), \textit{Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics} (Cambridge, Harvard University Press).


\textsuperscript{14} See also James Meernik and Michael Ault (2001), “Public Opinion and Support for US Presidents’ Foreign Policies,” \textit{American Politics Research} 29(4): 352-373, who find that the public cares highly about the president’s success in the areas of peace and security.
Audience Costs and Transparency

It is often argued that audience costs are stronger for democratic leaders because the transparent communication and electoral structure of democracies should allow a dissatisfied public to remove them. As such, democratic leaders are usually expected to have an advantage in international bargaining situations because they risk audience costs if they do not hold fast to their intended course of action. (That is, these leaders can better demonstrate resolve because they anticipate costs if the public sees they have failed to follow through on their commitments.) Within this literature, it is expected that audiences will want to punish decision-makers both for inconsistency and for non-preferred outcomes (failure). This suggests not only that it is transparency that aids democratic leaders in pursuing their international policy goals, but also that the democratic public should care quite a lot about transparency, since it provides the means by which they can monitor their leaders and hold them accountable.15

However as Baum and Potter argue, leaders may have a certain amount of leeway with the truth before the public is likely to notice or care enough to punish them.16 They call this phenomenon the “elasticity of reality”; that is, “the range within which events can be spun, or framed, without inducing a significant backlash from the public” (56). When this limit is exceeded, however, the authors expect that the public will demand more


information from the media (43), and that “[o]ver time, as events unfold and the public

gathers more information, the degree of elasticity diminishes, opening a space for

alternative frames to influence public opinion” (57). It is only in this context, then, that we

should expect to see challenges to the leaders' positions gaining ground among the public.
The catch is that foreign policy issues in particular are difficult for the public to observe, so

it is likely that the public's views will be restricted to the elite-provided frames unless the

“elasticity of reality” is violated.

While Baum and Potter provide one possible reason for domestic audiences not to
care about leaders' honesty (or to perceive deception at low rates), there are a few other
possible reasons why we might not expect to see high salience attributed to leaders'
truthfulness. The first point goes back to the question of public awareness and
understanding of complex political issues, especially those in the foreign policy domain.
That is, it may be that the domestic public is overwhelmed by the barrage of information it
encounters in the Information Age.17 This information overload could produce either apathy
or a reversion to exclusively partisan loyalties, reflexively discounting all information that
runs contrary to their preconceptions (that is, motivated bias, which is consistent with the
“predisposition factor,” discussed below).18 In the latter case, we should expect that new


Revealing Preferences,” American Journal of Political Science 36(3): 579-616, among others. Note, however, that
(UC Los Angeles: Center for Research in Society and Politics; http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7200v97q),
argues that the massive increase in the information easily available to and accessible by the public lowers the
“cognitive cost” of seeking out that information for themselves, which has led to increased attentiveness to
foreign policy crises in recent years. Because individuals still filter the information they take in, they are not
expected to suffer from information overload.

18 This relates to the phenomenon of “selective exposure” – see Dieter Frey (1986), “Recent Research on
Selective Exposure to Information,” in Berkowitz ed., Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, Vol. 19
(Orlando, Academic Press): pp.41–81, among others. See also James H. Kuklinski and Paul J. Quirk (2000),
information would not serve as a trigger and we should not see any change in public opinion/perceptions (except perhaps reinforcement). Bowler and Karp\(^\text{19}\) find that public disapproval of government institutions is correlated with the incidence of scandal in their particular district, that it does not seem to be correlated with media exposure, and that those with less awareness of or involvement in the political process have more negative attitudes towards government institutions.

Related to this last point, Cohen\(^\text{20}\) finds that the news media, despite its increasing pervasiveness in daily life in the U.S., is becoming less effective in impacting public opinion vis à vis the president. He points to the overall decline in ‘public trust’ in various societal institutions as one possible reason for this weakened position. This link to levels of public trust is also noted by Hetherington and Globetti\(^\text{21}\), who also suggest that reduced public trust and trust in government over time causes decreased presidential approval ratings. They find in their study that government trust levels in a prior year appear to affect presidential approval levels in the subsequent year, but not vice versa.

However, Cohen also points out that public trust in the news media has dropped at a steeper rate than for other institutions. One causal mechanism he identifies is the increased overall negative reporting on the president, which he links to the advent of "new media" and resulting competition for viewers or readership faced by news outlets. Whereas

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in the past the media could have been considered more “deferential” to the presidency, so when negative perspectives were reported they were salient to the public, from the early 1980s onward the press became more harsh, antagonistic, and critical in their approach to the president. This has reduced the impact of their reporting – if all news is critical, the public will find it harder to determine when they should be critical enough to exact punishment – but also it has caused the public to perceive the news media as operating more from a negative agenda than from an interest in fact-finding.

A second possibility is that people are exclusively and overwhelmingly concerned with the material outcomes that have direct and meaningful repercussions for their personal lives. This is an extreme version of my “effectiveness factor” (discussed below), and is found in the literature examining economic voting behavior (e.g. voters elect the opposition party in reaction to a painful economic downturn). This would mean that regardless of the perceived truth content of leader's justifications, if the outcomes of the actions were painful for the public, they would be expected to punish on that basis alone. This would suggest the inverse of my prediction below that a public that values truth should be willing to punish even successful leaders for misleading. In this context, we should see leaders punished for failure regardless of whether the outcome resulted from a sincere

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23 See, for example, Han Dorussen and Michaeell Taylor (2002), Economic Voting (New York, Routledge) p.2: “Voters may fail to recognize the relevant policy outcomes or to accurately attribute policy-making responsibility for them. Such failures undermine the electoral incentives that governments have to pursue the public’s policy goals. Poorly informed voters might reward or punish incumbent governments at the polls based on erroneous assessment of policy outcomes. They may also identify the policy outcomes correctly but misperceive who is responsible for them. Consequently, they might punish or reward the “wrong” politicians. In the case of complete failure, the electoral process might make politicians attentive to swings in public opinion but would not shape government policy making. Consequently, in the case of complete policy ignorance, finding a statistical relationship between economic perceptions (emotions) and voting behavior would not constitute evidence of policy representation.” See also: Christopher J. Anderson (2000), “Economic voting and political context: a comparative perspective,” Electoral Studies 19:151–170
mistake or deliberate deception. Consistent with this line of reasoning, we might also expect that favorable outcomes would incur the approval of the public, regardless of leaders’ truthfulness, as expressed in the “competence factor” and “effectiveness factor” discussed below.

It is here in the literature that John Mearsheimer\textsuperscript{24} situates his recent work. He asserts that state leaders are more likely to use deception on their own citizens than in dealings with leaders of other countries, but that publics will be unlikely to punish leaders even when lies are perceived – “because nothing succeeds like success in international politics.”\textsuperscript{25} While he styles his “theory-building” work as aimed only at examining outright lies (as opposed to other forms of deception), his typology consists in differentiating among lies based on their motivations and intended purposes. Nonetheless, he calls for development of testable hypotheses and empirical work on these matters. Therefore, my dissertation project could be viewed as complementary to Mearsheimer’s endeavor, as it offers a more nuanced continuum of types of deception, while leveraging historical and experimental data to directly respond to Mearsheimer’s claim that success covers a multitude of sins.

\section*{War and Reasons}

The question of types of war justifications that may be used in itself contributes to this preceding question. These reasons can fall within the broad categories of pragmatic

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{24} John J. Mearsheimer (2011) \textit{Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics} (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
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\end{footnotesize}
(security-oriented) and normative (morality-oriented). Regarding the latter category, Morgenthau argues that it is impossible to tell if morality-based justifications are the genuine motivations for war for two reasons. First, he points out that defending human rights, for example, is not the “prime business of a state,” so by definition foreign policy cannot always pursue this end. Second, because of the widely propagated theories of international morality as well as the moral reasoning of the domestic public, leaders may feel obligated to frame their justificatory rhetoric in moral terms regardless of their actual reasons. Thus, he asserts that we cannot accept rhetoric at face value because politicians may well be using justifications for their actions that do not express their genuine motives. However, while accepting the reality of mixed motives, we may still ask whether or not a given justification is false in a particular case.

Additionally, some authors hold that the content of the justifications themselves matters very much in international politics, because it sets precedent for what sorts of reasons become widely acceptable. In this vein, Nicholas Wheeler argues:

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28 Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, Sixth Edition. Alfred A. Knopf, New York: 1985:248 - “[S]ince statesmen and diplomats are wont to justify their actions and objectives in moral terms, regardless of their actual motives, it would be equally erroneous to take those protestations of selfless and peaceful intentions, of humanitarian purposes, and international ideals at their face value. It is pertinent to ask whether they are mere ideologies concealing the true motives of action or whether they express a genuine concern for the compliance of international policies with ethical standards.” See also 1985:12 and 277.
It is a categorical error to posit a separation between words and deeds when thinking about how the social world hangs together; the former constitute the latter by establishing the boundaries of what is possible. This book has shown that, in the society of states, words matter. The legitimating reasons employed by governments are crucial because they enable and constrain actions.

If war justifications have such a significant role, then it follows that false justifications would undermine the international order being created because they would create precedent that would have no genuine foundation. Consequently, one criticism that arises is that a wide range of actions may be ‘justified’ by cleverly stated reasons even if the action is not truly justifiable. In response to this critique, Jean Elshtain argues30, “To those who claim that this opens up just war to self-serving subjectivism, with just war becoming a cover for whatever a state has decided to do, it must be stressed that just war itself provides the grounds on which to determine whether or not such action meets ad bellum norms.” That is, the facts on the ground and the actions of the administration must be evaluated in light of the stated justifications and their underlying reasons in order to establish both the justness of their actions and the truthfulness of their justifications.

Alternatively, Richard N. Haass31 points out, “Most thoughtful observers of U.S. foreign policy have long since concluded that the ‘national interest’ concept unfortunately lends itself more readily to being used by our leaders as political rhetoric for justifying their decisions and gaining support rather than as an exact, well-defined criterion that enables them to determine what actions and decisions to take.” The appeal to national interest, or

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some set of 'hard' security interests (as opposed to 'soft' interests, including humanitarian issues), may function as a convincing reason to persuade a hesitant public. Haass comments, “Interventions are more sustainable if leaders can point to clear and important national (as opposed to universal humanitarian) interests” (72).

Thus we see that both morality-based and security-based justifications may be persuasive to the public for various reasons, and that both may be vulnerable to use more as rhetorical devices than actual presentations of leaders' true motives. If deception is perceived and the public has an incentive to punish, the leader will try to avoid this punishment through a damage control strategy. If a leader's damage control strategy is to buttress or replace the original justification with additional reasons, the public response is likely to be tempered by the content of the justification. As discussed above, different types of justifications initially may be more or less appealing to the public for various reasons. This question of salient reasons once again is raised later, in predicting public response to leaders' damage control strategies. Alternatively, it is possible that

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32 See also Gregory M. Herek, Irving L. Janis, and Paul Huth (1987), "Decision Making During International Crises: Is Quality of Process Related to Outcome?" Journal of Conflict Resolution 31(2): 203-226: "Other pseudodecisions differ from the purely ceremonial ones in that they may be partially implemented. Included in this category are policy decisions designed for hidden public relations purposes rather than the objectives that are publicly proclaimed. There is no real intention among the dominant policymakers to implement the new policy except in a token manner that will make the organization look good in the eyes of those pressure groups and constituencies that want the policy change. In such instances, the quality of the decision-making process would be expected to affect the hidden objective but not the alleged objectives. There would be the same expectation whenever policymakers are deceitful about the purposes of any policy decision that may be fully implemented – as when a government sends military forces to a client state allegedly to protect its citizens, but actually with the intention of bringing about political or military changes. Further research is needed to define the limiting parameters of the positive relationship between process and outcome."
justice or morality-based rhetoric is simply irrelevant in eliciting either public disapproval or approbation, since such rhetoric seems to be quite common. David Welch argues,

"[J]ustifications are always addressed to a particular audience for a particular reason. [...] An appeal to the demands of justice will always take place within the framework of a society that accepts the principles appealed to as legitimate (or that can be persuaded to do so, by appeal to something antecedently held), for the purpose, on the one hand, of securing a particular right or enforcing a particular obligation, and, on the other, of affirming and perpetuating the governing conception of justice itself so that it can continue to serve the function of peaceful social regulation."

Thus, since justice is an essential characteristic of the daily working of a democratic society, we might say that rhetoric focusing on justice must be a given in any public discourse or justification offered by leaders (and therefore should not be expected to have any added value or additional weight). However, to say that there is an expectation of justice or moral-oriented rhetoric is to imply that there is an intrinsic significance to such discourse, and that the public expects it because it matters to them.

Confirming this thought, some studies have shown that morality-based justifications have an intrinsic appeal to the public, which gives them greater weight. McGraw shows empirically not only that moral justifications in domestic matters garner more support, but

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34 David A. Welch (1993), Justice and the Genesis of War (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press): p.199. One potential problem with applying Welch’s theory of justice rhetoric is that he is using a very specific, narrowly-defined conception of "justice": a belief about one’s entitlements. This is a notion of distributive justice, not procedural justice or universal rights-based justice. However, in this particular quote, the logic functions regardless of the particular brand of justice involved.
also that the public is less likely to identify deception couched in a moral justification than within another type of rhetoric.36

**Psychological Mechanisms**

While some of the American politics literature has established a linkage between citizens’ prior affect for the president and how likely they are to see deception and want to punish, this finding is limited by having been tested only on domestic-level scandals thus far. The added value of testing this question on cases of war justification will contribute to the important question of whether or not war-making changes the stakes of interest for the citizens. Fischle37 finds that “motivated reasoning” (as similar to motivated misperception) better explains the high levels of popularity President Clinton continued to enjoy after the Lewinsky scandal than does Bayesian updating. That is, persons whose original affect towards Clinton was negative found the allegations more believable and of higher importance, whereas those predisposed to be positive towards him weighted the importance of the event as very low even if they thought the allegations were credible. Just and Crigler38 find that Clinton’s image as a good leader remained strong with the public because it was well-established before the Lewinsky scandal and the public did not have

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very high expectations for Clinton’s values, so did not find the news very surprising and did not consider it very important. Shah et al.\textsuperscript{39} argue that although news coverage of the Lewinsky scandal was in general somewhat negative, due to the nature of the topic, the framing of the story in terms of a conservative agenda or backlash against the president served to increase public support for the president.

Dirks and Skarlicki\textsuperscript{40} “conceptualize trust as a psychological state held by the follower involving confident positive expectations about the behavior and intentions of the leader, as they relate to the follower” – for these authors, trust is a \textit{perception}. They distinguish between two lines of research: “\textit{relationship-based}” and “\textit{character-based}” theoretical perspectives. The first deals with the leader-follower relationship itself, from an assessment of the follower’s view of that relationship (building from social-exchange theory). The second engages the leader’s character, again from the perspective of the follower’s perception.\textsuperscript{41} Some studies at the organizational level (looking at businesses) have indicated that effective trust comprises both dimensions, integrity-character-based and relational.\textsuperscript{42} Dirks and Skarlicki note that it is difficult to first build and then to maintain trust in leaders. They suggest that the nature of the leadership role may contribute to this

\textsuperscript{41} This latter segment of the study, concerning perceptions of the leader’s character, is most relevant to political science work – does the public think the president is a trustworthy person or not? As in the case of President Reagan and the intervention in Grenada, the answer to that question can have a big impact on the direction public opinion will take.
\textsuperscript{42} Although the relationship between president and voters is farther removed than that between a boss and employees, translated to political science this meta-level trustee relationship between a president and the public can be described in terms of how well the public believes the president is fulfilling his role as agent in the principal-agent context. While there is not a social exchange occurring that is as clearly defined as that in a business setting, it could be argued that the public may perceive mutual obligations between the president and themselves – they ought to act as good citizens, voting and making their interests known, while the president ought to carry out his duties as their agent and leader for the good of the country.
phenomenon – competing goals and incentives placed upon the leader may mean that he is not always acting in the way the followers expect or want; they call these “trust dilemmas.”

Democracy and Truth

If the structure of democratic society prizes transparency, and the political psychology literature finds conditions under which truth will and will not matter in domestic politics, then when and how should truth-telling and deception matter in international relations? Specifically, when should leaders’ deception over war justifications incur audience costs?

In his article on hypocrisy in U.S. foreign policy, Daryl Glaser (in a reference to Judith Shklar) discusses the notion of “psychic warfare.” He explains,

Criticism of hypocrisy is often a proxy method of pursuing disagreements on substantive issues. If we cannot disturb an opponent’s conviction, we may nevertheless be able to attack their public and self image by exposing their failure to abide by their own commitments. [...] Conversely, we are unlikely to attack as hypocritical substantive actions of which we approve. Critics of American hypocrisy typically seek to expose what they

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43 See also their discussion of motivated bias (p.35): “This phenomenon derives from the bias toward seeing negative information as more diagnostic in making character judgments than positive information (see, for example, John J. Skowronski and Donal E. Carlston (1989), “Negativity and Extremity Biases in Impression Formation: A Review of Explanations” Psychological Bulletin 105(1): 131-142) and Kurt T. Dirks and Daniel P. Skarlicki (2004), “Trust in Leaders: Existing Research and Emerging Issues,” in Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches, eds. Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook (Russell Sage Foundation, New York): pp.21-40. In other words, humans tend to see negative acts such as breaking a promise, failing to follow through on a commitment, being dishonest, or behaving without integrity as being highly informative about another’s character.”

perceive to be substantively bad acts. It is these acts that ultimately matter, not the hypocrisy of the actor.

That is, we may find fault with hypocritical opponents more because they are opponents than because they are hypocritical, while we may ignore the hypocrisy of those we support, engaged in acts of which we approve. Thus, we might predict both that supporters will be less likely to perceive deception and that they will be more willing to let it go unpunished when they do see it. That is, if we support an action, and we support the person or group performing that action, then we are more likely to excuse and justify the means by which they accomplish that outcome than if we disapprove of either the actor or the action.

The psychological literature offers empirical basis for predicting this phenomenon, particularly in studies of defensive avoidance and motivated bias: as ego-protecting individuals, humans are often unwilling to entertain information that contradicts closely held beliefs.\textsuperscript{45} Note that this phenomenon – what I will call the “predisposition factor” – also has roots in purely cognitive accounts of decision-making, as a result of “postdecisional accountability”\textsuperscript{46}. Additionally, other studies have found that individuals’ prior beliefs about


a leader’s reputation and their affect towards the leader tend to remain relatively unchanged in the face of scandal.\(^{47}\) Thus, if this were true, we should expect the perception of a leader’s misleading act to have very little effect on his supporters’ approval levels and willingness to punish, while the approval levels of non-supporters should drop sharply. This latter effect also derives from the “predisposition factor”: just as supporters are likely to let their approval of the leader or policy outweigh or obscure their dislike of deception, so too will non-supporters see the misleading act as confirmation of their prior beliefs about the untrustworthiness, incompetence, or poor policy-making of the leader. (One could also call this phenomenon a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” in that supporters who expect good things from a leader will perceive good things and weight them highly, while opponents who expect bad things from a leader will see bad things and weight them highly.)

An issue related to the competence factor is how the public views the leader’s effectiveness overall, not just in terms of the specific issue area to which the deception relates. This point connects back to the political psychology literature on reputation and image-building. If the public approves of the leader’s other policies, or views him as effective across other issue areas, the public might conclude that the cost of punishing such a leader would outweigh the benefits of holding him accountable for his deception. In this context, potential costs to the public could vary depending on what type of punishment was exacted. If punished by removal from office, the immediate successor could be worse than the current leader in other areas. If punished through public censure or shaming, the

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leader’s ability to keep doing his job could be hindered – he might no longer be able to build
consensus needed to pass legislation within the government, or international allies might
no longer wish to maintain such close ties with his state because of his tarnished reputation.
Concern over these sorts of ramifications might decrease the public’s willingness to punish.

Robinson, Dirks, and Ozcelik48 address this issue by asking “how prior trust
influences one’s experience of breach and betrayal.” They argue that it could either make
the betrayal that much more painful (similar to my “betrayal factor”) or it could be mitigated
by the strength of the prior trust (similar to my “predisposition factor”). The mechanism for
the effect of prior trust has to do with the discounting of deception when one party is
convinced that the other is generally trustworthy. Conversely, when a party has a low level
of trust in the other, the same objective amount of deception will trigger a much more
negative response because the party is not inclined to discount the instances of deception –
rather they are confirmatory evidence for their initial low level of trust.

On the other hand, Glaser49 goes on to note that “Sincerity matters more in, say,
friendship than in everyday manners. In the case of politics we value the sincerity of
comrades more than that of opponents. The insincerity of the latter matters only insofar as
it shows them up before their comrades and before their consciences. Highlighting it is the
stuff of the aforementioned psychic warfare.” This view finds its basis in the understanding
of the value of interpersonal trust in maintaining close relationships. For those with whom
we are not or do not wish to be close, we will not necessarily care whether or not they are

48 Sandra L. Robinson, Kurt T. Dirks, and Hakan Ozcelik (2004), “Untangling the Knot of Trust and Betrayal” in
Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Dilemmas and Approaches, eds. Roderick M. Kramer and Karen S. Cook
sincere. We do not feel the need to establish or maintain any bonds of interpersonal trust. However, if we can advance our cause and undermine their own by sowing doubt among their intimates, then it makes sense to draw attention to their insincerity. This view concurs with that of Harry Frankfurt in *On Truth*, where he argues,

> When we encounter people who lie to us, or who in some other way manifest a disregard for truth, it tends to anger and upset us. [...] As a rule, except perhaps when people misrepresent matters in which serious public interests are directly involved, we are dismayed far less by the harm liars may be doing to the general welfare than by their conduct toward ourselves. What stirs us against them, whether or not they have somehow managed to betray all of humankind, is that they have certainly injured us.

What both Glaser and Frankfurt here emphasize is what I call the “betrayal factor” – the idea that a lie from someone we trust will have greater significance than a lie from someone we do not care about, because that lie indicates that our trust was misplaced (reflecting poorly on our judgment) as well as that the individual trusted did not attribute value to our trust (which is a blow to our ego, belying our worth).

As Robinson, Dirks, and Ozcelik point out, the existence of prior trust may serve to amplify feelings of betrayal (*similar to my "betrayal factor"). The mechanism for this effect is

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50 However, Matthew R. Cleary and Susan C. Stokes (2006), *Democracy and the Culture of Skepticism: Political Trust in Argentina and Mexico* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation) investigate the claim from the ‘trust and civil society’ literature that trust among citizens and trust between the citizenry and the government are important building blocks for functional democracy. They derive hypotheses from this basic claim and test them on cases in Latin America – primarily Argentina and Mexico – to see if this holds. They find that existence of greater personal ties among citizens does not necessarily mean more democratic procedures or outcomes; in fact, the opposite may hold – people may be less free to vote as they see fit when they know that others who support the other side may know and ‘punish’ them later. Also, it is easier to bribe someone with whom you have close personal ties.


that the betrayal is such a violent antithesis to the trustworthiness that it is a considerable shock. They call this the “contrast effect” (332). The disjuncture between one's prior expectations and the real discovery of betrayal may also reflect badly on one’s own judgment and decision to trust the other in the first place. In studies of employee job satisfaction, the finding was that if employees had low expectations to begin with, they were less indignant or disappointed when management did not meet their expectations:

“Although the outcome (for example, broken promise) is disappointing, the transgression itself would not be unexpected or surprising – hence the shock or interruption that would evoke strong emotions is lacking” (333). The authors conclude that the existence (or lack thereof) of a prior trust relationship will determine how a party assesses the circumstances and content of the perceived violation (“the appraisal or interpretation of breach evidence”). Whether or not the fundamental attribution error is invoked – whether or not the evidence will be analyzed as an indication of the other's flawed character – will be affected by that prior trust relationship. Those with a high level of trust prior to the incident will be more likely to evaluate the evidence in a way favorable to the other, whereas those with low levels of trust initially will consider the evidence to confirm the worst about the individual’s character. However, that being said, the corollary is that if the one with a high level of trust becomes convinced that the transgression was malevolent, rather than a misunderstanding or product of unfortunate circumstances, then the strong negative emotional reaction is more likely to be invoked.53

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The sense of personal injury, particularly when the perpetrator has been considered a friend or an ally (and which must be compounded with the ire of a stakeholding citizen when the deception does involve “serious public interests”), suggests that once they have identified deception, the president’s supporters should be more angry and feel the deception more greatly than his opponents. We should expect such a result because the leader’s supporters are the ones who consistently trusted him and believed in his candidacy and leadership, while his opponents may have mistrusted (or at least disliked) him all along. This latter phenomenon – that of distrust of (or at least distaste for) the president by the adherents to the opposition party might also extend to a lack of surprise on the part of non-supporters when they perceive a misleading act, whereas it would be expected to catch supporters off-guard. If this is true, then we should expect a larger drop in approval from supporters than from opponents (among the public), when a deception is perceived. (Note that this would take into account the approval rating of each group as measured before the perceived deception as well as the average baseline level of trust as measured at the beginning.) For example, Just and Crigler find that President Clinton’s image as a good leader remained strong with the public both because it was well-established before the Lewinsky scandal and because the public did not have very high expectations for Clinton’s values (so they did not find the news very surprising and did not consider it very important).

Following from the preceding discussion, we may also predict particular levels of punitiveness as a result of the betrayal factor. As Lerner et al.\textsuperscript{56} found in a laboratory setting, individuals who have been primed to feel anger demonstrate greater willingness to punish, and tend to punish more severely when asked to pass sentence in an unrelated case. As applied to the general public, we should expect that if the betrayal factor is in effect and supporters feel angry and betrayed by their leaders, this group of people should seek to punish the leaders and once having decided to punish, will be more likely to escalate to heavier punishments.

While Frankfurt heavily emphasizes the feeling of personal insult often experienced by those who discover a lie has been told to them, in an earlier work he suggests that this is not necessarily the case for untruths that are yet less severe than an outright lie. In this context, he argues that “bullshit,” which he defines as “lack of connection to a concern with truth – this indifference to how things really are,” is more like bluffing than like lying, in that “although it is produced without concern with the truth, it need not be false.”\textsuperscript{57} As akin to bluffing, he notes, “people tend to be more tolerant of bullshit than of lies, [...] we are more likely to turn away from it with an impatient or irritated shrug than with the sense of violation or outrage that lies often inspire.” However, he fails to theorize this observation, merely choosing to “leave [that task] as an exercise for the reader.”\textsuperscript{58}

One possible way to theorize this phenomenon as applied to domestic political relationships would be to recall Ruth Grant’s explanation of the context of Machiavelli’s advice to princes:

Rulers depend on the support of the people and must cultivate that support since it cannot be reliably secured on the basis of either force or friendship. The people must be persuaded that the ruler seeks to secure their interests as well as his own where the two are not coincident. And so, politicians must employ rhetoric, flattery, and deception in order to build alliances and gain support. Political relations are relations of dependence as much as they are power relations. And it is dependence that breeds manipulation and hypocrisy.59

In such political circumstances, leaders have strong incentives to use deception to achieve their particular political goals; the very existence of these incentives makes it also plausible that the people are likewise aware of this constraint. If the citizens are aware of the role deception (or any framing that falls short of the entire unvarnished truth) may play in allowing leaders to build consensus, they may view it less as a personal insult or devaluation and rather find it excusable as a tool of statecraft.

Particularly in the context of liberal democratic domestic politics, Grant seems to suggest this latter view, when she argues, “Liberal politics is sustained by an ethic of rationalism; it depends on the notion that the political process will seek the public good in a reasonable fashion and on reasonable grounds. The frank exposure of self-interested motivations is often a threat to that process. In this sense, honesty and openness can be destructive, not only of the political community, but also of rational discourse itself” (178).

If this pragmatic sense of deception’s occasional efficacy prevails among the general public, we should expect to find limited punishment attempts in response to revealed deception. Rather, we should find the public focused on acceptability of reasons for conducting the military action coupled with successful attainment of stated goals. That is, as long as the public views the action as consummate with “the public good,” as Grant suggests, perception of deception should not elicit strong punishment.

Further exploring the relevance of pragmatic attitudes, Cleary and Stokes\(^6\) engage the claim from the ‘trust and civil society’ literature that trust among citizens and trust between the citizenry and the government are important building blocks for functional democracy. They derive hypotheses from this basic claim and test them on cases in Latin America – primarily Argentina and Mexico – to see if this holds. They find that existence of greater personal ties among citizens does not necessarily mean more democratic procedures or outcomes; in fact, the opposite may hold – people may be less free to vote as they see fit when they know that others who support the other side may know and ‘punish’ them later. Furthermore, it may be easier to bribe someone with whom you have close personal ties. In contrast to the civil society literature, the authors argue that skepticism is both more feasible and more beneficial to a strong democratic political system. Looking back to the Federalists, they claim that a public that is suspicious or skeptical of its elected officials will be more watchful and vigilant in monitoring them. That is, rather than expecting elected officials to be trustworthy, acting according to the public’s best interests, the public should expect them to be seeking their own interests, and should be motivated to monitor and punish them accordingly. Thus, the causal mechanism the authors anticipate is

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not one of betrayed trust sparking anger and punishment, but rather a fundamental lack of
trust, and a view of the principal-agent relationship as one of strict and implacable
monitoring, if not outright antagonism.61

However, this finding does not definitively show that trust among citizens and
between citizens and the government is actually detrimental to democracy. Rather, it shows
that personal ties do not equal trust – fear of social consequences for voting in favor of the
opposition actually indicates a lack of ability to trust one another. That is, in these cases
people cannot trust their fellow citizens and elected officials to respect their right to make
whatever political choice they like. In these situations, personal connections do not form the
basis for trust among the citizens; rather, they operate as a control mechanism for imposing
conformity. Thus, the authors show that the civil society literature’s assumption that
interpersonal ties automatically lead to higher levels of democracy is false, but their
findings do not necessarily say much about the relationship between higher levels of trust
and democracy.

The question remaining is if these attitudes carry over into foreign policy issues. If
so, we should expect people to care more about the outcomes than the process. In this
sense, the key factor of interest, which we may call the “results factor,” is the “public good”
that is the expected outcome of the hypocrisy, “BS,” or spin surrounding the debate. Thus, if
this is true, we should expect that the public will be more likely to excuse deception when it
is used to achieve an action or outcome the public views as favorable or desirable. This
connects back to the success branch of the audience costs literature, while further

61 Matthew R. Cleary and Susan Stokes (2006), Democracy and the Culture of Skepticism: Political Trust in
Argentina and Mexico (Russell Sage Foundation, New York).
suggesting that even consistency may not be a high priority if citizens understand the pragmatic need for bluffing at times.

Along lines related to the above discussion, we might question where public approval for a particular action originates in the first place. If the public’s main concern is that its leaders are governing efficiently and effectively, then we might find that there are issues for which the public does not have clearly defined substantive views, but they do care if their leaders act competently. Thus, the public may not have clearly defined opinions in favor of or opposition to war, but they want to know that the leaders are conducting the operation effectively and that it will succeed, because of the costs war imposes upon the public. For these cases, “success” might be measured by outcomes identifiably related to the initial goals the leaders stated at the outset, and the conduct of battlefield operations. In these circumstances, we should expect what I call the “competence factor” to be very important – that is, the public will approve of actions that are successful and condemn actions that are seen as failures.

According to Powlick and Katz’s research, when there is positive elite consensus or silence, there will be limited media attention and dissemination of information covering

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the issues at hand. However, the media is highly likely to report elite disagreement, occurring both inter- and intra-party. This latter finding is likely to be true in large part because opposition elites will not have a strong incentive to call attention to an issue if they do not disagree with the leader. Thus, if elite cues are absent at first, the public will have less reason to critically evaluate the leader’s statements (thus lowering the likelihood that they will perceive deception). In this case, we should expect public acquiescence. When there is elite dissensus, however, we should expect to see higher levels of public perception of deception and greater willingness to punish at first, due to the high salience of elite criticisms of the leader’s policies, which provide both information and direction for the public’s views.65

In the same manner, elite dissensus should be expected to lead to higher willingness to punish later, despite the leader’s damage control strategy. Here, partisanship is expected to play a significant role (see above discussion of the “predisposition factor”).66 Unity among the leader’s elite supporters – that is, the “message control factor” – should lead supporters among the public to accept the leader’s damage control strategy and reduce their willingness to punish. However, disagreement from opposition elites in the face of unity among elite supporters is likely to have a similarly negative effect on non-supporters among


35
the public, increasing their willingness to punish. From the social psychology literature, Chaiken\textsuperscript{67} discusses her experimental findings that source likeability and credibility are more important for opinion formation than message content for those participants with low involvement (who thought the consequences of paying attention to the content were not very important). However, those participants that had high involvement – that is, those who thought they were invested in paying careful attention to the message – were less easily persuaded by the likeability and perceived expertise of the message source.\textsuperscript{68} As applicable to political science and public opinion formation, this suggests that for issues of low salience to the public, for which they have little prior or current interest in learning about and forming opinions on such issues, they will form their opinions in accordance with the message they receive from leaders as long as they like and trust the expertise of the leader. If they dislike or doubt the leader’s expertise, then it is less likely that they will adopt a similar position, and furthermore, there may be a contrary effect in that they are motivated to take the opposing view of a leader they dislike or do not believe is a competent expert. Therefore, it should hold that a president’s past reputation and prior public opinion towards him should mitigate the effects of elite dissensus while amplifying the effects of elite unity in terms of whether or not deception is perceived and how strongly the public wants to punish the president.


Theory Development

Key Actors and their Roles

While the extant literature from international relations, political theory, and social and cognitive psychology provides a variety of helpful insights that may be used to address the question of how and when leaders’ truthfulness will matter to the public, there is not yet any single complete explanation. Therefore, I now build off of this groundwork to create a testable theory. In a simplified model of a democracy like the United States, the main players are the executive – elected president (agent); the political elites – elected representatives (agents); the electorate – the voting public who elect the President and political elites (principal); and the media – means of communication between agents and their principal, but media may also see itself as filling another role, of watchdog or critic of the elected officials, aiming to communicate this perspective to the public.

What are the motivations for each of the actors? The executive seeks to maintain a strong position for policy-making (does not want to cede power to other political elites unless absolutely necessary, and wants to increase independent ability to make decisions where possible). As agent, he may be potentially less restricted by duty to the principal as compared to elected representatives, but this is unclear. Individual legislators may feel more constrained by their constituents’ opinions because they have less restrictive term limits than the executive, so they want to make sure their constituents are happy with them and will reelect them. Although public opinion may not directly affect the president, it can be powerful in its indirect effects. Low popularity of the president may result in lowered elite support for his intended policies because of those representatives’ own interest in
satisfying their constituents. Therefore, the president has an interest in getting high
approval ratings and avoiding low approval ratings.

Political elites seek reelection, which requires maintaining their vote base, which
may mean positioning themselves clearly along partisan lines in their decision-making. In
fulfilling their role as agent and performing their duty to the principal, they may also take
seriously their constitutional position as a check/balance on the executive, which could lead
to contrary positioning.

The electoratet wants its agents to perform in ways that are not contrary to their
interests. Also, the public does not want to pay costs it is not convinced are necessary, and it
wants its agents to perform effectively. As principal, it is also in the public’s interests to
know what the elected officials are doing, effected by transparency in policy decision-
making, because if the public does not know what or how elected officials are doing, the
electorate does not know whether or not the agents deserve punishment for shirking. If
beyond these pragmatic concerns, the electorate cares about moral ends, then it should pay
close attention to both the moral content of foreign policy actions and to the types of
reasons offered by political elites. If the electorate is exclusively or principally concerned
with pragmatics, then the reasons it should find most convincing (and expect/demand to
hear) are those based on concrete economic or security interests. If the electorate has
deeper interests in moral/ethical issues, then it should find convincing justifications such as
those based on human rights norms and aiding “friendly” countries.

Just as elected officials have an interest in self-perpetuation, so does the media,
which means the media wants the public to consider it a reliable source of information
about what elected officials are doing so that the public can evaluate and judge agents’
performance. At the same time, the more important the media can make itself as a source of information and cues about leaders’ behavior, the more reliant the public will become. This may mean that the media also has an interest in critiquing elected officials in order to keep the public aware and attentive to them, and so continue looking to the media for further information.69

Given: All actors want to keep or gain power or influence; none want to lose power or influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor Name</th>
<th>Role/Function</th>
<th>Interests</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive (President)</td>
<td>Elected head of government; commander-in-chief of the armed forces</td>
<td>Strong policy-making position; keep public opinion favorable; keep or increase support of political elites</td>
<td>Wants ability to achieve policy goals, either with support of or over the heads of legislative representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Elites (Legislators)</td>
<td>Elected members of Congress; make law and represent the interests of constituents; responsibility to declare war</td>
<td>Reelection; strong policy-making position vis à vis executive; keep electorate happy</td>
<td>If constituents are satisfied, will reelection legislators; higher degree of policy-making power means more control over issues of interest to the public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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69 However, this strategy may backfire as noted by Jeffrey E. Cohen (2008), The Presidency in the Era of 24-Hour News (Princeton, Princeton University Press), who observes that persistent negative reporting has led the public to lose confidence in the news media as an establishment and reliable source for information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electorate (Public)</th>
<th>Elect leaders to public office; pay taxes, serve in armed forces</th>
<th>Avoid undue burdens that result from policies; want leaders to be effective and accountable</th>
<th>Want ability to punish leaders if ineffective, or if they overburden the public, so as to avoid these costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Unelected news establishment; reports events to keep public aware and informed; watch leaders</td>
<td>Access to information they can tell the public; critical evaluation of leaders’ actions</td>
<td>Wants influence on leaders’ decisions and on what the public thinks of leaders; wants to be needed source of information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given these different interests, what might prompt leaders to use deception? It could fit into their strategizing in two ways. For one kind of deception, making false claims about factual issues, the president could seek to do this because the true facts are potentially damaging to the president's preferred policy choices. If the other political elites were aware of the truth of the facts, they might not support the president's policy positions, and the public might not be supportive either because of political elites’ disapproval or because the public would have no reason to want those policies independently if they were to learn the true facts. The other kind of deception, presenting reasons for policy that are not necessarily the real reasons, might function as a means of salesmanship. By choosing something that seems to be important to the public, and likely to meet with acceptance from the other political elites, the president would have a better chance of pushing the policy through with minimal contest. The president might count on not being discovered in the
latter form of deception, given that every policy choice is going to have a complex set of reasons behind it. For factual deception, however, the president might simply hope that the deception would hold for sufficient time to produce enough sunk costs to prevent the policy from being reversed, while gambling that the ultimate effects of the policy would be positive enough that the public would be satisfied and not disapprove enough to punish the president.

Under these possible conditions, the Executive might find deception as a means of buying time. That is, if the president were able to convince, distract, or misdirect the attention of detractors for long enough that he could do what he wanted to do in the way he wanted to do it, then by the time objectors could find out, it would be too late to prevent his actions and because of sunk costs effects, it would be hard to reverse that decision. However, a restraining concern might be that if deception were discovered, there could be backlash – the gamble made by a President seeking to deceive would depend on how much backlash to expect in the form of public disapproval, and whether or not it could be mitigated. If the president could show that a policy works, then concealment and framing/spin should be more easily forgivable. Nonetheless, factual untruth should always meet with the disapproval of the public if they care about normative issues, because of the principle of accountability and the simple matter of how one can evaluate the merits of policies if the information provided is not correspondent with reality.

*Given the interests and goals of each actor, what incentives might the executive have for using deception?*

**Table 2: Incentives for Deception**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incentives</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Type of Deception</th>
<th>Specific Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Popularity of policy</td>
<td>If the President wants a</td>
<td>framing/spin</td>
<td>if he can perform the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles to policy</td>
<td>The policy may be acceptable to political elites and the public, but the practical implementation of it may meet with various objections (cost, difficulty, unintended consequences)</td>
<td>concealment</td>
<td>hide details regarding how it will be done to avoid objections, OR do it secretly (trigger sunk costs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(implementation disagreement)</td>
<td>lies</td>
<td>say it will not be implemented at a certain time or in a certain way, but do it anyway (trigger sunk costs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>framing/spin</td>
<td>interpretation or...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following from this overview of why the president might choose a particular type of deception, we can also see how some kinds of deception might be intrinsically more repugnant to the public (were they to discover them) and thus more damaging to the president. A deception about factual matters is most likely to constitute an outright lie, which is expected to be most displeasing to the public. When the public is alerted to this type of deception, furthermore, the deceptive quality of the president’s statements is more easily demonstrated, if the facts can be shown to be different from what the president had claimed. Thus, the public should more easily perceive this type of deception, and be more willing to punish the president for it, because they should be less likely to doubt their perception of deception.

Conversely, a deception that involves concealing some of the president’s reasons for wanting to undertake the action and supplying alternative reasons is less easy to demonstrate, because then it requires an evaluation of which reasons have more weight, and if the public believes the action to be justifiable only on the grounds of the reasons presented. These types of deceptions, when perceived, might be expected to elicit lower
degrees of punishment given the element of uncertainty that is entered by the presence of other justifiable reasons. How the public evaluates the reasons and how they weight them will influence how displeased they are to discover a reason that was concealed or downplayed.

In response to the public’s threat of punishment, the leader must respond by pursuing a damage control strategy in order to mollify the public and avert the threatened punishment. The variance in this strategy will depend at least partly on the type of deception perceived by the public, as well as on how severe the impending punishment is likely to be. The damage control strategy may range from outright denial of any deceptive behavior to an apology taking varying degrees of responsibility for the deception.

**Model:**

Leaders have incentives and disincentives for public deception

\( \text{(Amount of scrutiny they are under,)} \)

\( \text{by whom, timing in their} \)

\( \text{accountability relationship} \)

\( \text{with electorate} \)

\[ \rightarrow \]

Deception, yes/no

\[ \rightarrow \]

Public evaluates leaders’ statements

Public believes it has been deceived, yes/no

\[ \rightarrow \]

44
Public reacts to perception of deception:

Punishment, yes/no

(What sort of punishment?)

→

Leaders pursue a damage control strategy

→

Public responds by accepting or rejecting additional reasons given.

Punishment, yes/no

(What sort of punishment?)

In this study I will be focusing exclusively on the last four stages of the above model. Because it is the public’s perceptions of the leader’s deceptiveness that would be expected to trigger audience costs, regardless of the leader’s true motivations, this study will not engage the issue of when and why in a given case a leader indulges in deception.

**Concepts, Definitions, and Causal Mechanisms**

**Deception** varies by degrees. It is considered to be anything that is perceived not to be the truth, and perceived to be intentionally misleading. It encompasses misinformation, omission, hedging, bluffing, hiding, obfuscating, hypocrisy, and concealment, all of which are types located at varying distances from the truth. Here I conceptualize truth as a vector,
such that there is a multi-dimensional quality to truth and is deviants. The axes on which we locate these types are **intention** and **substance**.

**Intention** refers to the purpose for which statements are made or withheld. Are they designed for distraction, declarification, or misdirection? Conversely, are they aimed at providing information, explaining a position, or clarifying the substance?

**Substance** refers to the factual accuracy of the statements' content. To what degree do these statements reflect the full picture of reality in question? Is anything of significance added or subtracted?

It is here essential to note that this study is not aimed at divining the secret, true, hidden notions, motivations, and thoughts of leaders. Some researchers have argued that even individuals themselves are not always fully aware or fully comprehending of their own beliefs and rationales, so I do not here seek to make a definitive claim on this point. Rather, what is of direct relevance to the question at hand – how will the public deal with a leader they perceive as deceptive – are **perceptions**.

The public’s **perceptions** here refer to the observance, interpretation, and evaluation of the leader’s statements and actions. In engaging the historical evidence to test my theory, I seek to identify the perceptions of the public and other key players regarding the leader’s statements and actions. They will be assigned to the typology in accordance with this identification. In terms of factual accuracy, the statements may be independently evaluated – what was known at the time, and what could not have been known at the time. The issue of intention, however, will principally be limited to documentable perceptions.

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A justification is a reason for doing something that one presents to others and by which one expects to gain their support or agreement. In “justifying” a policy or action, one makes a case for the ‘justness’ – the value and legitimacy – of his or her proposed behavior. Thus, in the political context of a democracy, justifications are the public reasons given to explain policy to the citizens and other political elites; they are at the same time intended to elicit or maintain the support of these other groups.

We can identify two principal reasons for why truth-telling should matter in a democracy: transparency of process and adherence to norms. Transparency of process has to do with the institutional, pragmatic aspect of democracy. If the decision-making process is highly visible to the public, it will be easier for citizens to evaluate both leaders’ overall effectiveness and success or failure of particular actions. Adherence to norms deals with the belief that truth-telling is intrinsically valuable because the notion (ethos?) of representation embedded in a democratic political system implies that elected officials are meant to represent their constituents and in order to do so, they must be worthy of trust.

Contrary to the assumption of trust’s important role in democratic political life is the skepticism view. From this perspective, trust is not essential for a functioning democracy, but in fact a skeptical attitude is a healthy way for the public to maintain an interest in monitoring the leaders.71 However, I argue that in this context, truth-telling is still important because a skeptical public will quickly observe deception and seek to punish it, as expected by the transparency of process motivation discussed above. Therefore, I am treating these as mutually reinforcing mechanisms, rather than as exclusive, independent causal processes.

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Why would truth-telling with regard to war justifications matter significantly?

Giving justifications and reasons for war are important in the context of a democratic polity because policy is made through a process of debate and discussion. Thus, all policy needs to be justifiable on the basis of agreed-upon rules and norms. *Truthful justifications* matter because a policy justified by a false reason or on a false premise may not be justifiable. In order to accurately evaluate a policy, its reasons as well as its anticipated effects must be viewed.72

The particular salience of truth in justifications for military action rests on the impact that war has on the public. Taxes fund the war materiel and citizens serve in the army. War is a significant source of costs, and unless it is undertaken to directly repel an attack on the homeland, its function as a source of benefits is not immediately experienced by the people. High costs and unclear benefits should mean that that the public should not want to pay for a war unless the justification is compelling. If the president were to lie about the justification, then the public should want to punish him somehow because they would no longer consider the war justified.

In addition to the necessity of justifications themselves, the content of the justifications also plays an important role. Some types of justification are likely to be more easily accepted or seen as more valid than others. The basic categories of justifications are pragmatic and normative: **pragmatic** justifications may include self-defense or collective

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72 We must note some exceptions to this principle. If it would endanger national security to host public debate over the policy in advance, then this does not have to take place, and the debate may be temporarily concealed from the public eye. However, it needs to be openly debated (behind closed doors) among responsible decision-makers (those with legal, constitutional responsibility). After the policy is enacted, so it is no longer a secret, it must then be justified post hoc openly to the public.
security reasons, whereas normative justifications may include humanitarian intervention or protecting human rights.

As yet there has not been much work to examine the democratic public’s response to their leaders when they perceive war justifications as misleading. This means that it is unclear both under what circumstances a leader would risk incurring audience costs from the domestic public, as well as what sorts of punishments the public might inflict (that is, how serious are the threatened costs?). Therefore, focused study is necessary in order to accurately evaluate the audience costs leaders of democracies should fear in reality.\textsuperscript{73} The public may care about bluffing and bumbling, but does it care more about bald-faced lies? This project seeks to take the first step by using work in political theory and moral philosophy on truth-telling and deception to shed light on the international relations literature on public opinion and audience costs.\textsuperscript{74}

In coding types of untruth, I seek to distinguish between untruths propagated with the intent to deceive as opposed to untruth propagated in the belief that it was true, as the result of a genuine mistake. This is because of the \textit{intention} component of untruth, discussed above. Whereas the success-oriented audience costs literature does not make this distinction, expecting comparable punishment for failure due to an insincere bluff as for

\textsuperscript{73} See Hein E. Goemans (2000), War and Punishment: the Causes of War Termination and the First World War (Princeton, Princeton University Press): p.58. Note that Goemans has the categories “stay in power,” “out of power,” and “out and punished.” His only example(s?) of a democracy that suffers the last fate is that of France in 1870 when it is defeated by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War. I question the punishment outcome in this case, because the reason for the fall of government of the Second Republic was its ineffectiveness against the Prussians, and the deprivations the country was suffering while the government was unwilling to surrender. Adolphe Thiers and the Third Republic overthrew the Second Republic in order to cut the country’s losses and surrender to Prussia. While this was a type of failure, the Third Republic also failed (in surrendering to the Prussians), yet retained power.

\textsuperscript{74} At the same time (although to a lesser extent), I hope that this line of inquiry will contribute to the political theory and moral philosophy literature on truth-telling and deception. As it stands, these literatures are almost exclusively theoretical, and when they build arguments on the basis of specific evidence, it is principally anecdotal and non-systematic.
that due to a miscalculation, it is here necessary to conduct more detailed research to find out if the public cares more about deliberate deceptions than shoddy fact-checking. As discussed previously, many authors agree that the citizens of a democracy should care very much about truth-telling in politics. The logic of this position is that the public maintains their ability to monitor the actions of their leaders (in keeping with the principal-agent relationship typical of democracies), only while they have information about what the leaders are doing and why they are doing so. Also, some authors argue that democratic society is founded on a certain degree of trust, both among the citizens themselves and between citizens and leaders, which gives truth-telling an intrinsic value in this context.

Consequently, I argue that the public should be more willing to punish an act of deception than a mistake, in which the leaders believed something to be true, but were wrong. If this prediction holds, it would suggest that the public should be willing to punish deliberate untruth to some degree, regardless of the success of the resulting action, because of the weight placed on the truth itself. The public also has incentive to punish mistakes (unsuccessful ventures) because they want their leaders to be careful and prudent (to maximize the benefits the public receives as citizens and minimize the costs they must pay),

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75 Through the experimental portion of this research, I will seek to discover if the average citizen (as proxied by the respondents) is able to distinguish between shoddy fact-checking and deliberate deception.
but we should see citizens punishing leaders engaged even in successful ventures if they view the justification involved as being deceptive.\textsuperscript{77}

If we view truth as a means of verifying transparency, the public should prefer to be able to keep their leaders accountable because otherwise they would influence neither the sorts of costs imposed on them nor the actual value of the benefits they might receive. Thus, if the public cares about deception for the reasons discussed above, particularly in cases of war justifications, perceived acts of deception should induce some level of punishment for even successful, beneficial outcomes. Failure to punish such cases would signal that the public is willing to allow its leaders to undercut the accountability mechanism, as long as there are some public benefits in the end.

\section*{Research Questions}

In this study, I will elucidate the mechanisms of audience costs in the United States (with the intention that the theory can be extended in future to other cases), as the public reacts to leaders' war justification rhetoric by answering four principal research questions:

1) When will particular sectors of the public view justificatory rhetoric as deceptive or misleading?

2) How will the public respond when they perceive leaders' justificatory rhetoric as misleading or deceptive (punish or not punish)?

3) What factors will affect the degree of severity of punishments the public will seek to impose?

\textsuperscript{77} Note that this goes further than the consistency/reliability branch of the audience costs literature in stipulating a normative value for truth-telling.
4) How will the leader’s response to threatened or imminent domestic audience costs affect public willingness to punish?

In this study, I will focus on the segments of the model that deal with the public’s reactions, leaving for future research the questions of when leaders will choose to use deception in the first place, and what motivates their selection of a particular damage control strategy. The chief interest in this study is to understand when the public will perceive their leaders’ speech or actions as having been deceptive, and how they will respond as a result. It is only after we understand the type and source of potential audience costs that we can evaluate leaders’ strategic reasoning in light of these threatened costs. A later study, examining in detail the types of incentives and disincentives for truthfulness democratic leaders face would be highly relevant; however, it is beyond the scope of this particular undertaking.

**Theory Testing – Operationalization and Hypotheses**

**Describing Deception – Operationalizing Variables**

As discussed above, the truth/falsehood distinction is not restricted to a simple dichotomy. Because the distance between complete truth and total lie is occupied by a continuum on which lie various permutations of the values of intention and substance, it is reasonable to construct a typology detailing their characteristics, moving from the realm of concepts to that of explanation. Precision in defining concepts, as discussed above, is essential to making progress in building a strong and testable theory. Therefore, by a series of descriptive typologies of the dependent, independent, and intervening variables at work, it becomes possible to develop hypotheses to test their predicted interactions. In building
an explanatory typology, I follow the recommendations of Elman\textsuperscript{78}. Thus, it must combine the descriptive and classificatory functions of typologies in a unique, theory-based fashion. Elman explains, ‘At its most straightforward, the descriptive role builds types from the ‘compounds of attributes’ of concepts. [...] In an explanatory typology, [...] [t]he constituent attributes are extracted from the variables of a preexisting theory. The dimensions of the property space (its rows and columns) reflect alternative values of the theory’s independent variables, so each cell in the space is associated with predicted values of the theory’s intervening or dependent variables” (296). Thus, such a typology seeks to answer the question, “If my theory is correct, what do I expect to see?” (298).

In an explanatory typology, the classificatory function of typologies is how I decide which “type” a given empirical case represents. Elman explains, “The dimensions of the property space are provided by the theory’s explanatory variables, and the contents of the cells come from the logic of the theory” (298).

In my study, I distinguish among types of untruth, the conditions surrounding the delivery/discovery of the untruth, the type of the leader’s damage-control response, and the existence of the untruth itself. Table 3, following, offers a comprehensive view of the continuum of truthfulness of leaders’ statements. These types are derived from the moral philosophy literature on truth-telling and dishonesty, and their truth-proximity position is established according to the dual-axis scale discussed above, measured on intention and substance. Each of the types described is also considered a member of one of three broader categories: 1) Actively saying things that are not true; 2) Not saying things that are true or

saying some things that are true in order to cover up other things that are true; 3)
Honesty.

**Independent Variable 1**

*Time = t1: Typology of Deception (ordinal scale, ranked from lowest to highest degree of truthfulness):*

**Table 3: Typology of Deception**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description / Definition</th>
<th>General example</th>
<th>Severity of deception (level of proximity to truth)</th>
<th>Expected level of public disapproval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actively saying things that are not true</td>
<td>lies</td>
<td>Outright untruth: knowing what is factually true in a given circumstance, a person deliberately states what is not true, either by adding false</td>
<td>A leader makes a factual claim that is untrue OR A leader explicitly states a justification for war that is</td>
<td>lowest intention = -2 substance = -2</td>
<td>highest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

79 The term “honesty” is used here for lack of a more clearly appropriate term. The first three items falling under this category are not dishonest in the same way as those covered in the previous categories, but all in some way fall short of complete truthfulness, which is the final item in the table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypocrisy</th>
<th>Asserting that you abide by a particular set of rules, for normative reasons, but then deliberately behaving in violation of those rules.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omitting some things</td>
<td>A leader states that only certain reasons are valid for justifying war, but then uses other reasons in his intention = -2, substance = -1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Information or denying true information. | not part of the actual set of reasons held by the administration OR A leader explicitly denies a justification for war that is part of the actual set of reasons held by the administration | 55 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hypocrisy</th>
<th>standards.</th>
<th>justificatory rhetoric, when the reasons previously declared valid are absent</th>
<th>low intention substance = -2</th>
<th>med/high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>concealment</td>
<td>Knowing the full facts of the case, a person deliberately omits or hides some facts that are integral to the story at hand.</td>
<td>A leader prevents publicization of facts of the case that are relevant to the justifications presented OR A leader prevents publicization of a key justification, but does not explicitly deny it</td>
<td>med intention substance = -1</td>
<td>med</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

that are true or saying selective true things in order to cover up other true things
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Honesty</strong></th>
<th>evasion</th>
<th>Refusal to answer a direct question.</th>
<th>A leader does not respond at all when asked about specific information</th>
<th>med</th>
<th>low/med</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>framing (spin)</td>
<td>Neither falsification nor omission. Deliberate conceptualization and presentation of an issue to emphasize the information that is most helpful to your position.</td>
<td>A leader presents facts in such a way as to bolster his justifications.</td>
<td>med/high</td>
<td>med</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>double-standard</td>
<td>While a person is honest about what he is doing, he is also trying to hold someone else to a standard that he does not apply to himself.</td>
<td>A leader states that only certain reasons are valid for justifying war in cases where other</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td>A person makes claims he believes to be factually accurate (in good faith), which new information later reveals to be false.</td>
<td>A leader's primary justification is later found to be based on information that is found to be untrue, which he did not know at the time of the justification.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High/low?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete honesty</td>
<td>The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth</td>
<td>A leader's justification is the full facts of the case and an explanation</td>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>Lowest?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Countries are acting, but cites other reasons as valid when referring to his own country.
While public perception of the severity of leaders’ deception is significant, it does not operate on its own. The causal impact of this independent variable at time $t_1$ is affected by a set of intervening variables, namely the conditions under which the public perceives the deception. These factors complicate the effect of the deception itself because they function as partial filters for the way in which information is attained and perceived by the public. It is by determining what these conditions are and evaluating what their independent impact upon public perception might be that the influence of partisan discord, success or failure of the military action in question, and the president’s past reputation for effectiveness may be clearly examined. These possible conditions, their expected effect on public willingness to punish, and the related hypotheses (which are discussed in the following section) are presented in Table 4, below.

**Intervening Variable 1**

*Time = $t_1$, $t_2$: Conditions under which deception as perceived by public will have greater or lesser impact:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Corresponding expected level of public</th>
<th>Hypothesized mechanism to be tested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 4: Perceiving Deception
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>disapproval:</th>
<th>manner in which it was revealed:</th>
<th>high</th>
<th>“predisposition factor” – H1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>scandal</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>“betrayal factor” – H2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high level of disunity / dissent</td>
<td>high level of disunity / dissent</td>
<td>med</td>
<td>“betrayal factor” – H2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within leaders’ party, regardless of</td>
<td>within leaders’ party, regardless of</td>
<td>med</td>
<td>“predisposition factor” – H1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power share</td>
<td>power share</td>
<td></td>
<td>“message control factor” – H7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manner in which it was revealed:</td>
<td>revelation in context of suspicion</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>“predisposition factor” – H1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low-discussed leak</td>
<td>low-discussed leak</td>
<td></td>
<td>“message control factor” – H7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high level of unity in the leader’s</td>
<td>high level of unity in the leader’s</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>“elite dissensus/unity” – H7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>party AND a high proportion of</td>
<td>party AND a high proportion of</td>
<td></td>
<td>“message control factor” – H7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>power controlled by party members</td>
<td>power controlled by party members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(so opposition elite is numerically</td>
<td>(so opposition elite is numerically</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small)</td>
<td>small)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success of the action the untruth</td>
<td>success of the action the untruth</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>“competence factor” – H4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was used to achieve[^80]</td>
<td>was used to achieve[^80]</td>
<td></td>
<td>“effectiveness factor” – H5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The effect of time on this process of deception, perception, and punishment is also crucial to understand. I refer to the time at which the public first perceives the president’s[^80] The more nebulous a goal, the easier it should be to create a justification that seems to hold up, but it should also be more difficult to demonstrate follow-through and success (or lack thereof, on the other hand). Where will the public place the burden of proof? Again, this measure relies on public perceptions of success/failure.
statements as deceptive as “time t1.” In this first stage, the intervening variables discussed above are expected to impact first the perception of deception and then the degree to which the public wants to punish the president in response. However, as the president sees the public perception of deception, as well as the incipient or threatened punishment, the president will be motivated to take action in order to counteract the public’s desire to punish. I call this range of possible actions the president’s “damage control strategy.” I refer to the time at which a president seeks to respond to the negative public opinion and threatened punishment with a damage control strategy “time t2.” During this stage, the intervening variable of ‘type of damage control strategy’ is expected to influence the public’s reaction, by mollifying them and so mitigating the desired level of punishment, by averting it entirely, or by failing to satisfy the public, resulting in the same or amplified level of punishment as previously anticipated.

While the interaction of the independent variable from Table 3 with the intervening variables in Table 4 is expected to give us a predicted value for public approval/disapproval and willingness to punish at time t1 (when the deception is initially revealed), this second set of intervening variables also comes into play at time t2. These responses, and the level of concession they represent, are ordinally ranked in Table 5, following.

**Intervening Variable 2**

*Time = t2: Possible leader responses to public reaction (damage control strategies), ranked from highest to lowest level of concession:*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Type</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
<th><strong>Level of concession</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apology and acceptance of consequences</td>
<td>Admission of deception, admission that deception was wrong, and request for the public's forgiveness</td>
<td>highest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology and admission of responsibility</td>
<td>Leader acknowledges deception and takes “full responsibility,” but does not invite consequences.</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology and denial of responsibility</td>
<td>Admission of deception, admission that deception was wrong (although leader does not claim personal responsibility for the deception)</td>
<td>med/high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission of deception, but arguing that it was justified at the time</td>
<td>Argument that it was necessary to deceive the public for security reasons, to prevent enemies from learning of the reasoning or because the public could not safely be given the information that</td>
<td>med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change the question</td>
<td>Downplay the importance of the initial justification and emphasize what were formerly minor justifications or were unmentioned justifications</td>
<td>med/low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact debate</td>
<td>Argue that the administration did not misrepresent or misinterpret the facts and that the facts have supported the original justifications all along</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reiteration</td>
<td>Repeat the original justifications and the factual basis for them, and if available, bring in any new information that further support those original justifications.</td>
<td>lowest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewalling</td>
<td>No response or flat denial of any type of wrongdoing</td>
<td>lowest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As discussed above, the preceding Tables 3 and 4 provide ordinal scales of the two factors that combine causally at time t1: 1) the types of untruth in which leaders may engage and 2) the conditions under which that untruth is revealed and perceived by the
public. While variance on each of these dimensions (truthfulness and manner of revelation) taken separately could be expected to lead to particular values of the dependent variable (perception of deception and punishment by the public), in reality they co-occur and thus must be considered together in a complex causal process resulting in a particular value of the dependent (outcome) variable.

How does the passage of time matter in specific circumstances? That is, when looking at the table of when the deception will matter more or less to the public, how does the temporal proximity of the revelation to the action matter or factor into this calculation? In particular I expect that the greater the proximity of the revelation to the original statement, the more likely it will be for punishment to result, because of salience. If people care about truth, then they should still seek punishment even if there is a time delay between the revelation and the original statement. However, the relative importance of consistency and success should appear in terms of how these factors mitigate public reaction to deception. It requires time for these factors to operate – too early on, it is impossible to tell if the action is successful or whether or not the stated goals are being pursued. In the case studies, careful process tracing will allow me to thoroughly investigate the role of temporality.

As stated, the dependent or outcome variable of interest is the public reaction to the above factors, specifically the severity of punishment the public wishes to enact. As

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81 As indicated by the column in each table representing the expected level of public disapproval or willingness to punish with each possible value.
explained within the discussion of the sets of intervening variables, the process in each case is divided into two time stages. At both time t1 and time t2, the outcome variable of interest is the same – does the public seek to punish, and if so, what type of punishment is sought? The punishments within this set are identified by the population level at which they may be observed and measured (individual and aggregate), and are ordinally ranked by severity in Table 6, following.

**Dependent Variables**

*Time = t1, t2: Punishments the public might exact (ordinal scale ranked from lowest to highest severity):*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key:</th>
<th>individual and aggregate, aggregate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Severity:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>voicing perception of untruth</em></td>
<td><em>lowest</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>change in public opinion (approval --&gt; disapproval) on the policy related to the perceived deception</em></td>
<td><em>low</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>transferral - perception of lack of credibility in other policy areas</em></td>
<td><em>low/med</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>overall drop in public opinion / approval / overall drop in public opinion</em></td>
<td><em>low/med</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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83 Distinguishing the types of punishments according to the population level at which they may be observed and measured is important because it will make hypothesis testing in the case studies and the experiments much clearer. Through experimental testing, it will be possible to reveal the individual-level reasoning processes that lead people to choose certain types of punishments, which will provide good tests of the hypotheses centering on mechanisms of emotion and affect (discussed below), thus avoiding the ecological fallacy that might otherwise plague the case studies and opinion data analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>satisfaction level regarding the administration</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agitation and public demonstration</td>
<td>med/high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voting for opposition candidate or party, depending on election cycle</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypotheses**

**Answering the first research question, “When will particular sectors of the public view the leader’s justificatory rhetoric as deceptive or misleading?”**

Following from the above discussion in Section III, I expect individuals’ partisanship to affect perceptions of deception according to two possible mechanisms. The **predisposition factor** applies to the sector of the public politically opposed to the leader. That is, I expect partisan opponents’ *ex ante* negative attitudes towards the leader to influence their current perceptions, making them more willing and more likely to perceive deception in his statements, with accompanying disapproval and willingness to punish. At the same time, I expect the leader’s political supporters to be less willing and less likely to perceive deception in his statements. However, if the **betrayal factor** holds, if partisan supporters come to perceive deception, I expect them to disapprove and be willing to punish the leader because the deception comes as a shock, whereas partisan opponents’ existing disapproval levels should not vary significantly because they already had a low view of the leader. This leads to the first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Because of the predisposition factor, supporters will be less likely than opponents to perceive deception, and will be more likely to excuse untruth when*
they perceive it (or at least they will code it as less severe than it is). At the same time, opponents will be expected to see untruth sooner, code it as more severe than it is, and be more willing to exact stronger punishment. Approval ratings will drop and willingness to punish will increase among supporters more than among opponents because of the betrayal factor.

Answering the second and third research questions, “How will the public respond when they perceive leaders’ justificatory rhetoric as misleading or deceptive (punish or not punish)?” and “What factors will affect the degree of severity of punishments the public will seek to impose?”: 

_Hypothesis 2_: When the betrayal factor is in effect, supporters should be angry and seek strong punishments.

As discussed above, if the public perceives political maneuvering, with a concomitant lack of full candor, as a necessity for all elected officials at some point or another, they will be more likely to be lenient with deception when they support the goal achieved by means of that strategy. If the public takes this position, I expect that Hypothesis 3 will hold:

_Hypothesis 3_: Because of the results factor, the public will take a pragmatic approach and be less likely to punish leaders for lower levels of perceived untruthfulness when they view as desirable the outcome the deception was used to achieve.

Relatedly, if successful outcomes hold the place of highest priority for the public, then I would expect its effects to dominate even in circumstances for which the public did not necessarily care deeply about the particular goal of the military action.
Hypothesis 4: Because of the competence factor, the public will not seek to punish leaders for perceived deception when it relates to a military action that is being conducted successfully. Following from the predisposition factor, once supporters perceive deception, they will be more likely to punish if the action is also perceived as failing, but they will be more likely to approve and not punish if the action is succeeding.

Answering the fourth research question, “How will the leader’s response to threatened or imminent domestic audience costs affect public willingness to punish?”:

As discussed above, moral justifications carry particular weight with the public and can serve as an effective mask for deception. Thus, we should expect to see more willingness to excuse leaders’ revealed deception if the damage control strategy employed includes providing additional moral or justice-based reasons. At the same time, if the citizens view deception itself as an injustice perpetrated by their leaders against them, they should respond more negatively when they perceive as deceptive or misleading a moral justification given at first; such deception would abuse the values they care about (see the “betrayal factor,” discussed above).

Hypothesis 5: Because of the salesmanship factor, if the leader is able to offer additional justifications for the action at time t2 (particularly justice-based reasons), public willingness to punish the original deception will decrease.

Hypothesis 5.1: If the justification perceived as deceptive is a moral or justice-based reason, the public will want to punish more severely than otherwise, because of the betrayal factor.
When the public is receiving compatible cues from all of its sources – the president, other political elites, and the news media, it is unlikely to perceive deception. However, when there is elite dissensus or competing cues from the media, the public must select from among the alternate frames available.

**Hypothesis 6:** The elite dissensus/unity factor indicates that high levels of elite disagreement and elite condemnation of leaders’ behavior will lead to greater public awareness and willingness to punish at time t1 because there will be high publicity of the deception. High levels of unity among elites at time t1 will lead to low public perception of untruth and lower willingness to punish the leader when they do perceive deception.

**Hypothesis 6.1:** The message control factor indicates that favorable unity among the leader’s elite supporters at time t2 will lead to less willingness to punish and greater willingness to excuse by supporters among the public. At the same time, opposition elite disapproval in the face of the leader’s damage control strategy should lead to higher willingness to punish from non-supporters among the public. In-group / out-group dynamics could produce the additional effect that high levels of opposition elite disapproval result in higher levels of approval from supporters within the public.84

**Theory Testing Summary**

*Research Questions and Related Hypotheses:*

**Table 7: Research Questions and Hypotheses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) When will particular sectors of the public view justificatory rhetoric as deceptive or misleading? (supporters/opponents)</td>
<td>H1 (predisposition factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H2 (betrayal factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How will the public respond when they perceive leaders’ justificatory rhetoric as misleading or deceptive? (punish/not punish)</td>
<td>H2 (betrayal factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H3 (results factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H4 (competence factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H5.1 (betrayal factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H6 (elite dissensus/unity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What factors will affect the degree of severity of punishment(s) the public will impose?</td>
<td>H3 (results factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H4 (competence factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H5 (salesmanship factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H5.1 (betrayal factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H6 (elite dissensus/unity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H6.1 (message control factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) How will the public respond to the leader’s damage control strategy?</td>
<td>H5 (salesmanship factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H6.1 (message control factor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>See Leader Response Table, above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data and Methodology

Case Selection and Analysis

The historical cases to be used for in-depth case studies will be drawn from the universe of cases of justifications for military action. As discussed above in the theory development section, using military force imposes costs on the public so it should be a foreign policy issue that triggers public interest and concern. In separating the cases according to a success/failure distinction, I will control for the effects of success or failure as distinct from truth-telling or lack thereof.

In addition to the necessity of justifications themselves, the content of the justifications also plays an important role. In identifying the respective weights of normative versus pragmatic justifications, the passage of time must be considered once more. By examining what justifications are accepted and believed before the action is seen to succeed, it will be possible to evaluate the reasons the public finds meaningful as well as determine how independently significant success or failure become in swaying the public’s approval.

In order to avoid selecting on the independent variable in a way that would skew my sample and limit generalizability of my findings, I have allotted four primary cases within a two-by-two matrix. One axis distinguishes the outcome of the case in terms of success or failure, while the other axis distinguishes the justifications used according to a greater or lesser degree of perceived truthfulness. These selection criteria follow from the structure of the theory being tested. Because the competing theoretical claims under
consideration hinge on deception and success, it is essential to select cases that vary in value for each of these phenomena, as shown in the table below.85

Data richness is also important for the case studies because I perform across-case focused comparison with process tracing and content analysis, creating a detailed narrative of each case and identifying the causal mechanisms at work according to the hypotheses being tested. While it could be considered a limitation of the project that all four cases are from the United States, there are several advantages to this selection. First, governmental institutional structure is held constant, which will avoid introducing potentially spurious variables (which might otherwise occur if a case of a parliamentary type democracy were used in comparison with a presidential type democracy). This control will allow for a clear test of the variables of interest in this theory; following this initial plan of research, in the future it will be possible to take the findings of this current project and extend the original research design by testing the theory on cases of other types of democracies. Furthermore, these cases show another helpful element of variation because a different president is in office for each case. Further discussion of the coding process within the cases follows the table.

85 In approaching the case studies, I follow Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2004), Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences (Cambridge, MIT Press), in their discussion of requirements for case study research. The process meets their criteria as follows: 1) Clear identification of the single subclass of events each of the cases represents (war justification). 2) Particular cases are chosen according to a “well-defined research objective” and “appropriate research strategy” (cases represent more or less truthfulness combined with success or failure). 3) The cases “employ variables of theoretical interest for purposes of explanation” (as discussed in the theory development section). Additionally, the selection of multiple cases according to criterion 2 will allow careful application of the method of structured, focused comparison.

Finally, I take seriously Stephen Van Evera’s (1997), Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science (Ithaca, Cornell University Press) injunction to seek data-rich cases. All four cases selected are rich in a variety of data, including public statements by leaders; official press releases; journalistic reports of events on the ground; and declassified government documents, including inter-agency memos, records of Cabinet meetings, and transcripts of Congressional meetings.
In each case, I review primary source material and secondary historical literature to answer the following questions:

1. If the public perceived leaders’ war justifications as deceptive:
   
   a. At what point in time did the public begin to perceive deception?
      
      - Which sectors of the public first perceived deception?
      
      - How pervasive did this belief become?
   
   b. How did the public respond after perceiving deception – did it seek to punish leaders?
   
   c. What factors affected the severity of the punishments the public sought to impose?
      
      - How much did opposition elites condemn the policy?
      
      - What was the status of events on the ground?
   
   d. How did the leader respond to the threatened audience costs?
   
   e. How did the leader’s response affect public willingness to punish?
   
   f. What did public approval levels look like at the end of the military action as compared to its beginning?

2. If the public did not perceive leaders’ war justifications as deceptive:
   
   a. Did approval for the policy vary with events on the ground?
b. How much did opposition elites condemn the policy?

c. What did public approval levels look like at the end of the military action as compared to its start?

The data sources used to code leaders’ original justifications and damage control strategies include official statements made by the leader or released by the administration covering the event in question. As discussed previously, this study focuses on the public’s perceptions of truth or falsehood, not the ‘objective’ truth-quality of the president’s statements. The public’s coding of the justifications and their subsequent actions will be coded from public opinion data collected at the time and news reports of mass public actions (such as protests and demonstrations). (Note that for the most part the type of data available limits testing of possible public responses to those that can be measured on the aggregate level.) After the coding is complete, I will construct a narrative for each case and test the hypotheses detailed above.

**Experimental Design**

The purpose of the experimental portion of this research is to illuminate the microfoundations of individuals’ reasoning processes as they evaluate the president’s behavior, to discover when they will perceive deception and how they will respond. Are feelings of betrayal triggered, or do people view leaders dispassionately and skeptically? Although there is limited anecdotal evidence in some of the historical cases that may address this question, it cannot be systematically studied except through experiments. The laboratory findings regarding the microfoundations of these decisions can then be extrapolated back to the aggregate level. In combination with the historical case studies and
public opinion polling data, the experimental results will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of this issue.

In the theory I develop, from which I derive the hypotheses to be tested through the experiments, I describe four possible worlds we may inhabit. In the first, the public has no interest in foreign policy, so presidents can do whatever they want. In the second, the public only cares about pragmatics such as economic benefits and reduced burdens, so no other incentives will matter. In the third, pragmatic concerns still dominate, but the public cares about truth-telling for pragmatic reasons such as the state’s reputation86. In the fourth, the public cares about truth for normative and emotional reasons, not just pragmatics. The observable outcome – the consequences for a president’s actions and his incentive structure for which actions he chooses, should then depend heavily on which of these frameworks best matches reality. In a purely pragmatic world, because the experience of costs vs. benefits is the only factor of interest, partisan cues should not matter and neither should the veracity of the president’s justifications. On the other hand, if normative concerns are present, these cues should also affect the public’s response.

The study tests two categories of hypotheses: 1) hypotheses dealing with pragmatic strategic motivations and 2) hypotheses dealing with elite partisan cues. In each of these interest areas, the alternative hypothesis competing against the interest-based hypotheses is the strong normative hypothesis: regardless of success or failure and regardless of elite positions, if normative concerns are most important to the public, participants are expected to disapprove of revealed deception.

**Success-Oriented Hypotheses:**

My theory predicts:

H: Deception will lead to disapproval across all treatments. We should expect to see some disapproval of the military actions ordered by the president in cases of deception, regardless of success or failure of the action. The impact of Lie is expected to be stronger than the impact of Concealment.

Alternatively, the literature suggests:

H1: Success may inspire approval regardless of the truth-quality of justifications.

H2: Failure is most likely to incur disapproval, regardless of the truth-quality of justifications.

**Partisan-Oriented Hypotheses:**

My theory predicts:

H: Deception will lead to disapproval across all treatments, regardless of partisanship of respondents and elite critics.

Competing hypotheses from the literature:

H1: Senator’s critique of President should elicit more disapproval from respondents in their own party than in the opposition party.

H2: Disapproval incited by a co-partisan (matching) critic is more likely in cases of deception than in cases of truth.

H3: Disapproval incited by a co-partisan (matching) critic is more likely in cases of failure than in cases of success.
H4: Regardless of the critic’s party, deception is more likely to incur disapproval from respondents in the opposition party than in the President’s party.

The experimental manipulation exposed participants to fictional scenarios set in the future. The scenarios took the form of fictional news stories about President Obama sending US troops to Yemen. Each scenario consisted in three variable sets of cues regarding the military action: one cue evaluating the success or failure of the military action; one cue offering evidence that the president falsified the justifications for the action, concealed key information relating to the action, or truthfully stated the reason for sending troops; and one cue featuring criticism by either a Republican or a Democratic politician.

The scenarios are designed to highlight particular interest areas that might be important to the public in deciding whether or not to approve of the president’s actions. These interest areas are 1) pragmatic (Is the military action in question meeting success?) and 2) partisan-based (Are elites in the opposition party expressing disapproval of the policy? Are elites in the president’s own party expressing disapproval of the policy? Are elites in the respondent’s party expressing disapproval of the policy?). For each of these interest areas, the hypothesis competing against the interest-based hypotheses is the normative hypothesis: regardless of success, failure, or partisanship, if normative concerns are most important to the public, participants are expected to disapprove of deception. In the scenarios assigned to the control group (“truth scenario”), no deceptive statements were revealed, but iteration of success, failure, and elite criticism will be included.

**Conclusion**

The value of this dissertation lies in its potential to contribute to several debates within the political science literature. In terms of intellectual merit, this project is unique in
its attempt to bring together the international relations literature on public opinion and audience costs, the political theory and moral philosophy literature on truth-telling and deception, and the cognitive and social psychology literature on affect and emotion. First, by illuminating a previously unexplored normative dimension of audience costs, it will offer a more complete understanding of the role and power of public opinion within a democracy. Second, the project will add to the moral philosophy literature through the detailed typology of types of deception leaders might use. Additionally, this theoretical literature will be empirically enriched as some concepts, particularly notions of betrayal, will here be tested through experiments. Finally, some of the findings on the role of emotion in political psychology studies of domestic political scandals will be shown to have greater generalizability, as this study applies them to the domain of war justifications.
Chapter 3: The “Voters’ Responses to Leaders’ War Justifications” Experiments, part 1

Introduction

As laid out in the theory chapter, I want to identify which of the possible worlds we inhabit: does the public care at all about normative issues when formulating opinions in response to the president’s foreign policy and justifications for military action, and if so, to what extent and under what conditions? The first step in answering these questions is to run an experiment that will reveal some of the microfoundations of opinion formation through well-controlled, realistic scenarios.

This experimental study focuses on identifying the causal processes at work in determining how eligible voters will respond to the President’s justifications for military action. The key questions to be tested are whether success or failure is the strongest determinant of positive or negative responses, if criticism from a co-partisan elite amplifies negative responses, or if the truth-quality of the President’s justifications, as revealed by the critic, is a significant factor in determining respondents’ approval or disapproval. Following from this analysis, I explore respondents’ specific reasons for disapproving of the president’s action, coupled with an examination of ways in which respondents might want the president to take responsibility for his actions. In this chapter, I will discuss the experiment design, hypotheses, coding of variables, and present descriptive data collected pre-treatment that describe the demographics of the subject pool and report respondents’

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1 The selection criterion for this study was: “eligible to vote in the United States.” This study did not ask if respondents voted in the last election, so that information on political engagement is unavailable.
political attitudes on a variety of issues. Chapter 4, following, presents analyses of the post-treatment data.

I find that regardless of outcome, the presence of deception makes respondents significantly less likely to approve of the military actions ordered by the president; that respondents are most likely to approve of military actions ordered by the president when the president’s justifications are truthful and the mission has a successful outcome; and that across all outcome conditions, negative cues from an elite co-partisan have no identifiable impact on a respondent’s likelihood of approving of the president’s military actions. I treat each of these results at length in Chapter 4.

This study’s findings expand the theoretical literature by identifying the role deception or truthfulness plays in how the public evaluates justifications for military action, as well as indicating whether or not the public’s disapproval will translate into active willingness to punish the president if deception is perceived. This study reveals previously undisclosed mechanisms of opinion formation and audience costs, a finding with practical implications for policymakers.

**Theory**

This study was designed to assess whether voters are driven by normative factors or if they follow exclusively pragmatic interests when evaluating the president’s justifications for military action. As discussed in the theory chapter, a significant literature emphasizes transparency and truth-telling as key to the democratic process. At the same time, other research has shown that the American people prefer successful outcomes to
failure, and that they tend to favor the actions of their own political party over those of the opposition party.²

As discussed, my theoretical framework builds on the idea of four possible worlds that may define the relationship between the public and the president. In the first, the public has no interest in foreign policy, so presidents may do whatever they want. In the second, the public only cares about pragmatics such as economic benefits and reduced burdens, so no other incentives matter.³ In the third, pragmatic concerns dominate, but the public also cares about truth as portrayed through the lens of elite partisan discourse. In the fourth, the public cares about truth for normative reasons – as a good in itself, aside from whatever pragmatic benefits it may have. The public's response to a president's actions should depend heavily on which of these frameworks best matches reality, with consequences for the president.

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³ It may be debated how relevant these preferences might be given the context of the "Global War on Terror." Although "success" in this context is unlikely to satisfy these preferences through territorial (re)acquisition as may have been the case in past conventional wars, it nonetheless remains the case that the economic burdens generated by an overextended military fall to the public. These burdens can be reduced if the theatres of operation can be reduced by meeting enough military goals to withdraw troops from those areas. While it may be acknowledged that there is low ability for the public to ascertain how much longer troops would need to remain, they can nonetheless recognize that meeting the mission’s goals will increase the likelihood of withdrawal and thus the reduction of economic burdens and the perception of increased security.
In the first world, we should expect to see no discernable consistency in how the public responds to the president’s foreign policy decisions. In the second world of pure pragmatics, success or failure should have a decisive role in public opinion formation, but neither partisan cues nor truthfulness should have any effect. In the third possible world, partisan identity actually forms the framework by which the public perceives events, and we should see an impact of truth or deception, but only insofar as it is communicated by one’s own partisan elites. However, if the fourth world holds, and normative concerns actually have intrinsic value to the public, this should be revealed by opinion formation that approves of truth and disapproves of deception regardless of outcome or partisanship. (Note that this fourth world does not completely discount possible effects of outcome and partisanship. Rather, the effects of truth and deception join the public’s previously established preferences for success and agreement with their own political party.)

Why Experiments?

Whereas the case study chapters later in this dissertation evaluate aggregate-level polling data in relation to key events, decisions, and statements made by the president and members of Congress, the cases are naturally full of confounding elements. In some cases, no polls were taken around a theoretically key event, allegations of deception posed by critics are offset by other factors, or the outcome of a particular situation is indeterminate. While careful case study methodology can alleviate some of these issues by dividing the cases into smaller units and exploring smaller-scale interactions among the various parts through process-tracing, it is never possible to control for all potential confounds factors.
Given these limitations of case-study research, experimental methodology is ideally suited to test some aspects of the theory that cannot be well tested by case studies. In particular, the element of experimental control is particularly valuable. In real-world situations, normative values, partisan loyalties and outcome desirability are intertwined, such that it is difficult to discern their relative importance or weight. Because of social acceptability bias (also known in social psychology as the experimenter demand effect), I could not directly ask individuals questions such as: “Do you care if the president tells the truth or not?” We would expect that most respondents would answer “yes,” because that is the socially approved answer, even though they might weight outcomes more heavily in certain situations. A carefully designed experimental treatment can probe this issue. By giving respondents realistic foreign policy scenarios, I sought to control for each of these factors, in order to clearly see which are of greatest importance in determining public approval or disapproval of the president’s actions.

Experimenters can control the value of each independent variable for each treatment. As McDermott and Aronson point out, the experimenter’s challenge is to design a situation that maximizes both impact (through realism and interest) and control. Notably, experimental realism does not require perfect imitation of the real world; rather it requires that “subjects believe the situation, problem, or issue they confront.” By designing fictional news articles for the scenarios, which vary explicitly along each of the theoretically

important dimensions and are sound in construct validity, I was able to create a study with functional experimental realism and internal validity. While the idiosyncrasies of my subject pool might limit the generalizability of my findings, the advantage of experimental control means that this study serves as the first step in isolating the causal processes of interest.

Although I use fictional news articles as the medium by which to communicate the scenarios that serve as the experimental treatments, deception was not used in my study. Although one might wonder if giving participants fictional scenarios might dampen treatment effects, because they may not engage with them as they would with a news article in a real-world setting, there is evidence from the experimental literature indicating that participants do engage emotionally with fictive scenarios. More importantly, from an empirical perspective, post-test self-reports show that a high proportion of subjects

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commented that the article felt very realistic and compelling, suggesting that experimental realism had been achieved.

**Hypotheses**

The study tests two categories of hypotheses: 1) hypotheses dealing with pragmatic strategic motivations and 2) hypotheses dealing with elite partisan cues. In each of these interest areas, the alternative hypothesis competing against the interest-based hypotheses is the strong normative hypothesis: regardless of success or failure and regardless of elite positions, if normative concerns are most important to the public, participants are expected to disapprove of revealed deception.

**Success-Oriented Hypotheses:**

My theory predicts:

H: Deception will lead to disapproval across all treatments. We should expect to see some disapproval of the military actions ordered by the president in cases of deception, regardless of success or failure of the action. The impact of Lie is expected to be stronger than the impact of Concealment.

Alternatively, the literature suggests:

H1: Success may inspire approval regardless of the truth-quality of justifications.

H2: Failure is most likely to incur disapproval, regardless of the truth-quality of justifications.
Partisan-Oriented Hypotheses:

My theory predicts:

H: Deception will lead to disapproval across all treatments, regardless of partisanship of respondents and elite critics.

Competing hypotheses from the literature:

H1: Senator’s critique of President should elicit more disapproval from respondents in their own party than in the opposition party.

H2: Disapproval incited by a co-partisan (matching) critic is more likely in cases of deception than in cases of truth.

H3: Disapproval incited by a co-partisan (matching) critic is more likely in cases of failure than in cases of success.

H4: Regardless of the critic’s party, deception is more likely to incur disapproval from respondents in the opposition party than in the President’s party.

Experimental design

The experiment consisted of a pretreatment survey of demographic information and political views, followed by the experimental treatments. Participants read a fictional news article set in the future in which the president orders a military strike against suspected terrorists in Yemen. Participants then answered a battery of questions regarding their reaction to the article.

Values of Independent Variables Manipulated in the Experimental Treatments

Table 9: Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Truthiness</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Criticism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Truth</strong> (Al Qaeda plot confirmed)</th>
<th><strong>Success</strong> (militants killed/captured; military strike with no American or civilian deaths)</th>
<th><strong>Republican</strong> (Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-KY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concealment</strong> (weapons but no bombing plot discovered; targeted killing)</td>
<td><strong>Failure</strong> (militants escape; American and civilian deaths)</td>
<td><strong>Democrat</strong> (Sen. Harry Reid, D-NV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lie</strong> (no Al Qaeda connection, no bombing plot)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The decision to use fictional news articles set in the future as the basis for the treatments was based on several factors. First, I chose not to use a past, real-life scenario because I did not want participants to focus on remembering how they felt about that event. Rather, I wanted to engage their prospective reactions to a scenario that was realistic enough to be believable, yet not directly associated with any particular real-world events. Yemen was selected because at the time the experiment was fielded, there were no extraordinary events ongoing, although the US military had ongoing collaborations with the Yemeni government\(^\dagger\) and was keeping watch against Al Qaeda activity in the region, while the Yemeni government continued to struggle with the separatist movement in the South. These latter factors meant that politically aware respondents would accept the fictional

scenario in Yemen as within the realm of possible real-world events.\textsuperscript{12} It is particularly important to note that this study was fielded between 30 December 2010 and 21 January 2011, before the protest and revolution movements collectively known as the “Arab Spring” had gained momentum.\textsuperscript{13}

An example article will illustrate the relevant variables. In this version, President Obama has ordered additional troops to Yemen to attack suspected Al Qaeda militants believed to be plotting to bomb the U.S. Embassy. During the fight, a cleric is killed, but many other militants escape, while both innocent civilians and US soldiers are killed.

[\textbf{Failure}] The soldiers find a weapons cache, but no other evidence of a bombing plot. At a press conference later, Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) criticizes the President, essentially arguing that the strike was a cover-up in order to kill the cleric, who had not been authorized for targeted killing [\textbf{Concealment, Republican Criticism}].

In the Truth versions of the fictional article, the US troops find Al Qaeda literature and plans for the bombing plot, while in the Lie scenarios, the suspected militants are revealed to be a Yemeni separatist group with no ties to Al Qaeda and no bombing plot. In the Success versions, no militants escape, and there are no US or civilian casualties. In half the scenarios, the Senator criticizing the President is identified as Harry Reid (D-NV). The full text of the fictional news articles is included in the first appendix to this chapter.

The decision to explicitly reference President Obama and two current senators as the characters in the article was deliberate. The first reason was simply in the interest of

\textsuperscript{12} See Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler (2009), \textit{Paying the Human Costs of War} (Princeton, Princeton University Press) for a similar treatment design.

\textsuperscript{13} During the time my study was fielded, Tunisia’s was the only completed revolution. Egypt’s would begin three days after my study was completed, while the first major demonstration in Yemen would take place six days after my study ended.
experimental realism: the fictional article would read more like a genuine Reuters piece if individual names were used as opposed to generic titles. The second reason relates to maintaining experimental control. As studies in experimental ethics have repeatedly shown, subjects tend to look for a real-life anchor or analog for fictive persons or events they encounter during the experiment. In that case, however, particular referents or anchors used by each individual are unknowns. By explicitly naming persons within the framework of a rigorously constructed event, I was able to connect to specific priors and specific biases (again, this highlights the importance of experimental realism). While there are various alternate scenario designs and characters that could have been used with interesting results, due to scope limitations on the research, I designed these scenarios to allow the most experimental control and tap into the most explicit relationship with respondents’ implicit beliefs.

**Coding of Theoretically Important Independent Variables**

This section explains how I coded experimental variables and provides the variable names for easy reference when looking at the regression tables. Because all variables of interest are appropriately understood as categorical variables (not continuous), they have all been coded singly or in groups of dichotomous variables for use in a logit model.

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15 Limitations of the scope design of this study and consequent avenues for future research are discussed in the conclusion to Chapter 4, following.
Main Effects:

Party of Respondent:

Partyd1 (binary, 1 = Democrat), Partyd2 (binary, 1 = Independent), Partyd3 (binary 1 = Other) (Partyd1 = Partyd2 = Partyd3 = 0 = Republican baseline)

This set of three dichotomous variables covers the partisan identification of all respondents. Republican participants are identified by all three of these variables being set to zero. Republicans were chosen as the baseline because the other groups of partisans are expected to diverge from Republicans in terms of both general beliefs about foreign policy and in baseline approval of the President. Although respondents’ partisan identifications as Republican or Democrat are recognized in the MatchingCritic variable that shows whether or not the respondent’s own party matches that of the Senator criticizing the President, it is theoretically important to include in the logit model the measures of all respondents’ partisan affiliation to identify any main effects of party affiliation. (This is especially important given the high number of Independents in this dataset.)

Outcome:

(Success = 1, Failure = 0)

This variable captures the outcome of the military strike in each scenario. A scenario codes as Success when the military strike is accomplished with no American or civilian losses and as Failure when targets escape and there are American and civilian casualties. Either Success or Failure could have been set as the baseline (0), but Failure was chosen in accordance with convention.
Truthiness:

Truthinessd2 (binary, 1=Concealment), Truthinessd1 (binary, 1=Lie) (Truthinessd2 = Truthinessd1 = 0 = Truth baseline)

This pair of dummy variables captures all values of Truthiness (truth-quality) of the president’s justifications for sending troops and ordering the strike. In the truth condition, both Truthinessd1 and Truthinessd2 are set to zero. Truth was selected as the baseline because both types of deception (Concealment and Lie) are divergent from Truth, and if the president is generally expected to provide honest justifications, there is also a strong theoretical case for setting Truth as the baseline.

Partisan critique matched to respondent’s party:

(MatchingCritic; match = 1, no match = 0)

This variable shows whether or not the party of the Senator criticizing the President matches that of the respondent. Matches are only possible for Republican and Democratic respondents, so a coding of “no match” does not in itself communicate anything further about the respondent’ political affiliations. This is why each respondent’s party is taken into account in the model by the dichotomous Party variables described above.

Criticism by a Democrat:

(CriticismDnotD; yes = 1, no = 0)

This additional dummy variable identifies whether or not the Senator criticizing the President was a Democrat (i.e., matched the President’s party). Note
that a “no” coding on this variable automatically means “Criticism by a Republican” because the criticism always comes from a Senator in either the Democratic or Republican parties. It was of theoretical importance to include this variable in the model because it may be that the party of the critic has a main effect on respondents’ perceptions even aside from affinity with one’s own party. That is, if the criticism is coming from a Senator within the President’s party (a Democrat), the criticism may be more compelling because one would expect automatic support from a partisan of the President. By that same token, criticism from a member of the opposition (a Republican) may be taken less seriously because the opposition may be expected to reflexively oppose the President. Thus, including this variable will help parse out the precise mechanisms of partisan effects.

**Interactions:**

Interaction effects are key to my analysis. Because it could be the case that major theoretical variables (Outcome, Truthiness, and MatchingCritic) might not have independent main effects, but may have an effect in conjunction with each other, I created sets of interaction variables to include in the model to capture the effects of the joint presence of these factors.

**Truthiness*Outcome:**

(ConcealmentxOutcome, LiexOutcome)

These interactions express the effects of the particular value of Truthiness combined with the value of Outcome. When both Concealment and Success are present (Truthinessd2 = 1 and Outcome = 1), the interaction variable
ConcealmentxOutcome has a value of 1. When both Lie and Success are present (Truthinessd1 = 1 and Outcome = 1), the interaction variable LiexOutcome has a value of 1. A value of zero indicates that an interaction is not present.

**Truthiness*MatchingCritic:**

(ConcealmentxMatchingCritic, LiexMatchingCritic)

These interactions express the effects of the particular value of Truthiness combined with the value of MatchingCritic. When a match between the respondent’s and critic’s parties and Concealment are both present (MatchingCritic = 1 and Truthinessd2 = 1), the interaction variable ConcealmentxMatchingCritic has a value of 1. When a party match and Lie are both present (MatchingCritic = 1 and Truthinessd1 = 1), the interaction variable LiexMatchingCritic has a value of 1. A value of zero indicates that an interaction is not present.

**Major Dependent Variables**

In response to the scenarios, the primary dependent variables to be examined are (1) approval for President Obama’s decision to increase troop presence in Yemen and (2) approval for the President’s decision to order the military strike in Yemen. The subsequent dependent variables, which focus on reasons for disapproval and willingness to hold the President accountable, only apply to the respondents who disapproved or were not sure with regard to these two primary dependent variables.

**DV1: Approval of the President’s decision to increase troops in Yemen:**

(Approve = 1, Disapprove = 0)
DV2: Approval of the President’s decision to order the military strike in Yemen:

(Approve = 1, Disapprove = 0)

Although responses to these questions were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly approve, Somewhat approve, Somewhat disapprove, Strongly disapprove, Not sure), for all analyses positive responses have been recoded as Approve (1) and negative responses have been recoded as Disapprove (0), while “Not Sure” responses have been dropped. This recoding was undertaken to increase the power of the analysis, given the high number of possible combinations of independent variable values. Respondents who answered “Not Sure” to both of these primary questions were not asked the question about reasons for disapproval (see analysis below), but they were asked the questions about presidential responsibility. Respondents who approved of both the troop increase and military strike were not asked the follow-up questions, because they did not disapprove and would not be expected to want to hold the President accountable.

Statistical model:

Because both major DVs were recoded as binary variables, all analyses were performed via logistic regression:

\[
\text{logit}(dv) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times Partyd1 + \beta_2 \times Partyd2 + \beta_3 \times Partyd3 \\
+ \beta_4 \times Outcome + \beta_5 \times Truthinessd1 + \beta_6 \times Truthinessd2 \\
+ \beta_7 \times MatchingCritic + \beta_8 \times CriticismDnotD + \beta_9 \times Lie \times Outcome \\
+ \beta_{10} \times Concealment \times Outcome + \beta_{11} \times Lie \times MatchingCritic \\
+ \beta_{12} \times Concealment \times MatchingCritic + \text{demographics}
\]

\[16\] See the note in Chapter 4, following, in which I report results for ordered logit models of the two primary independent variables re-expanded into their four-point Likert scale values (“Not sure” responses are still dropped). Overall, the results of the ordered logit models are consonant with my findings in the binary logit models, so there is no compelling reason to eschew the binary logit analyses, which are attractive in their simplicity and clarity of interpretation. For a brief discussion of the robustness of parametric statistics with respect to data collected on Likert scales, see Geoff Norman (2010), “Likert scales, levels of measurement and the ‘laws’ of statistics,” Advances in Health Science Education 15: 625-632.
Subject Selection

For the purposes of the analyses presented here and in Chapter 4, the dataset comprises 1,077 respondents recruited online through the Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk) platform during December 2010 and January 2011. Further discussion of this dataset and its idiosyncrasies appears below in the section on Procedure and Data. Additional data were collected from a group of a few hundred Duke University and NCSU students as well as some residents of the Durham area during Fall 2010; these data, along with about 100 additional observations from mTurk recruits collected in late January 2011, are not used for analyses presented in this chapter. Rather, this group of respondents from Duke and NCSU served as the pilot sample for this study. That work was particularly valuable because it allowed me to discover a flaw in the design of one of the treatment conditions, which inadvertently dampened the treatment effect. This flaw was corrected in the treatments administered to the sample of 1,077 participants recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. The additional 100 mTurk participants were not included in the analyses

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18 Data quality from the mTurk survey was verified by comparing the distribution of mTurk participant response times with those of the university and community participants in the pilot study. Modal response time for both groups was 8 minutes, while mean response time for both groups was 10 minutes.
19 In the pilot study, I had framed the Concealment scenarios with reference to Al Qaeda when reporting the mission’s outcome. In most of those cases, respondents perceived Al Qaeda as a “trump card,” viewing the strike as justified because concealment was not as apparent. Before fielding the mTurk study, I removed the reference to Al Qaeda from the Concealment scenarios.
here presented because they participated in the study between 23 and 25 January 2011, which (as mentioned above) overlaps slightly with the beginning of Egypt's uprisings. All data collected represent a sample of convenience.\textsuperscript{20} As long as they met the eligibility criterion for the study (eligible to vote in the United States), all prospective participants were accepted. No subsampling was done before administering the survey; rather, participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions and control groups by the online survey software (Qualtrics).\textsuperscript{21} In the Procedure and Data section, below, I discuss the particularities of my sample, compare my respondents along various dimensions to the respondents in the 2008 American National Election Studies survey, and offer conclusions regarding whether or not the sample represented is a source of limitation for this study.

**Demographic Variables**

Although they do not form part of my theoretical predictions, other demographic variables could have a significant main effect on the outcomes of interest. To avoid omitted variable bias, I ran model comparisons between the binary logit model featuring only the theoretically relevant independent variables and the binary logit model that included the most likely demographic variables. While the theoretical-only model was a better fit for some of the dependent variables of interest, the analyses and predicted probabilities reported in Chapter 4 are all based on the full model, including demographic variables.


\textsuperscript{21} Subscription through Duke University: http://www.qualtrics.com/
Naturally, goodness-of-fit was better for the complete model when any of the demographic variables were statistically significant. More generally, I report the full model in all cases, since it will be clear when the demographic variables do not account for significant variance.22

**Gender** (Genderd; female = 1, male = 0)

**Race/Ethnicity** (RaceEthd; minority = 1, Caucasian = 0)

**Age** (1 = 18-25; 2 = 26-35; 3 = 36-45; 4 = 46-55; 5 = 56-65; 6 = 66 or older)

**Highest Level of Education Completed** (EduOrd; high school equivalent or lower = 1; vocational/technical school or some college = 2; bachelor's degree or higher = 3)

### Procedure and Data

The experiments began with a standard pre-treatment survey to collect demographic information. Respondents then answered questions about their feelings regarding which issues are most important for the federal government to address; their attitudes toward American foreign policy and the use of military force; their trust in various national institutions and their approval of President Obama; and their levels of knowledge about foreign policy issues. Following these questions, participants were randomly assigned to one of the twelve possible scenarios mentioned above. After reading the scenario, they were asked questions measuring the two primary dependent variables: “Do you approve or disapprove of President Obama’s decision to increase troops in Yemen?” and “Do you approve or disapprove of President Obama’s decision to order the military strike in Aden,

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22 Goodness-of-fit was determined using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), which is calculated: \(2k - 2(\text{LL})\) where \(k\) is the number of parameters in the model and \(\text{LL}\) is the log-likelihood. See Kevin Burnham and David Anderson (2002), *Model Selection and Multimodel Inference*, (New York, NY, Springer-Verlag).
Yemen?” Those who responded with disapproval to either of those questions were asked follow-up questions about the reasons for their disapproval, and those who answered “disapprove” or “not sure” to those first two post-treatment questions were asked to choose options for how they thought the President should take responsibility for his decisions, and what actions they would take to induce him to take responsibility. These latter actions included options such as voting against candidates from the President’s party in the next election, petitioning for the troops to be brought home, and participating in a protest.

**Demographic Data**

As the correlation matrix below shows, correlations between most of the demographic and party ID variables are low, and the correlations that appear are unsurprising. Although “Republican” serves as the baseline to which the other Party IDs are compared, I included RnotR (1 Republican, 0 Not Republican) in this matrix to make explicit any potential correlations this variable might have.
Figure 1: Correlation Matrix for Demographics

The significant correlations are Race/Ethnicity and Democratic Party (positive – over half of minorities surveyed identified as Democrat); Age and Gender (positive – 41% of women surveyed were 36 years of age or older, compared to 32% of men); Age and Race/Ethnicity (negative – 44% of minorities surveyed were under age 36); Education and Democratic Party (positive – 47% of those with a Bachelor’s degree or higher identified as Democrat); and Education and Age (positive – respondents 36 years of age or older made up 42% of those holding a “Bachelor’s degree or higher,” compared to 34% of those who completed “some college” and 27% of those who only finished “high school or equivalent”).
These correlations are empirically substantiated in the literature and do not signify any unusual relationships among these data.

The following tables compare my subject pool to data taken from the 2008 American National Election Survey (ANES).

**Table 10: Gender and Race/Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>ANES 2008</th>
<th>Experiment Pool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>ANES 2008</th>
<th>Experiment Pool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is relatively little difference in gender representation in my subject pool as compared to the ANES pool. Racial/ethnic representation is skewed to overrepresent Caucasians in my study, and Asians are slightly overrepresented as well. African-Americans and Hispanics are the most underrepresented groups in this experiment. However, this
distribution is quite similar to that observed by Berinsky et al. in their study of 587 mTurk recruits.23

Table 11: Age and Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>ANES 2008</th>
<th>Experiment Pool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-33</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34-49</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-65</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66+</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education Level Completed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>ANES 2008</th>
<th>Experiment Pool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary or High School</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree or Higher</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the different age ranges offered to participants in the ANES 2008 study and my experiment, it is difficult to exactly compare the two groups. However, the median splits look quite similar, with over half of respondents in each group being in their early thirties or younger. Even so, my subjects are significantly better-educated than the ANES.

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participants. Over 90% of participants in my study experienced at least some college, compared to less than 60% of the ANES participants. This disparity is most likely due to selection effects: because my study was hosted entirely online, mTurk participants could only be recruited if they had sufficient access to the Internet to log in, find, accept, and complete the study in a single sitting (the survey did not allow a respondent to save, exit, and return to it later). Internet access is likely correlated with income, which is also typically positively correlated with level of education. In my experiment pool, the most highly educated respondents also reported higher average income than the less-educated respondents.

Table 12: Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>ANES 2008</th>
<th>Experiment Pool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other / None</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the educational distribution, the distribution of religious affiliation is skewed in my study as compared to the ANES group. Although Catholics are almost equally represented, Protestants are strongly under-represented and participants with other or no religious beliefs are strongly overrepresented by comparison. Religious affiliation does not play a predictive role in my study, except insofar as it may be a precursor of political
affiliations. However, since that effect would be captured in reported political affiliations (below), further investigation of this linkage is not useful for this study.

Table 13: Partisanship and Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>ANES 2008</th>
<th>Experiment Pool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Ideology</th>
<th>ANES 2008</th>
<th>Experiment Pool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Liberal</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Liberal</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Conservative</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Conservative</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Republicans are most underrepresented in my study, Democrats are also somewhat underrepresented and Independents strongly overrepresented. While

24 A full 31% of my respondents chose “none” as their religious affiliation. Of this group, only 6% identified as Republican. While this proportion of atheists in the subject pool is surprising relative to the ANES data, it is fairly consonant with Berinsky et al.’s mTurk findings – over 40% chose “none,” 20% chose “Protestant,” and 16% chose “Jewish.” See Adam J. Berinsky, Gregory A. Huber, and Gabriel S. Lenz (2010), “Using Mechanical Turk as a Subject Recruitment Tool for Experimental Research” Working Paper (http://web.mit.edu/berinsky/www/workingpapers.html): 22.
respondents’ political ideology is likewise skewed toward more liberal views compared
with subjects in the ANES study, political ideology maps onto partisanship in an
unsurprising manner. Independents are more moderate, Republicans more conservative,
and Democrats more liberal.

Political Views

Following collection of the demographic data, the pretreatment survey sought to
measure participants’ baseline levels of confidence in political and social institutions,
foreign policy interest, beliefs about the use of military force, and presidential approval.
Because the questions asked in my experiment do not appear in the ANES study, I present
comparisons with results from other national polls as appropriate.
Table 14: Institutional Confidence (Experiment)

Institutional Confidence – Experiment Pool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Not very confident</th>
<th>Not at all confident</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White House</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Military</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Media</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Party</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Institutional Confidence (Gallup)
In both my study and in the Gallup poll, about 50% of respondents express confidence in the White House (or Executive Branch). Participants in my experiment expressed slightly less confidence in Congress than respondents to the Gallup poll reported for the Legislative Branch. Gallup poll respondents’ confidence in the news media is a full twenty percentage points higher than that reported by participants in my study. The mTurk participants’ evaluations of their confidence in various institutions is consonant with the recent decreasing public trust in Congress.\textsuperscript{25} The most interesting contrast is between the high expressed confidence in the White House (a combined 51%) versus the low expressed confidence in Congress (a combined 29%). It is possible that this orientation will affect how participants respond to the experimental treatments – if they have less confidence in Congress as an institution, they may discount the senator’s critique of the president when reading the scenario. Additionally, it is possible that low confidence in the news media

\begin{table}[h]
\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & A great deal of confidence & A fair amount of confidence & Not very much confidence & None at all \\
\hline
Executive Branch & 20\% & 29\% & 27\% & 24\% \\
\hline
Legislative Branch & 5\% & 31\% & 42\% & 21\% \\
\hline
News Media & 12\% & 31\% & 36\% & 21\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
\end{table}

overall (despite reasonably high amounts of confidence in the New York Times) may render the article format of the scenario less persuasive to the respondent.26

**Table 16: Issue Salience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue that should be top priority for the Federal government</th>
<th>First Choice</th>
<th>Second Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The war in Iraq and Afghanistan</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job creation and economic growth</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigration</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The environment and climate change</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although a lack of similar questions in either the ANES study or other national polls made it impossible to compare the experiment participants’ views on which issue should be top priority for the Federal government, , understanding their perspectives is useful for interpreting the analyses in the next chapter. Notably, domestic issues predominate among the responses, with “job creation and economic growth” comprising more than half of the first set of responses and 21% of the second set of responses, while “health care” is the

26 In fact, in the self-reporting free answer section at the end of the study, several respondents specifically voiced their mistrust of the news media and its “biases.”
second most salient choice – 14% of the first set of responses and 26% of the second set. Yet “the war in Iraq and Afghanistan” is the third most popular second choice, tying with “the environment and climate change” for third most popular first choice. Given the relatively low salience of foreign policy issues compared to domestic problems, it might be expected that the experimental scenario, which is entirely a foreign policy matter, may not resonate particularly strongly with respondents.

Table 17: Foreign Affairs Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Affairs Awareness / Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you say you follow what’s going on in foreign affairs all of the time, most of the time, some of the time, rarely, or never?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All of the time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most of the time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Some of the time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rarely</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Never</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not sure</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On how many days out of the past week would you say you:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>watched a news story about foreign affairs on television or on the internet</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not sure</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To better gauge their interest in and awareness of foreign affairs, respondents were then asked to report their relevant news consumption habits (see Table 17). Despite the high salience of domestic policy issues, 40% of respondents reported that they follow foreign affairs “all the time” or “most of the time.” Additionally, 66% said they read a news article about foreign affairs two or more days each week, while 58% reported viewing a news story about foreign affairs two or more days in the past week. Although 22% reported not viewing, and 15% reported not reading, a foreign affairs article in the past week, when both media are taken in combination, only 3% of respondents in the entire dataset reported neither reading nor viewing a foreign affairs news article in the past week. This finding suggests that respondents are not ignorant of or uninterested in foreign policy matters.

Finally, as a way to gauge a more specific measure of the potential salience of various policy issues, respondents were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement that the United States should be willing to use military force to achieve various goals.
Figure 2: Reasons to Use Military Force

While “Bringing democracy to other nations” had low support at just over 20% agreement, the very high agreement for the other options is quite notable. If the public were experiencing war-weariness after eight years of US involvement in Afghanistan and seven years in Iraq, we might not expect to find such strong belief that the United States should be willing to use military force to achieve any of these goals, let alone almost all of them. Of particular note is the nearly 80% agreement that the US should be willing to use military force to combat global terrorist organizations and the over 70% agreement that the US should be willing to use military force to prevent the spread of weapons of mass
destruction. This finding suggests, at least in principle, that respondents to this survey still consider global terrorism and weapons of mass destruction significant enough that the US ought to be prepared to address them militarily, despite the long involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. A greater than 80% agreement for using military force to support and defend allies is not surprising, as public opinion polls historically have indicated that a strong majority consistently favors supporting and defending countries allied with the US.27

Besides understanding respondents’ positions on various foreign policy issues, it is also necessary to consider their pretreatment approval level of President Barack Obama.

**Table 18: Presidential Approval**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Barack Obama is handling his job as President?</th>
<th>Gallup Poll (1/5/11)</th>
<th>CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll (1/23/11)</th>
<th>Experiment Pool (12/30/10 – 1/21/11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For ease of comparison, respondents’ evaluations of the president are shown with results from a Gallup poll taken one week into my data collection, as well as a CNN poll taken two days after my data collection was completed. Respondents’ views on how the respondents chose “strongly agree” when expressing their support of US willingness to use military force for each of the three goals that met with the highest agreement.
president was handling his job are very close to the approval levels found by the CNN poll. It must also be noted that partisan affiliation is strongly associated with presidential approval levels. For example, 89% of Republicans disapproved, while 82% of Democrats approved of how President Obama was handling his job. Independents were more closely split, with 45% disapproving and 55% approving. Given that Democrats and Independents make up 74% of the respondents in this study, there will be even stronger support for my theory if the treatment variables of interest are found to have significant impact on how participants evaluate and respond to the president’s actions and justifications.

In the following chapter, I present results of my statistical models, demonstrating support for the normative truth-preference hypothesis.
Chapter 4: The “Voters’ Responses to Leaders’ War Justifications” Experiments, part 2

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the data collected through this experimental study are used to test hypotheses concerning the relative impact of the factors of outcome, partisanship, and deception vs. truth-telling. My theory predicts that respondents will be more likely to disapprove of military actions ordered by the president when they have read scenarios in which his justifications are revealed to involve concealment or a lie. While my theory also expects lower rates of approval when respondents have read a scenario with failure as the outcome, the prediction is that deception is more likely than truth to have a negative effect on approval for both failure and success. My theory also predicts that while partisanship may be expected to affect approval in several different possible ways (see note below), deception is expected to make approval less likely, regardless of partisanship factors.

The following analyses confirm this: deception (captured by the Truthiness variables) has an effect on respondents’ approval of military actions ordered by the president, independent of the effects of outcome and partisanship. Moreover, respondents differentiate between types of deception (Concealment vs. Lie), rather than exclusively making a simple Truth/Not Truth distinction. This finding further supports my theory’s explanatory value, suggesting that respondents distinguish between grades of deception.

Subsequently, I examine respondents’ interest in holding the president accountable. While respondents who disapproved overwhelmingly wanted the president to take
responsibility for his actions, it is questionable whether or not the president should be worried about their disapproval if respondents do not act. Therefore, the last part of the analytical discussion examines potential actions respondents said they would be willing to take in order to get the president to take responsibility. While willingness to commit to any particular action was relatively low, the categories of action respondents selected shed some light on the types of audience costs that might be generated in response to perceived deception from the president. These findings open up avenues for future research and offer some support for recognizing a normative dimension to audience costs.
Findings

Primary Dependent Variables: Approval for the Troop Increase in Yemen and Approval for the Military Strike in Yemen

Table 19: Logit Models for Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*p &lt; .05, **p &lt; .01, ***p &lt; .001</th>
<th>Approval of Troop Increase</th>
<th>Approval of Military Strike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrat Party1</td>
<td>-.611*** (.180)</td>
<td>-.655*** (.181)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Party2</td>
<td>-.900*** (.205)</td>
<td>-.927*** (.206)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Party3</td>
<td>-.142*** (.390)</td>
<td>-.137*** (.390)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie Truthiness1</td>
<td>-.524* (.252)</td>
<td>-.745** (.257)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment Truthiness2</td>
<td>-.503* (.248)</td>
<td>-.664** (.257)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>.541* (.232)</td>
<td>.607** (.234)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MatchingCritic</td>
<td>-.062 (.271)</td>
<td>.098 (.273)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CriticismDontD</td>
<td>-.251 (.140)</td>
<td>-.208 (.140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie *Outcome</td>
<td>-.432 (.350)</td>
<td>-.223 (.352)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment *Outcome</td>
<td>-.146 (.328)</td>
<td>.049 (.333)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie *MatchingCritic</td>
<td>-.159 (.350)</td>
<td>-.155 (.353)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment *MatchingCritic</td>
<td>.048 (.358)</td>
<td>-.238 (.362)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.134 (.137)</td>
<td>.489*** (.138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity RaceEthid</td>
<td>.225 (.180)</td>
<td>.235 (.182)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.036 (.056)</td>
<td>.102 (.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education EduOrd</td>
<td>.009 (.105)</td>
<td>.006 (.107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-638.19</td>
<td>-630.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable 1: Approval for the Troop Increase in Yemen

Approval for Troop Increase in Yemen, Varying Truthiness and Outcome

Respondents’ evaluations of President Obama’s decision to increase troop presence in Yemen indicate that in the face of deception, the outcome no longer plays a significant
role in approval. Unlike respondents who read Lie or Concealment scenarios, only respondents who read scenarios with truthful justifications were significantly more likely to approve when the outcome was a success as opposed to a failure. The figure below shows a graph of the predictions of the logit model Approval of Troop Increase, with p values generated by Wald tests.¹

![Approval for Troop Increase in Yemen depends on Truthiness and Outcome](image)

**Figure 3: Approval of Troop Increase, Truthiness by Outcome**

These findings are consistent with my theory, as Outcome and Truthiness significantly influence approval in the predicted direction (Concealment and Lie reduce approval relative to Success). Moving from Truth to Concealment to Lie across both

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¹ Equivalent to a chi-squared test of the hypothesis that a particular linear combination of variables is 0.
Outcome conditions significantly reduces approval, representing drops of ten to fifteen percentage points. Again, Outcome significantly affects approval for Truth scenarios, but is no longer significant in cases of deception.

This finding offers strong support for my first outcome-oriented hypothesis: “Across all treatments, we should expect to see higher disapproval of the military actions ordered by the president in cases of deception, regardless of success or failure of the action.” Furthermore, the limited effect of Outcome suggests that deception, when present, may be a more salient factor in respondents’ opinion formation on this question.

However, these results fail to support my second outcome-oriented hypothesis: “The impact of Lie is expected to be stronger than the impact of Concealment.” Rather, it appears that respondents here differentiate between Truth and not-Truth, but do not to draw more nuanced distinctions between degrees of not-Truth (Concealment and Lie).

| Approval for Troop Increase in Yemen, Varying Matching Critique and Outcome |
Figure 4: Approval of Troop Increase, Truthiness by Matching Critique

Figure 4 depicts the same dependent variable, this time as a function of Truthiness and Matching Criticism. Again, the Truth/Not-Truth distinction is apparent, but the effect of Matching Critique is negligible in all conditions. Therefore, these results do not support competing hypotheses 2 and 3: “Disapproval incited by matching critic is more likely in cases of deception than in cases of truth,” and “Disapproval incited by matching critic is more likely in cases of failure than in cases of success.”
Dependent Variable 2: Approval for Military Strike in Yemen

The figure below shows a graph of the predictions of the logit model for Approval of Military Strike, with \( p \) values generated by Wald tests.\(^2\) Here again, deception results in disapproval across both Success and Failure conditions (with a trend toward significance in the Lie condition). However, Failure also makes disapproval more likely in both the Truth and Concealment conditions.

\(^2\) Equivalent to a chi-squared test of the hypothesis that a particular linear combination of variables is 0.
Truthiness is once again a significant predictor of approval, with an effect size of over ten percentage points between Truth and Conceal, and twenty points between Truth and Lie. The effect size of Success relative to Failure is about ten percentage points for both the Truth and the Concealment conditions and eight points in the Lie condition (the former two significant at $\alpha < 0.01$, the latter exhibiting a trend).

These findings likewise offer support for my first outcome-oriented hypothesis: “Across all treatments, we should expect to see higher disapproval of the military actions ordered by the president in cases of deception, regardless of success or failure of the action.” That is, Concealment and Lie still significantly reduce approval levels relative to Truth, even in cases of Success. Additionally, the approval-boosting effect of Success also appears, as expected. Finally, these findings also provide some support for my second outcome-oriented hypothesis: “The impact of Lie is expected to be stronger than the impact of Concealment.” Although there are no statistically significant differences between Lie and Concealment across the two Outcome conditions, the effect size of Lie relative to Truth is greater than the effect size of Concealment relative to Truth for Success conditions. Even though the difference between Lie and Concealment is not significant, the pattern of approval ratings has the right direction: Lie/Concealment/Truth, low/medium/high. As in Approval of Troop Increase, respondents still make a Truth/Not Truth distinction. However, I suggest that approval rates for Failure are even lower for the military strike because the failure is a direct outcome of the military strike, whereas the troop increase is simply the prior condition.
Approval for Military Strike in Yemen, Varying Matching Critique and Outcome

Approval for Military Strike in Yemen depends on Truthiness, but not Matching Critique

As in the analysis of Matching Critique for the troop increase, we see here that all significant variation in the data is driven by Truthiness, not by Matching Critique. These findings offer support for my first partisan-oriented hypothesis: “Across all treatment, treatments featuring deception conditions are expected to incur more disapproval than truth conditions, regardless of partisanship of respondents and elite critics.” However, it is not possible on the basis of these results to reject the null hypothesis for competing hypotheses 2 and 3: “Disapproval incited by matching critic is more likely in cases of deception than in
cases of truth,” and “Disapproval incited by matching critic is more likely in cases of failure than in cases of success.” (That is, we cannot reject the hypothesis that Matching Critique has no effect.)

Second Set of Dependent Variables: Reasons for Disapproval – Exploring Theorized Mechanisms

Having constructed a first tier of support for my theory based on respondents’ approval of presidential military actions, the next step is to probe the decision mechanisms operating during opinion formation. Respondents who disapproved of either the troop increase or military strike were asked to select up to three reasons for their disapproval, corresponding to various normative and pragmatic dimensions proposed by my theoretical framework.

Selecting the first answer, "The President’s reasons didn’t match the facts on the ground," is most closely associated with the “fourth world,” in which normative concerns, including truth-telling, have intrinsic value. The next reason, “Goals not achieved,” is expected to highlight pragmatic concerns, namely success or failure of the military strike. The next two reasons, “American casualties not worth it” and “Too many deaths,” are also expected to tap into pragmatic concerns about the costs vs. benefits of military action, as well as normative views regarding what sorts of costs are justified and when. “We should finish the job in Iraq and Afghanistan so all the troops can come home” is expected to relate to pragmatic concerns about costs vs. benefits of military involvement in multiple theatres. This final reason is also expected to illuminate partisan responsiveness, as the senator criticizing the president always refers to “fulfilling our commitments to Iraq and
Afghanistan.” Finally, “America shouldn’t be the world’s policeman” is expected to capture both normative and pragmatic views about the justifiability and feasibility of military involvement around the world.

“The President’s Reasons Didn’t Match Facts on the Ground,” Varying Outcome and Truthiness

Table 20: Disapproval - Reasons Didn’t Match Facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reasons Didn’t Match Facts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* p &lt; .05, ** p &lt; .01, *** p &lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat Party1d1</td>
<td>-.549* (.239)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Party2d2</td>
<td>-.085 (.255)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Party3d3</td>
<td>-.170 (.490)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie Truthiness1d1</td>
<td>1.14*** (.314)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment Truthiness2d</td>
<td>.436 (.316)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>-.542 (.388)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MatchingCritic</td>
<td>-.322 (.464)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CriticismDnotD</td>
<td>.257 (.172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie*Outcome</td>
<td>.896 (.463)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment*Outcome</td>
<td>.734 (.472)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie*MatchingCritic</td>
<td>.264 (.511)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment*MatchingCritic</td>
<td>.911 (.525)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.110 (.167)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity RaceEth1d</td>
<td>-.315 (.234)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.038 (.069)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education EduOrd</td>
<td>.545*** (.134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-Likelihood</td>
<td>-438.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>737</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20 presents results of a logit model for dependent variable “The President’s reasons didn’t match the facts on the ground” as a function of Truthiness and Outcome. As expected, reading the Lie scenario has a highly significant, positive correlation with selecting “the President’s reasons didn’t match the facts on the ground” as a reason for disapproving of the military actions. Level of education is also highly significant and positively correlated with this response, suggesting that higher-educated individuals are more likely to consider the validity and truthfulness of justifications for military action. Additionally, Democrats were significantly less likely than Republicans to select this reason for disapproval, which suggests support for the “predisposition factor.” That is, because the Republicans in this study are unfavorably predisposed towards President Obama, a Democrat, they are more willing to perceive inferior truth-quality in his justifications.3

---

3 As discussed in Chapter 3, 89% of Republicans in this study disapproved of how the president was handling his job in the pretreatment survey, compared to only 18% of Democrats and 45% of Independents. In the 13-17 January 2011 NBC/WSJ poll, which found 53% approval and 41% disapproval overall, 79% of Republicans disapproved, compared with 8% of Democrats and 45% of Independents. (Survey by NBC News, Wall Street Journal. Methodology: Conducted by Hart and McInturff Research Companies, January 13 - January 17, 2011 and based on 1,000 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. The sample included 200 respondents who use a cell phone only. [USNBCWSJ.11JAN.R04A].)
Respondents distinguish between the severity of Concealment and Lie

Figure 7: Reasons Didn't Match Facts, Truthiness by Outcome

Figure 7 depicts the predicted probabilities of selecting this answer along the different Truthiness and Outcome conditions. As anticipated, there is no significant effect of Outcome. However, the selection pattern for this answer clearly shows that respondents not only perceive Lie and Concealment as different from Truth, but also they see those conditions as different from each other. The effects of Lie relative to Concealment and Concealment relative to Truth for both Success conditions are large and significant, about twenty percentage points. In fact, the only difference between Truthiness conditions not to
reach significance was that between Truth and Concealment scenarios in the Failure condition (though the model suggests a trend).

“The President’s Reasons Didn’t Match Facts on the Ground,” Varying Matching Critique and Truthiness

Figure 8 depicts “the President’s reasons didn’t match the facts on the ground” as a function of Truthiness and Matching Critique. Here, the effect of deception is still clear, as in Figure 5. However, while the effect size of Matching Critique relative to No Match is
negligible in the Truth and Lie conditions, Matching Critique has an effect size of over ten percentage points within the Concealment condition. Although this difference barely misses the threshold for statistical significance, it offers special insight into partisanship effects. 78% of those who read a Concealment/MatchingCritic scenario and then selected this reason for disapproval were Democrats. Democrats were significantly less likely than Republicans overall to select this reason, but became more likely to select it after reading a criticism from a Democratic senator. This finding offers tentative support for the “betrayal factor” – the idea that perceiving deception from a leader in one’s own party will result in strong disapproval – by suggesting that one is more likely to perceive a co-partisan leader’s deception when it is criticized by another co-partisan elite (as opposed to an opposition elite). The figure below provides graphical representation of this phenomenon.4

4 For Democrats reading a Concealment scenario, the effect size of Matching Critique is nearly twenty percentage points. This difference almost meets the threshold for statistical significance (χ²(1) = 3.24, Prob > χ² = 0.0720).
Figure 9: Comparison of Matching Critique's Effect for Democrats and Republicans in Concealment Condition
Table 21: Goals Not Achieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals Not Achieved</th>
<th>( p &lt; .05 ), ( ** p &lt; .01 ), ( *** p &lt; .001 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrat Partyd1</td>
<td>-.362 (.243)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Partyd2</td>
<td>-.183 (.260)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Partyd3</td>
<td>.070 (.413)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie Truthinessd1</td>
<td>-.002 (.297)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment Truthinessd2</td>
<td>-.328 (.302)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>-.842* (.340)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MatchingCritic</td>
<td>.210 (.380)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CriticismDntD</td>
<td>.294 (.177)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie*Outcome</td>
<td>.768 (.430)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment*Outcome</td>
<td>.078 (.462)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie*MatchingCritic</td>
<td>-.309 (.444)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment*MatchingCritic</td>
<td>.184 (.474)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.205 (.171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity RaceEthd</td>
<td>.150 (.229)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.066 (.072)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education EduOrd</td>
<td>.024 (.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo ( R^2 )</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-Likelihood</td>
<td>-424.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( N )</td>
<td>737</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses to this question show tentative support for my theory. This option was offered with the expectation that respondents would choose it on the basis of their assessment of whether or not the mission met with military success. The scenarios were
designed such that the Success condition entailed achieving military goals (no militants escape) with no costs, while Failure entailed not achieving military goals (militants escape) while suffering costs (US soldiers and Yemeni civilians are killed). Thus respondents were expected to choose it more often in cases of Failure and less often in cases of Success. As expected, Outcome is statistically significant and negatively correlated with selecting this reason. That is, respondents were more likely to select “goals not achieved” as one of their reasons for disapproval after reading a Failure scenario, which confirms expectations that people prefer success to failure.

![Figure 10: Goals Not Achieved, Truthiness by Outcome](image-url)
However, this pattern holds only for the Truth and Concealment scenarios. As expected, the effect of Failure is fairly large in these conditions – a change of just under fifteen percentage points between Success and Failure in the Concealment condition and just over fifteen percentage points between Success and Failure in the Truth condition (both statistically significant). However, there is no discernible effect of Failure within the Lie condition. That is, for Lie, success just as bad as Failure, with an increase of twenty percentage points in cases of Lie/Success relative to Concealment and fifteen percentage points relative to Truth.

How can these results be explained? The ideological distribution within the Lie/Success group selecting this answer is reasonably varied: 37% were Conservatives, 17% Moderates, and 46% Liberals, indicating that ideological biases are not the driving force.

However, as cognitive psychologists have argued, survey responses may be affected by salience of other issues or by the process of assessing one’s reasons for making a decision.\(^5\) It is important to recall that in this part of the post-treatment survey, respondents have been asked to think about their reasons for disapproval. In the Lie scenario (for both Outcome values), the senator criticizing the president has argues that the president’s stated reasons were “misleading” and has cited evidence showing their falseness. Thus I suggest that the respondents choosing “goals not achieved” after reading a Lie/Success scenario are

actually treating the lie as the most salient factor in the scenario, overshadowing the benefits of success. Corroborating this, a full 78% percent of these respondents also selected “the President’s reasons didn’t match the facts on the ground” as grounds for disapproval, indicating that deception loomed large in their thinking.6

---

6 Notably, on this response we see a Lie/Not Lie pattern in the responses. If the priming effect of “misleading” in the Lie/Success scenario is driving selection, then it appears that Concealment does not have a similar effect – while the president concealed that killing the cleric was a major reason for the strike, the cover-up does not negate the overall goal (targeting militants to protect the embassy) in the same way as the outright deception.
"American Casualties Not Worth It” and “Too Many Deaths"

Table 22: Disapproval - Casualties and Deaths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Casualties Not Worth It</th>
<th>Too Many Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrat Party1</td>
<td>-.016 (.252)</td>
<td>.749** (.241)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Party2</td>
<td>-.255 (.251)</td>
<td>.310 (.261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Party3</td>
<td>-.475 (.417)</td>
<td>.194 (.416)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie Truthinessd1</td>
<td>-.066 (.287)</td>
<td>.187 (.286)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment Truthinessd2</td>
<td>-.027 (.280)</td>
<td>.061 (.281)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>-.634* (.302)</td>
<td>-.051 (.294)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MatchingCritic</td>
<td>-.297 (.357)</td>
<td>-.421 (.361)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CriticismDoNotD</td>
<td>.053 (.170)</td>
<td>-.010 (.172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie*Outcome</td>
<td>-.357 (.407)</td>
<td>-1.16** (.402)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment*Outcome</td>
<td>-.319 (.410)</td>
<td>-.471 (.398)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie*MatchingCritic</td>
<td>.084 (.430)</td>
<td>.854* (.428)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment*MatchingCritic</td>
<td>.445 (.445)</td>
<td>.051 (.440)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.303 (.163)</td>
<td>-.010 (.162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity RaceEthd</td>
<td>-.326 (.228)</td>
<td>.228 (.215)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.179** (.066)</td>
<td>-.067 (.066)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education EduOrd</td>
<td>-.295* (.124)</td>
<td>-.114 (.122)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-Likelihood</td>
<td>-458.77</td>
<td>-465.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>737</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

"American Casualties Not Worth It,” varying Outcome and Success?

The logit model for disapproval reason “American casualties not worth it” (Table 22) shows that Outcome, age, and level of education all play statistically significant roles. A number of studies have shown variant effects of age and education level on casualty

7 The graph of the predicted probabilities from the model varying Matching Critique and Truthiness is not shown because there are no interesting significant results (as suggested by the lack of significance for MatchingCritic or its interaction terms in the model).
tolerance,\(^8\) and I, too, find that older respondents are more likely to choose “American casualties not worth it” as their reason for disapproval, whereas more highly educated respondents are less likely to choose this reason.\(^9\)

**Casualty sensitivity affected by Outcome, not Truthiness**

![Figure 11: American Casualties Not Worth It, Truthiness by Outcome](image)

---


\(^9\) Similar findings on these relationships between age and casualty tolerance and education level and casualty tolerance are reported by Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler (2009), *Paying the Human Costs of War* (Princeton, Princeton University Press); Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi (2004), *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force* (Princeton, Princeton University Press).
Figure 11, above, depicts the graph of predicted probabilities from the logit model for “American casualties not worth it” (Table 22) as a function of Truthiness and Outcome. While this reason was expected to be salient for respondents who disapproved after reading Failure scenarios, because the Failure condition entails American and civilian casualties, my expectation for the interaction between Truthiness and Failure was not confirmed. Because my theory predicts that disapproval is likely to be amplified in cases of deception/Failure as compared to deception/Success, I expected that respondents might be more likely to think that casualties are “not worth it” when their deaths occur in the context of deception. However, instead this finding suggests that respondents are primarily performing a basic calculus related to outcome sensitivity when they select this option.
“Too Many Deaths,” varying Outcome and Truthiness

When it comes to deaths, no effect of Failure for Truth condition

Figure 12: Too Many Deaths, Truthiness by Outcome

Figure 12 depicts response percentages for “too many deaths” as a function of Truthiness and Outcome. As expected, Failure makes choosing this response significantly more likely for both Concealment and the Lie scenarios. However, there is no significant effect of Failure in the Truth condition. Surprisingly, Outcome, both Truthiness variables, and MatchingCritic do not significantly affect the odds of choosing these responses, but the interaction variables Lie*Outcome and Lie*MatchingCritic are both significantly correlated
In addition, the interaction effect of Lie*Outcome is visible in the significant drop for Success in the Lie condition relative to Truth.

This may seem surprising, since the only reported deaths in the Truth/Success scenario were confirmed Al Qaeda militants planning a bombing plot. Nevertheless their self-reported explanations of their answers at the end of the study indicated overwhelmingly that these respondents did not consider US military operations in Yemen legitimate. Most common explanations included that that US should stop “interfering” in other countries and “let the Yemen government handle things,” while worrying about the long-term security risks of involvement (“interventions ... make acts of terrorism against American targets more likely” and “violence only generates more violence”).

Given these comments, it is quite possible that when they read the option “too many deaths,” these respondents were not thinking about the Yemen story exclusively, but rather the broader context of the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{10} Apparently, although a majority of these respondents supported at least one of the possible uses of US military force in the pretreatment survey, their abstract commitments do not appear to transfer to the concrete situation presented in the article. Additionally, it is worth recalling that the political ideology distribution of respondents in this study as a whole skews strongly liberal compared to the general population (as reported by the ANES 2008 poll data\textsuperscript{11}) – and in this particular group of respondents, there were only two Republicans, confirming that this

\textsuperscript{10} This possibility is also suggested by the fact that one-third of these respondents also selected “American casualties not worth it” as another of their reasons for disapproval. While it is not possible to completely rule out the possibility that they did not read the scenario carefully, mistakenly believing that American deaths occurred, the fact that none of them mentioned American deaths in relation to the scenario in their self-reporting at the end suggests that sloppiness is not responsible. For discussion of how the most salient element in a frame can overwhelm other factors, see John Zaller and Stanley Feldman (1992), “A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences,” American Journal of Political Science 36(3): 579-616.

\textsuperscript{11} Pearson’s chi-squared test for equality of distributions (chi-squared = 201.14, 6 degrees of freedom, $p < 0.000$).
result is driven by respondents with more liberal ideology. This suggests that some subjects may be less willing to countenance deaths in any specific military action, though supportive of such action in the abstract.

More conventionally, selecting “too many deaths” as a reason for disapproval after readings scenarios in which American soldiers and innocent civilians were killed lends support to the understanding that the public is not insensitive to casualties. As others suggest, the prospects of success for a military action may increase casualty tolerance, while others point to framing in terms of casualty ratios (number of US soldiers killed vs. number of enemy combatants killed) as increasing casualty tolerance. Because the Failure scenarios were designed to include both failure to achieve stated goals (militants escape) and the costs of that failure (US soldiers and Yemeni civilians killed), this finding does not help to disambiguate the specific role casualties play in determining disapproval for military action. However, a higher overall proportion of respondents chose “too many deaths” or “American casualties not worth it” than “goals not achieved” as a reason for disapproval. Thus, at least for the respondents in this study, it appears that battle losses were a slightly more salient aspect of failure than failing to achieve the mission goals. This

finding will be worth exploring further in a follow-up study focused on developing a clearer understanding of how voters weight goals and costs in evaluating military success.

Too Many Deaths, Varying Matching Critique and Truthiness

![Graph showing correlation between deaths, Lie, Concealment, and Truthiness](image)

**Figure 13: Too Many Deaths, Truthiness by MatchingCritic**

As noted in Table 22, Lie*MatchingCritic was significantly, positively correlated with selecting “too many deaths” as a reason for disapproval. Truthiness had no effect on selecting this option in the absence of matching criticism, but respondents who read the Lie
scenario with Matching Criticism were significantly more likely to choose it – ten percentage points more than for Truth or Concealment. This finding suggests that respondents who read a Lie scenario are more responsive to criticism from a co-partisan elite, which offers support for the hypothesis, “Disapproval incited by matching critic is more likely in cases of deception than in cases of truth.”

“Finish the Job in Iraq and Afghanistan so all the Troops Can Come Home” and “America Shouldn’t be the World’s Policeman”

Table 23: Disapproval - Finish the Job / Shouldn’t Be World’s Policeman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Finish the Job, Troops Can Come Home</th>
<th>America Shouldn’t Be World’s Policeman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrat Party d1</td>
<td>.186 (.227)</td>
<td>.764*** (.226)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Party d2</td>
<td>-.173 (.249)</td>
<td>.446 (.244)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Party d3</td>
<td>-.336 (.406)</td>
<td>.741 (.409)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie Truthiness d1</td>
<td>-.140 (.301)</td>
<td>-.767** (.292)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment Truthiness d2</td>
<td>.114 (.290)</td>
<td>-.585* (.287)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>.966*** (.298)</td>
<td>-.127 (.304)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matching Critic</td>
<td>.612 (.356)</td>
<td>-.196 (.359)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism * Not D</td>
<td>-.183 (.165)</td>
<td>-.079 (.164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie * Outcome</td>
<td>-.046 (.394)</td>
<td>.933* (.399)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment * Outcome</td>
<td>-.297 (.396)</td>
<td>.770 (.404)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie * Matching Critic</td>
<td>-.646 (.422)</td>
<td>-.019 (.423)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment * Matching Critic</td>
<td>-.529 (.433)</td>
<td>-.131 (.438)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.152 (.159)</td>
<td>-.046 (.160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity RaceEthd</td>
<td>-.030 (.214)</td>
<td>-.248 (.214)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.070 (.064)</td>
<td>-.022 (.065)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Edu Ord</td>
<td>-.294* (.121)</td>
<td>-.057 (.123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-Likelihood</td>
<td>-479.32</td>
<td>-473.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>737</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the logit results in Table 23 show, Outcome is statistically significant for choosing “finish the job” as a reason for disapproval. While the relationship in itself is unsurprising, the positive correlation is unexpected. That is, respondents who read about a successful operation and disapproved were more likely to want to finish US commitments to Iraq and Afghanistan “so all the troops can come home.” My theory does not make any predictions for why this reason should be significantly more popular across all cases of Success compared to Failure. A possible explanation is that this disapproval reason is less frequently chosen in cases of failure because of other critiques that become more salient for these cases.\textsuperscript{13} That is, respondents may highly disapprove of America’s perceived police role in all cases, but mission failure diverts priority to other reasons for disapproval. Perhaps those who disapprove of the military involvement in Yemen, even after reading a successful scenario, are opposed to further involvement of the US military around the world, and would like to reduce troop levels everywhere. Alternatively, perceived success in Yemen may increase the urgency of success and subsequent mission termination in other theatres of operation – a desire to ‘quit while we’re ahead,’ for example. It would be worthwhile to pursue additional research to address this issue, in order to understand how respondents think about the trade-offs between success and the opportunity to draw-down forces in other regions.

\textsuperscript{13} To gain more insight into how these reasons trade off against each other, I ran multinomial logit analyses using each reason as the baseline in turn. These results can be provided upon request.
High disapproval of America acting as “world policeman” across all cases; no variance among Success cases

Figure 14: America Shouldn't Be World's Policeman, Truthiness by Outcome

Also unexpectedly, for “America shouldn't be the world's policeman,” both Concealment and Lie variables significantly predict choosing this reason for disapproval, but their correlations are negative, meaning that respondents were less likely to choose this reason after reading a deception scenario. Also surprisingly, in Truth cases, respondents were just as likely to choose this reason after reading about Success as about Failure. Again, the reduced selection rate for this option in cases of Failure/deception may be due to increased salience of other possible reasons for disapproval under deception scenarios. However, the overall high popularity of this answer for respondents across all case
dimensions suggests a pervasive view that the United States is overextending itself through military involvement around the world. It will also be valuable to pursue further research to try to understand the particular sources of discontent and willingness to choose this reason, as the other factors measured by this study do not explain them.

**Responsibility and Punishment**

Lastly, following this exploration of the mechanisms of opinion formation, I will briefly consider respondents’ interest in holding the president accountable and their willingness to take action toward that end.

![Ways for the President to Take Responsibility](image)

**Figure 15: Responsibility**
Figure 15 shows the range of options for ways in which respondents would like the president to take responsibility for his actions. Respondents could select as many as they wished. The most popular way for the president to take responsibility was to “provide additional reasons for the strike.” This suggests a willingness to give the president a “second chance” to give additional explanation for his decisions and their justifications before deciding whether or not to seek punishment. This point is further discussed in the final section, below. “Bring the troops home from Yemen” was the second most popular accountability option, which is consonant with respondents’ frequent comments about the extent of US military involvement around the world and the costs it entails. Apologies were less popular, although it is interesting to note a nearly equal interest in apologies to the American public and the government of Yemen.

Finally, respondents were asked to rate the likelihood that they would take each of a given set of actions to induce the president to take responsibility. My theory expects that stronger penalties should follow from more severe forms of deception, as the public should become more incensed by more egregious types of deception due to the betrayal factor (as experienced by co-partisans) or the predisposition factor (confirmation of opponents’ prior negative beliefs).14 Although the logit models for these answers lack the necessary power to identify significant factors,15 the more interesting descriptive statistics of these respondents offer some tantalizing suggestions regarding accountability and punishment that will merit further study. Figure 16, below, shows the proportion of respondents who expressed willingness to take each action:

14 See Chapter 2, Tables 3 and 6.
15 It could also be the case that there is simply no clear pattern of responses, based on the options I provided.
Respondents were then asked to rate the likelihood that they would take a given action to get the President to take responsibility:

![Figure 16: Punishment Options](image)

**Table 24: Key to Figure 16 - Punishments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key:</th>
<th>Severity of Punishment:¹⁶</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OP Troops Return</td>
<td>low/med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote No Pres party</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con Sit/Rep Troops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB Troops return</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB Crit Pres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write to newspaper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cndl Vigil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March in prarest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁶ See Table 6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President’s political party in the next election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OP Crit Pres</td>
<td>Sign an online petition criticizing the President’s action</td>
<td>low/med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con Sen/Rep Troops</td>
<td>E-mail or phone your State Senator or Representatives asking Congress to bring the troops home from Yemen</td>
<td>med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB Troops Return</td>
<td>Join a Facebook group asking for the troops to be brought home from Yemen</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB Crit Pres</td>
<td>Join a Facebook group criticizing the President’s action</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write to newspaper</td>
<td>Write a letter to your local newspaper expressing your disapproval</td>
<td>med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cndl Vigil</td>
<td>Participate in a candlelight vigil for those killed in the strike</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March in protest</td>
<td>March in a protest criticizing the President</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Petition for Troops to Return from Yemen**

The most frequently selected punishment option was “Sign an online petition asking for the troops to be brought home from Yemen.” Respondents were slightly more likely to select this after reading a failure scenario, as were respondents who had read Concealment or Lie scenarios. Across all Truthiness and Outcome values, the only respondents who selected this action at a higher rate when reading a Success scenario were those in the Concealment/Success category. The ideological trend among those choosing this action skewed Liberal, as shown in the figure below.

![Figure 17: Ideological Distribution of Punishment - Online Petition to Bring Troops Home from Yemen](image)
**Vote Against Candidates from President’s Party**

The selection of “Vote against candidates from the President's political party in the next election” should be of particular interest in assessing meaningful consequences the president might face. As the second most popular punishment option, the first question is whether this response only captures disapproving Republicans – that is, respondents who were already planning to vote against Democratic candidates during the next election cycle. The figure below shows the distribution by political party of those who chose this punishment.

![Figure 18: Partisan Distribution for Punishment - Vote Against President’s Party](image-url)
As shown in Figure 18 above, while about 35% of these respondents were Republicans, over 20% were Democrats. Understanding these Democrats, as well as the Independents who comprise over 35% of this group, will begin to address the question of when the president should be concerned about consequences that directly affect political power. Given that the partisan distribution is not heavily skewed, the next question is whether there is a strongly Conservative ideological bent among the Republicans and Independents who comprise the bulk of this group of respondents.

Figure 19: Ideological Distribution of Punishment - Vote Against President's Party
However, as Figure 19 above shows, the ideological distribution of these respondents is more broadly distributed than the respondents who expressed willingness to sign a petition to bring the troops home from Yemen. Although there is a higher proportion of Conservatives and Moderates, about a third identified as Liberals. Thus, Conservative opposition to the Democratic president’s party cannot fully explain this punishment decision.

Figure 20: Truthiness Distribution of Punishment - Vote Against President’s Party

Rather, as Figure 20 shows, more respondents who read Lie scenarios chose this punishment option than those who read Concealment or Truth scenarios, and slightly more
of those who read Concealment scenarios chose this option than those who read Truth scenarios. A cross tabulation of Truthiness with Party across all outcomes shows that more Republicans and Independents who read Lie or Concealment scenarios chose this response than those who read Truth scenarios, but equal numbers of Democrats from the Lie and Truth conditions chose this option (Outcome also seemed to make no difference to the Democrats choosing this option) Likewise, there was no effect of Matching Critique, as almost equal numbers of Democrats from the Match and No Match conditions chose this option, while more Republicans from the No Match condition chose this option. This trend is interesting, suggesting that co-partisan respondents who are willing to vote against candidates from their party may be responding to deception or they may be dissatisfied with their party for unrelated reasons, but that member of other parties find themselves even less likely to vote for the president’s party in the face of perceived deception. This last point is particularly worth noting because Independents in this study skewed toward the Liberal end of the distribution. As the more Liberal-oriented Independents should be more likely to vote for Democratic political candidates, the president should be hesitant to use deception at the risk of losing these votes, as it appears that their vote choice can be swayed by perception of deception.

**March in a Protest**

Finally, a brief examination of those who indicated willingness to march in a protest will be valuable. Although action of this nature does not directly affect the distribution of power in the political system, it is considered a “high” severity punishment because of the

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17 The distribution of Independents who selected this response also skewed Liberal, although to a lesser degree than in the study as a whole. About 40% of Independents selecting this punishment option identified as Liberals, about 31% identified as Conservatives, and about 29% identified as Moderate.
potential reputational costs the executive may suffer. More of those who read Failure scenarios chose this option, while more Liberal respondents also chose this option with greater frequency. However, it is worth recalling that around 60% of the Independents in this study characterized themselves as Liberals, and the partisan distribution (Figure 21 below) shows that Independents were more likely than either Republicans or Democrats to express willingness to march in a protest criticizing the president.

![Figure 21: Partisan Distribution of Punishment - March in a Protest](image)

While this information about the self-reported willingness of respondents in this study to march in a protest is interesting, the more salient question is whether or not these
responses are at all reasonable to expect in the real world. In order to understand whether these projections of likely willingness to take action are realistic or not, it is helpful to compare the 10% in this study who predicted likely participation in a protest with polling data from the past thirty years, show in Figure 22 below.

**Figure 22: Protest Participation 1978-2008**

The polling data from 1978-2008, ranging from 3-9% reporting participation in a protest or demonstration, suggest that the 10% reporting willingness to participate in
protests are overreporting their actual likelihood of participation. Of course, this raises the question of how seriously the president ought to fear action beyond disapproval in the real world. However, even assuming inflated predictions of action across all of these options, the distributions are worth investigating through further experimental and empirical research to increase generalizability by delving deeper into the mechanisms by which respondents assess and select punishment options.

Free Responses

In specifying reasons for their answers in a voluntary free-response section at the end of the study, respondents’ comments converged on a few key themes: The most frequent explanations for disapproval mentioned US overcommitment around the world, the tactical failure of the strike and resultant casualties, general mistrust or disapproval of President Obama, and doubt about the veracity of justifications. The most common reasons for approval included overall confidence in President Obama (the need to give a leader a “second chance” was frequently cited in these responses), belief that his justifications were legitimate, belief that if there was any discrepancy between claims and observed facts, it was due to intelligence failures or media bias, and strong doubt of the news media as an accurate source of information. However, the fact remains that many of these same respondents did mention doubting the President’s justifications, and the statistical impact of deception on responses given was highly significant, as discussed above. General distaste

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for American overcommitment or reactionary dislike of the president simply cannot explain the patterns we find in the responses.

**Discussion**

As this study has shown, respondents both perceive and disapprove of deception in the president’s justifications for military actions. While there is some confirmation of the expected effects of Success and Failure on approval, it turns out that a co-partisan’s critique is most salient in terms of the reasons respondents cite to explain their disapproval, but seems unimportant for initial determination of approval or disapproval.

While these findings provide support for my theory, the pattern of responses suggests possibilities for further research. The way in which “Success” and “Failure” are operationalized in the scenarios deliberately combines the wellbeing of US forces and civilians and the status of the suspected militants as a result of the military strike. As others have demonstrated, casualty sensitivity can be mitigated by expectations of military success or framing that offsets losses by comparing them to enemy combatant losses. In order to trigger a perception of failure in respondents who would be more sensitive to casualties as well as those who would be more sensitive to escaped militants, the Failure measure included reports of American losses and destruction of civilian lives and property, along with more objective military-relevant assessments of escaped targets. That is, although casualties alone may not constitute failure, as previously shown, without clear

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consequences (such as civilian and American deaths), tactical failure may not be taken as seriously. The restrictions of the study and the limitations on creating scenarios that would provide the necessary cues in a clear and memorable way form the justifications for this decision. However, it may be argued that in real world situations, the public’s perceptions of success and failure are constructed along a much longer time horizon, such that a single tactical failure (and any casualties) are evaluated in the context of a much broader mission (for example, the public’s reactions to casualties in the recent war in Iraq are found to be contingent upon casualty ratio framing and prospective judgments about the likelihood that the US would succeed in establishing stability and fair governance).

Finally, because the scenarios focus exclusively on a single military event, it may be asked how much this study can reveal about the direction American public opinion will take in real world situations contextualized by a defined broader mission, with a longer time horizon. First of all, it should be noted that only 16 respondents altered their overall approval rating of President Obama after reading the scenario. Eight of those changed their opinion from disapproving of the president to approving of him, while the other six switched their initial approval of the president to disapproval after reading the fictional news article.20 This question was asked twice as a control measure, because I did not expect a speculative account of a single military event to affect respondents’ overall judgment of the President and how he was “handling his job.”

Contrariwise, there were other respondents who declared a loss of trust in the President as a result of reading the article. These responses show a real effect of the

20 Notably, three of those changed from disapproval to approval after reading a Failure scenario; five changed from disapproval to approval after reading a Success scenario; five changed from approval to disapproval after reading a Failure scenario; and one changed from approval to disapproval after reading a Success scenario.
“betrayal factor,” and suggest that while a single instance of revealed deception is not in itself sufficient to turn public opinion against the president across a wide range of issues, it can lower their opinions such that over time, mistrust and concomitant disapproval may grow. Furthermore, while a significant portion of the public may be willing to give the president the benefit of the doubt at the first indication of misleading, it is noteworthy that the language used most often refers to a “second chance” or “another chance.” It is not too far a stretch to recognize that this initial generosity toward the president will not necessarily extend to a third or fourth perceived infraction. Thus, although the ability to generalize directly from responses to a single, fictional military event to a longer-term campaign in real terms is understandably limited, there is substantial evidence to indicate that this study provides valid measures of public opinion formation, and suggests that longer-term consequences may ensue when deception is perceived.

**Conclusion**

While providing basic support for my theory’s predictions that perceived deception will inspire disapproval, this study also uncovered some interesting ways in which respondents view Lie versus Concealment. Notably, the Lie/Concealment distinction does not become significant until people express their reasons for disapproval – when making the initial approve/disapprove decision, it appears that the difference between Truth and Not Truth is far more important. Truth matters for approval. Not only does deception significantly contribute to disapproval across cases, it also diminishes the approval-boosting effect of Success. Furthermore, while Concealment may in some conditions provoke as negative a response as Lie, in others, respondents clearly distinguish among
levels of deception. The implications of these findings for the consequences of presidential mis-leading show decisively that normative concerns, particularly a desire for truth-telling, do in fact play a significant role in public opinion formation when assessing the president’s justifications for military action.
Chapter 5: The Vietnam War

Introduction

While the conventional wisdom regarding the Gulf of Tonkin Incident and the beginning escalation in Vietnam is that disapproval was all casualty-driven and failure-driven. My theory says that yes, over the long-term continuous casualties and reduced prospects for success contributed to disapproval (including the misperception that the Tet Offensive was a failure). However, disapproval begins earlier, in 1966 following the Fulbright Hearings and the doubts raised regarding the validity of the Resolution – passed to enable response to the specific incident – as sufficient to justify ever-increasing levels of US commitment. Therefore, I argue that disapproval at this time cannot be attributed to casualties/failure or public belief that Southeast Asia and the spread of Communism were irrelevant. Rather, that level of involvement was seen as unjustified. This was particularly the case because of the growing sense that President Johnson was not telling the “real truth” about the situation – South Vietnamese levels of support, what actions would be effective, how long and to what extent the US would have to maintain forces in the region.

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident

On August 4, President Johnson gave a public address reporting on the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

The initial attack on the destroyer Maddox, on August 2, was repeated today by a number of hostile vessels attacking two US destroyers with torpedoes. The
destroyers and supporting aircraft acted at once on the orders I gave after the initial act of aggression. We believe at least two of the attacking boats were sunk. There were no US losses.

... The determination of all Americans to carry out our full commitment to the people and to the government of South Viet-Nam will be redoubled by this outrage. Yet our response, for the present, will be limited and fitting. We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risks of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war.

I have instructed the Secretary of State to make this position totally clear to friends and to adversaries and, indeed, to all. ... Finally, I have today met with the leaders of both parties in the Congress of the United States and I have informed them that I shall immediately request the Congress to pass a resolution making it clear that our Government is united in its determination to take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in southeast Asia.¹

Of the claims made in this speech, it is important to highlight several. First is the confidence with which Johnson asserts that a second attack did indeed occur on 4 August. Second is the stated intention of keeping American response “limited,” in order to “seek no wider war.” Third, the call for unity within the US government and willingness to “take all necessary measures in support of freedom and defense of peace.” This phrase: “all necessary measures” is repeated in the text of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which would serve as authorization for Johnson’s continuing escalation in Vietnam over subsequent

years. Notably, it is valuable to question how compatible are the second and third points highlighted above. How could an American response remain “limited” while simultaneously taking “all necessary measures” (a phrase that would never be clarified in concrete policy terms)? The answer, as time would show, was that the third point would gain dominance at the expense of the second, and escalation would be favored over limited conflict. However, did this initial inherent contradiction and the action that later followed from it constitute deception in the eyes of the American public? Ultimately, history and the court of public opinion did not give Johnson the benefit of the doubt, as public opinion polls retrospectively concluded that Johnson had not been straightforward with the American people over the reasons for escalation in Vietnam.

The widespread belief perpetuated among the administration and Congress, and reported constantly in the news media, held firmly that North Vietnam had indeed attacked American vessels twice within the space of a few days. As historian Edwin Moïse points out, “American newspapers in general did mention that North Vietnam had denied making any attack against the destroyers on August 4, but none appeared to take seriously the possibility that the North Vietnamese denial might be honest. Time and Newsweek did not even mention the North Vietnamese denial. Some newspapers carried a UPI dispatch saying that North Vietnam had admitted the attack and had tried to justify it as self-defense.”

In this context, where there were apparently high levels of elite unity both in terms of internal agreement and external statements and announcements, it seems as though there would be very low likelihood for opposing frames to take root. Nonetheless, in this case the elite unity projected became a self-fulfilling prophecy, as there were in fact doubts within the

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leadership regarding the attack; however, these doubts were not encouraged and were eventually overwhelmed by a desire to show solidarity and present a decisive response.

Alexander Haig, then an assistant to Secretary McNamara, has written,

“Endless attempts were made [on August 4] ... to verify that an attack had in fact taken place. But there were no devil’s advocates on duty; the purpose of every inquiry was to verify the attack on the Maddox and the Turner Joy, not to question whether it had actually happened.”

Thus, in an environment where the goal was to avoid cognitive dissonance, confirm that an attack had indeed taken place, and so lay the groundwork for strong, legislated action that could react to and deal with such an experience, there was no motivation to take the time to fully critically evaluate what may have happened to the Maddox that night.

Passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and Military Escalation

In response to the reported attacks on the US destroyers, President Johnson called for Congress to provide him with authority to send more troops and materiel into the region, and to be able to engage troops more forcefully, in order to avoid being cast as a “paper tiger,” thus evincing a strong presence to drive back North Vietnam. Congress responded with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, a joint resolution that authorized the President to take “whatever actions necessary” to bring stability to the region. Although many members of Congress viewed that resolution as giving the President only limited authority in Vietnam (an authority that could be withdrawn at any time), others were

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concerned that awarding this authority would leave the door open for presidential power
that would exceed constitutional bounds.

What was Congress agreeing to by passing the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution? First, they
were affirming that there had been a deliberate attack on a US vessel by North Vietnamese
forces, in international waters, thus functioning as an act of war in violation of international
law. Second, that the United States had not until that point engaged in acts of aggression
against North Vietnam, and was chiefly concerned with ensuring the neutrality of South
Vietnam and avoid conquest by the North. With this understanding underlying the
Resolution's creation, the Congress framed their decision as follows:

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of
America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approves and supports the
determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary
measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to
prevent further aggression.

This language provides a degree of ambiguity regarding both what might constitute
“further aggression” and what “all necessary measures” might entail. Of particular note is
the intention both to “repel any armed attack” and “prevent further aggression.” This

4 “Whereas naval units of the communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the
United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels
lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace” (Gulf
of Tonkin Resolution: Text of Joint Resolution, August 7, Department of State Bulletin, 24 August 1964, p. 268:
5 “Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of Southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no
territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace
suggests a willingness to take preemptive or preventative action without fully specifying the circumstances under which such action would be acceptable.

Sec. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.7

In this section, the situation in South Asia is framed as an issue directly linked to US national security because of its implications for international peace and security writ large. Additionally, US reputational concerns are triggered by the invocation of the country’s commitments both via the United Nations Charter and the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty. Both of these approaches are significant because they cast the issue in terms of national security, meaning the stakes involved are that much greater than if Asian regional security was the only concern.

Second, addressing US commitments to the UN as well as to Southeast Asian collective security agreements functioned not only to lay the international legal basis for taking additional action in the region, but also to reinforce the commitment of the US in this situation because it emphasized treaty based obligations (in a sense de-liberating potential courses of action the United States might take).

Sec. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.  

Particularly noteworthy is the way in which the duration of the Resolution is established. Rather than expressly invoking Congressional responsibility to renew the Resolution as needed, the initial language made it an inherently ‘sticky' policy, such that the president was awarded the right and responsibility to decide when the “peace and security” of the region would be “reasonably assured,” while the burden placed upon Congress was to restrict the ability to revoke the Resolution’s authority only through a subsequent concurrent resolution. These two levels of hand-tying – on the international level by reference to treaty-based obligations and on the domestic level by making it easier for any action taken under the Resolution to continue than to be stopped – made the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution both extremely durable and extremely powerful from the outset. At this point, how committed the US was to become was entirely at the discretion of President Johnson, even if many legislators were unwilling to accept that this was the step they had taken.

Despite the shared desire to express a uniform commitment to the security of US ships in the gulf, and to respond with appropriate firmness to any attack on US forces, the legislators did not necessarily see the Gulf of Tonkin incident as occasion for serious war-making in the region. Their disassociation between responding to the incident in solidarity, supporting the president, and increasing American commitment and effort in Vietnam,  

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meant that their overall commitment and willingness to support the endeavor in actuality was not as strong as it may have initially seemed.

Not having believed when they voted for the resolution that the president intended to use it as authority for massive escalation of the war, many members did not feel committed later to support him in putting it to such use. William Fulbright, who as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee became a major spokesman for the resolution, acknowledged during Senate debate that the resolution could be used as authorization for the United States in effect to go to war, but he was not worried about this possibility because everything he had heard indicated that President Johnson did not intend to use it for any such purpose.9

The hasty efforts by the Johnson administration and lawmakers to declare an official stance to condemn and respond to the supposed attacks of August 4 meant that Congress gave power and authorization to the president without carefully weighing the implications of what he would be free to do with that authorization. It further meant that the consensus on the issue among the branches of government, as reported in the media, was a shallow unity. It offered the appearance of cohesive decision-making in a situation that was instead fraught with uncertainty and lacking a coherent plan for long-term action.

Perhaps the two biggest complicating factors inherent in the widespread approval for a unified response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident were the one-sided view of the evidence reported to and discussed by legislators, and the confusion within the Congress over what they were actually authorizing by their joint resolution.

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For example, in the House, expressions of support varied from Congressman Laird’s argument, that while the retaliation in the Gulf was appropriate such actions still left a policy to be developed with respect to the land war in Southeast Asia, to the more reticent viewpoint of Congressman Alger. The latter characterized his support as being primarily for purposes of showing unity and expressed concern over the danger of being dragged into war by “other nations seeking our help.” Several spokesmen stressed that the Resolution did not constitute a declaration of war, did not abdicate Congressional responsibility for determining national policy commitments, and did not give the President carte blanche to involve the nation in a major Asian war.10

As Congress was to discover, a legal expression of unity would be binding in ways they may not have anticipated, and once their approval was given, it would be extremely difficult to revoke. Furthermore, the appearance of policy consensus conveyed to the public that both the Congress and the presidential administration had a clear plan of action and an agreement over what was appropriate, necessary, and practicable. Thus, although they did not realize it at the time, an uncalculated commitment to unity was to prove more costly in the long term than expression of dissensus in order to negotiate a better-understood response.

How Did the Administration Justify Military Action?

Looking at the accounts of the events of 4 August 1964 and following, it appears that enough of the military officials and US policymakers (including President Johnson) were convinced that there had truly been a second attack on 4 August, that it is hard to characterize their assertions to this effect as “deliberate lies.” Furthermore, because US forces had been committed after the resolution, there were so many sunk costs that precipitous withdrawal would have been difficult and would not have looked well. Given the massive “domino effect” rhetoric that had been employed by every administration since Eisenhower, and especially so by Johnson, once the US had permitted itself to become entrenched officials felt compelled to slog it out in hopes of eventual victory that might overshadow the doubtful circumstances of the heavy commitment’s inception.

Table 25: President Johnson’s Justifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason Given</th>
<th>Type of Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>protect US ships; defend South Vietnam</td>
<td>self-defense / collective security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>domino effect</td>
<td>regional security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paper tiger</td>
<td>reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prevent spread of communism</td>
<td>ideology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the strength and sincerity of the reasons given by the Johnson administration for escalating US force in Vietnam in response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the main reasons emphasized were pragmatic in nature, based on publicly-expressed arguments, and were rooted in philosophies of international security that had been believed
throughout the several previous presidential administrations. Thus, there was not anything intrinsically deceptive about these reasons themselves. However, there is room to critique and debate the relative weight placed on possible future scenarios that President Johnson and his advisors feared would result if strong action were not swiftly taken. Furthermore, the sharp contrast between Johnson's campaign claims that he was America's best hope for avoiding overcommitment to Southeast Asia and his almost paranoid concern about the possibly far-reaching implications of the fall of South Vietnam are worth noting. Additionally, President Johnson made a practice of presenting a more sanguine outlook for success when addressing the American public than he actually believed, which meant that the information coming to the public from the government was positively biased.

Thus, analysis of the factual and philosophical basis for each reason proffered will be helpful in evaluating the way in which it was weighted in the president's decision-making and justifications presented to the public. On the issue of preventing communism's spread, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara emphasized the long-standing tactic of communist leaders ranging from Stalin to Mao of supporting so-called "wars of national liberation" as a means of ousting non-Communist regimes and replacing them with leadership favorable to Moscow or Hanoi. He argued:

Thus today in Vietnam we are not dealing with factional disputes or the remnants of a colonial struggle against the French but rather with a major test case of communism's new strategy. That strategy has so far been pursued in Cuba, may be beginning in Africa, and failed in Malaysia and the Philippines only because of a
long and arduous struggle by the people of these countries with assistance provided by the British and the United States.\textsuperscript{11}

By linking the situation in Vietnam to a broader chain of events worldwide, and by accentuating that it was appropriate to view this case as part of the aggressive cultivation and exportation of Communist ideology, McNamara made the case for concern over potentially losing South Vietnam. That is, rather than merely being a regionally contained struggle over a particular territorial-cultural matter, the situation in Southeast Asia could be viewed as yet another pivot point in the tension between the communist and non-communist world.

In his speech to Congress in August 1964, the day after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, President Johnson framed the need for escalation and further commitment from United States forces in several different veins. First, he situated the current circumstances in terms of the previous decade of US dealings with Southeast Asia:

Our policy in Southeast Asia has been consistent and unchanged since 1954.

I summarized it on June 2 in four simple propositions:

1) \textit{America keeps her word.} Here as elsewhere, we must and shall honor our commitments.\textsuperscript{12}

By asserting consistency of goal, attitude, and tactics from the Eisenhower administration to his own, Johnson sought to avoid criticism that he was seeking some novel approach to US involvement in the region, and that whatever action he would seek to


pursue from this point onward was intended as a continuation of, rather than a divergence from, previously established policy.

Second, he linked US national security to the security of other nations:

3. *The issue is the future of Southeast Asia as a whole. A threat to any nation in that region is a threat to all, and a threat to us.*

This claim is a bit shakier on first glance, as the question must be asked: “To what degree was this truly the case?” If, in fact, US national security would not directly suffer from losing South Vietnam to Communist influence, then this alone would not be a compelling independent reason to increase American efforts to prevent that occurrence.

Third, President Johnson sought to clearly convey that this was not intended as some sort of neo-colonial or imperialistic endeavor to extend US influence in the region:

4. *Our purpose is peace. We have no military, political, or territorial ambitions in the area.*

Convincing Congress, the American public, and international allies (not to mention the South Vietnamese) that there were no selfish territorial gains sought from involvement in Southeast Asia, would lend legitimacy to the action.

Finally, Johnson presented the situation as a contrast between South Vietnam’s desire for self-determinacy and independence and North Vietnam’s desire for conquest and control under the guise of unification:

5. *This is not just a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity.* Our military and economic assistance to South Vietnam and Laos in

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particular has the purpose of helping these countries to repel aggression and strengthen their independence.\textsuperscript{15}

This note would be particularly resonant with both Congress and the American people, especially in the context of Western democracy's stance against the spread of Communism. While it may be questioned how much neutrality the United States could truly have afforded South Vietnam, at least initially the president's intention was to simply prevent North Vietnam from forcing Communist leadership on South Vietnam, arguing that a non-aligned yet independent South Vietnam was better for regional stability (and also more consonant with respect for post-colonial self-determination) than a state overrun by its ideologically militant neighbor.\textsuperscript{16}

Underlying the determination of the Johnson administration not to allow communist North Vietnam to control South Vietnam was the established principle of the Truman Doctrine, on which previous anti-communist interventions in other countries had been based. As President Johnson declared in a 1966 speech,

I think they [most Americans] know that communism must be halted in Viet-Nam, as it was halted in Western Europe and in Greece and Turkey and Korea


\textsuperscript{16}The concern about projecting US disinterest and being cast as a "paper tiger" was one of the strongest motivators within the Johnson administration for finding a strong and swift response. As Secretary Dean Rusk explained in a television interview, "We had to strike immediately because we didn't expect to ask those ships to run a continuing gauntlet of torpedoes on their way back to the Gulf of Tonkin when their mission was completed, nor were we prepared to have them denied international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin." Further than that, if under these there had not been an immediate and appropriate response, then Hanoi and those who might be standing behind Hanoi in this might well have come to a very formidable mistaken judgment about what is possible in the Southeast Asian situation."

"Q. "You mean their view that we are a paper tiger might have been confirmed?"

and the Caribbean, if it is determined to swallow up free peoples and spread its influence in that area trying to take freedom away from people who do want to select their own leaders for themselves.

I think that our people know that if aggression succeeds there, when it has failed in other places in the world, a harsh blow would be dealt to the security of other free nations in Asia and perhaps a blow to the peace in the entire world.17

This view formed the key basis for tying American national security concerns to the events transpiring in Southeast Asia. Although both the president and his advisors shied away from using the phrase “domino effect” to characterize this perspective, because of the derogatory connotations associated with that term, it nonetheless was an accurate descriptor of their views.

As the core historico-predictive claim underlying the fear of falling dominos was that any victory for a communist government in Southeast Asia would simultaneously advantage China and disadvantage the US position and other non-communist governments in the region, the argument for greater US involvement in Vietnam on that basis would weaken if this view were incorrect. By arguing that the future of US national security, and the balance of international security between communist and non-communist forces more generally, pivoted on the status of Vietnam, President Johnson and his advisors effectively tied the potential outcome of communist success in Vietnam to failure for the United States.18

18 See William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, “Progress and Problems in East Asia: an American Viewpoint,” Address made before the Research Institute of Japan at Tokyo, 29 September 1964,
However, if it could be shown that overtaking South Vietnam would indeed be a victory for communist North Vietnam, but it would not significantly aid China (because of ongoing tensions between Hanoi and Beijing) nor would it precipitate the collapse of other non-communist governments in the region, then this issue-linkage would no longer be sustainable as a valid justification for continued strong US presence in Vietnam. In a 1967 speech, Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy admitted as much:

[T]he underlying view of the relation between Viet-Nam and the threat to Southeast Asia was clear and strongly believed throughout the top levels of the Kennedy Administration. We knew, as we have always known, that the action against South Viet-Nam reflected deeply held ambitions by Hanoi to unify Viet-Nam under Communist control and that Hanoi needed and wanted only Chinese aid to this end and wished to be its own master. And we knew, as again we always have, that North Viet-Nam would resist any Communist Chinese trespassing on areas it controlled. But those two propositions were not then, as they are now, inconsistent with the belief that the aggressive ambitions of Communist China and North Viet-Nam – largely North Vietnamese in old Indochina, overlapping in Thailand, Chinese in the rest of Southeast Asia – would surely feed on each other. In the eyes of the rest of Southeast Asia, certainly, they were part of a common and parallel threat.19

Department of State Bulletin, 19 October 1964, p. 537. Quoted in Gravel Edition/The Pentagon Papers/Vol. III, p.723: "A word further about the situation in Southeast Asia, especially in South Vietnam. Here the aim of our policy is to assist the Government of South Vietnam in maintaining its independence and its control over the territory accorded to it by the Geneva accords of 1954. We do not aim at overthrowing the communist regime of North Vietnam but rather at inducing it to call off the war it directs and supports in South Vietnam."

As events on the ground had developed over the previous few years, and the US government gained a better understanding of the relationships and information they had processed in the past, it became clearer that the assumed direct linkage between the extant communist governments in East Asia and the potential for future communist growth in other states, was not as straightforward as expected. Not only was the US facing increasing difficulty in achieving short-term military successes in the field, but prospects for long-term political and military success were becoming even more ambiguous and the dire consequences predicted if North Vietnam succeeded in overtaking the South were being slowly cast into doubt.

Nonetheless, even in 1966, the United States’ concern about communism’s spread in Southeast Asia found agreement from the governments of other non-communist countries in the area. As Vice President Humphrey explained,

During my recent mission I was struck by the depth of feeling, among almost all Asian leaders, that Asian communism had direct designs on their national integrity and independence. [...] [N]one – without any exception – questioned our involvement in Viet-Nam. There were questions about aspects of our policy there but none concerning the fact of our presence there and our resistance to aggression.20

For the remaining non-communist governments in the region, the military might of Hanoi was disturbing and knowing that they could count on the support of the United States through its involvement in Vietnam was a source of reassurance. Here it becomes clear that

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the justification based on reputational concerns that President Johnson had offered from
the beginning was in fact a strong and valid reason, at least where the other countries of
Southeast Asia were concerned. The US had declared itself willing to stand against
communism worldwide and Vietnam’s neighbors viewed the American commitment as
evidence that US commitments were not empty rhetoric but would be honored. Thus, the
reputation of the United States as a country that kept its word was reinforced in the eyes of
the rest of Asia.

However, the democratic nature of political debate in the US also provided a source
of concern for those Asian governments, as Vice President Humphrey acknowledged:

Among the leaders with whom I spoke, there was repeatedly expressed a
deep concern as to whether our American purpose, tenacity, and will were strong
enough to persevere in Southeast Asia. Public debate in America was sometimes
interpreted as a weakening of purpose. I emphasized not only the firmness of our
resolve, but also our dedication to the rights of free discussion and dissent.21

Here Humphrey highlights the tension between seeking to maintain a unified policy
response to the perceived needs of the situation in Vietnam, while maintaining levels of
openness and transparency that could allow fruitful public debate. While making sure the
public and Congress felt they were being sufficiently informed of the events in Vietnam was
vital to keeping legislative and popular support (and approval of the president), it is notable
how the discussion and debate valued by the American people (and thus the transparency
necessary to enable that forum), was viewed somewhat suspiciously by the other Asian

governments, seen as a potential mode by which the United States’ commitments (and thus reputational stance) might be overturned.

In his State of the Union address on 4 January 1965, President Johnson reaffirmed the need for continued American presence in Vietnam:

In Asia, communism wears a more aggressive face. We see that in Vietnam.

Why are we there?

We are there, first, because a friendly nation has asked us for help against the Communist aggression. Ten years ago our President pledged our help. Three Presidents have supported that pledge. We will not break it now.

Second, our own security is tied to the peace of Asia. Twice in one generation we have had to fight against aggression in the Far East. To ignore aggression now would only increase the danger of a much larger war.

Our goal is peace in Southeast Asia. That will come only when aggressors leave their neighbors in peace.

What is at stake is the cause of freedom and in that cause America will never be found wanting.\(^22\)

Again, he linked his policy and actions on Vietnam to prior administrations and focused on the need to maintain consistency, for the sake of America’s reputation as well as a national security that is dependent on Asian regional security. By calling upon tropes such as “the cause of freedom,” Johnson sought to tap into American public feeling in favor of democracy and liberty in order to maintain and increase support of further military

involvement in Vietnam. While these justifications were not in themselves deceptive, and were genuinely reasons of concern to President Johnson and his advisors, the emphasis with which Johnson used them appealed to the democratic impulses of the public, giving them a clear and straightforward picture neither of the level of commitment they should expect in the following years, nor of the difficulty of the task of stabilizing an independent South Vietnam. Although the Johnson administration was aware that the process would not be simple and smooth, by not clearly sharing the stakes with the public, the necessary information was essentially being withheld. After three years of increasingly involved fighting, with American casualties mounting, the public began to see Johnson’s initial explanations and justifications as lacking candor and being essentially misleading, given the actual costs in time, money, and American lives.

1964-1965: Election and Escalation

Public Opinion

Confidence in Johnson

The presidential campaign of 1964 saw Lyndon Johnson facing off against Barry Goldwater, a Republican known for his more hawkish stance. He freely admitted to his advisors that he was concerned more with the backlash from hawkish factions who would claim he had gone soft than he was with those who wished to withdraw completely. However, a significant part of Johnson’s campaign message revolved around his claim that he was the candidate who “can best keep the peace” and avoid deeper involvement in Southeast Asia.23 Despite these public statements, being newly empowered with the provisions of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, President Johnson encouraged development of

the plans for Operation Rolling Thunder – a massive bombing campaign – which, after he was elected, was launched early in 1965.

As the incumbent, this gave him a boost in the eyes of the public, who responded well to his determination. Thus, the Gulf of Tonkin incident provided the perfect “rally ‘round the flag” opportunity to boost Johnson’s popularity. This became evident when looking at the Gallup poll taken on August 6-11. In response to the question, “If the situation gets worse in Vietnam, which man do you think could handle it better—Goldwater or Johnson?” only 15% chose Goldwater compared to 58% who chose Johnson. (Fifteen percent thought there would be no difference between the candidates.)

Although approval ratings of Johnson’s handling of the situation in Vietnam started out with positive majority opinion in 1964, by the spring of 1968, approval ratings were consistently around 40% and were exceeded by disapproval ratings by anywhere from 2–5%.

\[\text{Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization August 6-August 11, 1964, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,557. [USGALLUP.64-696.R07D] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.}\]
Because so much confusion surrounded the events of August 4, the American public as well as the government officials in Washington believed there had been a genuine attack. Therefore, their perception of deception was not triggered until several years later as further evidence came to light regarding the muddled nature of communications and reports from the incident, and the gradual lack of success in the field highlighted the absence of clarity in the Johnson administration’s plans, as well as the unprecedented free reign Johnson had taken in terms of how he chose to act on the authorization provided by the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.
In the months immediately following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, public assessment of President Johnson’s character and leadership ability remained high. In late February 1964, the Gallup organization had asked, “How much trust and confidence do you have in President Johnson—a very great deal, considerable, not very much, or none at all?” Thirty-six percent of those polled reported having a “very great deal” of trust and confidence in the president, while fifty-one percent said their confidence in him was “considerable.”

In the “Hopes and Fears” survey, conducted in September 1964 by the Gallup organization for the Institute for International Social Research Methodology, respondents were asked to gauge their level of confidence in each of the three branches of the US government. When rating their “trust and confidence” in the Executive branch, 67% gave a rating of 7 or higher on a ten-point scale, with 26% choosing the highest rating (“greatest possible confidence”), making it the rating selected by the highest percentage of respondents.

Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization February 28-March 5, 1964, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,662. [USGALLUP.686.Q030] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

By way of comparison, the Judicial Branch received confidence ratings of 7 or higher from 59% of respondents (with 19% choosing "greatest possible confidence"), while the Legislative Branch was rated 7 or higher by 63% of respondents (with 15% choosing "greatest possible confidence"). Survey by Institute for International Social Research Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization during September, 1964, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,611. [USGALLUP.633POS.Q28C] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

The question’s full text reads: “Our federal government, as you know, is made up of three branches: The Executive Branch, headed by the President, the Judicial Branch, headed by the U.S. Supreme Court, and the Legislative Branch, made up of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. I’d like you to show me on this ladder how much trust and confidence you have in each of those branches, under present circumstances. The top of the ladder [10] in this case means the greatest possible confidence, the bottom [0] no confidence at all. First, how much trust and confidence do you have in the Executive Branch, headed by the President?” Breakdown of ratings: 11% chose “7”; 17% chose “8”; 13% chose “9”; 26% chose “10.” Survey by Institute for International Social Research Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization during September, 1964, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,611. [USGALLUP.633POS.Q28A] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
Furthermore, in October 1964, 71% of respondents agreed that they would describe President Johnson as “personally honest.” In October of that same year, the Harris poll asked respondents to agree or disagree with a series of statements about President Johnson. When presented with: “He inspires confidence as President,” 68% said they “agree[d] more,” while 19% “disagree[d] more.”

These polling data suggest that the public had high levels of both trust and confidence in Lyndon Johnson’s ability as president, both before and after the Gulf of Tonkin incident. This shows that at this early stage, the general public did not harbor any suspicions of deception in the administration’s policies and justifications. As discussed in the theory chapter, these levels of confidence would be expected to make the public more likely initially to support the president’s decisions to use military force as well as to be favorably inclined towards the president in his policy decisions.

A year later, a Gallup poll conducted 11-16 December 1965, respondents were asked, “if you could sit down and talk to President Johnson and ask him any question you wanted to about Vietnam, what would you ask him?” Only 3% answered: “Is the American..."
public getting all the truth about the situation in Vietnam?" The most popular question was: “Why we are fighting in Vietnam? Does the government in Vietnam really care or appreciate our help? Why we say our men are advisors when they are fighting? Why are our boys giving their lives over there?” chosen by 21% of respondents, followed by the 20% who chose “Why don’t we step up our effort in Vietnam? Why not bomb Hanoi? Why we just don’t clean it up instead of prolonging it? Why don’t you do more?”

**Approval/Disapproval/Protest**

While the approval and disapproval levels measured by public opinion polls are important for evaluating the president’s standing, when the punishment option chosen by a sector of the public goes beyond expressing disapproval or voting against the president’s party and takes the form of protests, it is important to evaluate both how much of a concern protests pose for the administration as well as how unified the protest message really is and how much resonance it has with the rest of the public.

In understanding how the general public viewed the protest movement, it is first valuable to look at the baseline level of inclination that may have existed among the general public to participate in any kind of demonstration or protest regarding any issue. In a Gallup pool fielded in late October 1965 asked, “Have you ever felt the urge to organize or join a public demonstration about something?” Only 10% of respondents answered in the affirmative with 90% expressing zero interest. In that same poll, respondents were asked

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31 Interestingly, the third most popular response was “Don’t know,” chosen by 17% of respondents. Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization December 11-December 16, 1965, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,565. [USGALLUP.721.Q06] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

32 Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization October 29-November 2, 1965, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 2,399. [USGALLUP.719.Q019A] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
about their beliefs regarding the political composition of those demonstrating against the
Vietnam War. A full 58% answered that the Communists were involved “a lot” while 20%
thought that they had “some” involvement in the protests. Only 11% combined thought that
Communists were involved in the demonstrations “to a minor extent” or “not at all.”

From this polling data, two points of interest manifest themselves. First, at least in
1965 the general public did not view demonstrations and protests as viable or acceptable
means of political engagement. Second of all, general public perception of the
demonstrators’ demographics placed them firmly in the category of political extremists,
unrepresentative of the average American citizen, rather representing those whose politics
would not necessarily have the best interests of the United States at heart.

This view was prefigured by the Harris Survey in June of 1965, when respondents
were asked about the social implications of the different types of demonstrations. In
response to the question, “By and large, do you think the teach-ins and other student
demonstrations are a healthy sign that the United States can debate government policies in
a crisis, or do you think these debates and demonstrations are not a good thing during a
 crisis when American troops are fighting abroad?” although 32% answered that this was a
“healthy sign,” 53% were sure this was “not a good thing.” In the September Harris Survey,
those polled were asked whether “Student demonstrators at colleges” were “more helpful
or more harmful to American life.” At this time, 65% agreed that these student
demonstrators were “more harmful” whereas a mere 7% saw them as “more helpful.”

The December 1965 Harris Survey, however, found slightly different perspectives
when the questions were framed in terms of citizens’ civil rights. When asked, “Do you think
people have the right to conduct peaceful demonstrations against the war in Vietnam?” 59%
agreed that Americans “have the right,” although 32% asserted that people “don’t have the
right.” When met with the follow-up question, “Why do you think that way (that people
have/don’t have a right to conduct peaceful demonstrations against the war in Vietnam)?
Any other reason?”; the highest percentage of respondents – 46% – affirmed that people
“Have the right – [the] Constitution guarantees it.” Eleven percent of these respondents
asserted that people “Don’t have the right – [it is] [s]ubversive, revolutionary,” while 10%
thought that people “Don’t have the right – [it is a] [m]atter for Government to decide.”

Here it appears that when evaluating a certain type of protest – student
demonstrations on college campuses – the general public viewed them with distrust and
skepticism, but in terms of the validity of demonstration and protest as a form of political

35 However, it is important to note on this point that 28% thought that it “doesn’t matter.” Methodology:
Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during September, 1965, and based on personal interviews with a
national adult sample of 1,250. Sample size is approximate. As reported in the Washington Post.
[JUSHARRIS.092765.R1E] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of
Connecticut.

36 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during December, 1965, and based on personal
interviews with a national adult sample of 1,250. Sample size is approximate. As reported in The Washington
Post. [JUSHARRIS.121365.R1] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of
Connecticut.

37 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during December, 1965, and based on personal
interviews with a national adult sample of 1,250. Sample size is approximate. As reported in The Washington
Post. [JUSHARRIS.121365.R2] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of
Connecticut.
speech and engagement, most steadfastly supported citizens’ rights to participate in this manner, as a matter of principle.38

While the general public’s assessment of the president’s motivations were crucial for how their opinion of his leadership and actions changed over time, it is also valuable to see how they judged the motivations and goals of the protesters. In December 1965, the Harris Survey posed the question to respondents: “The demonstrators against the war in Vietnam say they sincerely think the war there is morally wrong. What do you think is the main reason behind the demonstrations against the war in Vietnam?” Thirty-four percent answered that the protesters were “Just demonstrating against something,” while 26% suspected them to be the “Tool of Communists.” Fourteen percent attributed the demonstrators with the aim of draft avoidance, but another 14% believed the main reason was indeed “Moral opposition to [the] war.”39 (Another 11% said the demonstrators “Think [the] Vietnam war is wrong.”)40 This generally negative view of the protesters’ motivations meant that the general public did not take them seriously, and for the most part did not feel a sense of kinship or shared concerns with them.

38 It is also notable that in that same Harris Survey in December 1965, beyond the 46% who saw protest as a Constitutionally guaranteed civil right, an additional 11% argued that protest was a right “as long as it’s peaceful.” Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during December, 1965, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,250. Sample size is approximate. As reported in The Washington Post. [USHARRIS.121365.R2]. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

39 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during December, 1965, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,250. Sample size is approximate. As reported in The Washington Post. [USHARRIS.121365.R3]. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

40 It is unclear if there is a substantive difference between “moral opposition” and thinking the “war is wrong.”
1966: The First Fulbright Hearings

The beginning of 1966 saw a concerted movement by members of Congress to try to influence the direction of the president’s Vietnam policy. Seeing the pause in bombing as an opening for communicating their hesitance with ever-increasing American commitment in the region, they took the opportunity to gain clarity for themselves and the American public. In January, Senator Wayne Morse – one of the most vocal anti-war critics – proposed a resolution to repeal the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and its permission for the president to take “all necessary measures” to repel and or prevent further aggression in South Asia. At the same time, he proposed that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee conduct “a full and complete investigation of all aspects of United States policies in Vietnam.”

That same day, Senator Fulbright met with a group of senators to discuss the possibility of holding public hearings regarding the Johnson administration’s Vietnam policy. Most clearly at issue was that the language of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution did not impose any specific constraints on the president. As a result, President Johnson and Dean Rusk invoked the Resolution at every turn whenever a new policy was undertaken or questioned. “He has used it all year,’ one Republican Senator said today. ‘He pulls it out of his pocket and shakes it at you.’ It was so damned frayed and dog-eared the last time I talked to him,’ a Democratic Senator said, ‘that I wanted to give him a fresh copy.”

While there was not as yet any movement expressing doubt in the veracity of the attacks that prompted the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in the first place, a growing number of senators had

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decided that the Resolution was justified as a response to those attacks, but did not in itself suffice as justification for continuing escalation that could result in at best another six years of commitment.\textsuperscript{44}

With the agreement of the whole Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Fulbright held televised, public hearings on the Supplemental Foreign Assistance Bill for Vietnam. During the course of those hearings, Senator Gore – who had become a critic of the war by the end of 1965 – thought that the highly public nature of the hearings was just the tool needed to “go over the head of the President to the American people, and reach him by way of the people.”\textsuperscript{45} Senator Fulbright explained,

The purpose of these hearings is to inform the American people, the members of the committee and the Senate as fully as possible about the implications of the war in Vietnam. ... It is in truth our duty under the Constitution to inquire into matters of this kind. I hope these hearings my assist our Government in making the wisest possible decision with the security of our country for the reestablishment of peace in Southeast Asia.

Senator Fulbright had not reversed his earlier belief that the Resolution was an appropriate or necessary response to the perceived attacks on the Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964. However, he did not believe in the validity of President Johnson’s use of the Resolution to justify every subsequent escalation.

\textsuperscript{44} E.W. Kenworthy (30 January 1966), “Morse is Seeking Shift on Vietnam: Offers a Measure to Rescind ‘64 Resolution Regarded as Blank Check for Johnson,” Special to The New York Times: “Meanwhile, President Johnson’s senior advisers are said to have told him that it would take six or seven years of military action in South Vietnam to bring about a satisfactory solution there.”

In retrospect we can assess the circumstances of the Gulf of Tonkin incident and note that President Johnson, his advisors, and military officials did not pursue thorough fact-checking of the incident, because it was useful to believe it was true. However, there is no strong contemporary evidence to indicate that opposition voices even considered calling into question that particular attack. Rather, the subsequent years of escalating US commitment – all justified with reference to the Gulf of Tonkin resolution – were criticized on the basis that (despite its extremely broad and open-ended language) the Resolution was intended to provide for a flexible and appropriate US response to the attacks in the region. The president’s justification for initial action, based on the Resolution in response to the attacks, was not criticized. Instead, the nexus of critique from Senators Fulbright, Morse, and others in 1966 lay with their assessment that President Johnson’s policies over the past year and a half had exceeded what should have been reasonably permissible. The issue was that US involvement had moved beyond a justified response to deep commitment, without a clear vision for victory or exit. It was President Johnson’s constant use of the Resolution to justify every new policy that angered these legislators, not an idea that the Resolution itself was predicated upon a non-event.

Despite many senators’ dismay with President Johnson’s announcement on 31 January to resume bombing of North Vietnam after the 37-day pause, the American public did not share that sentiment. In a February Harris survey, when asked, “Do you think President (Lyndon B.) Johnson was right or wrong to resume bombings of North Vietnam after the recent pause?” 73% of respondents believed the president had made the right
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decision.\textsuperscript{46} The Fulbright hearings, which ran until 18 February, did elicit some doubt among the public as to the legal justifications for continued escalation based on the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. This effect is reflected in how respondents answered another Harris survey that month. When asked to evaluate the job President Johnson was doing handling Vietnam, 51% rated him “only fair” or “poor,” compared to 49% rating him “excellent” or “pretty good.”\textsuperscript{47} This is a significant downturn in public opinion on Johnson’s management of Vietnam compared to the Harris survey of only two months earlier, when 63% of respondents gave the president an “excellent” or “pretty good” rating, compared to only 37% who judged him to be doing “only fair” or “poor” with Vietnam.\textsuperscript{48} As there had not been a surge in American deaths during that time, and because the public supported Johnson’s bombing policy, this strong increase in disapproval of the job he was doing handling Vietnam may well be attributed to the hard questions asked during the Fulbright hearings.

\textbf{1967: Suspicion and Declining Support}

By 1967, however, the continuous fighting – and lack of clear success from Operation Rolling Thunder’s persistent bombing runs – had taken its toll on the American public, especially in terms of the public’s confidence in President Johnson. In the Gallup poll conducted on 9-14 March 1967, only 41% of respondents expressed approval for Johnson’s

\textsuperscript{46} Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during February, 1966 and based on 2,000 personal interviews. Sample: national adult. As reported in The Philadelphia Inquirer [USHARRIS.030766.R1]. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

\textsuperscript{47} Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during February, 1966 and based on 1,250 personal interviews. Sample: national adult. Sample size is approximate. As reported in The Washington Post [USHARRIS.022866.R1]. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

\textsuperscript{48} Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during December, 1965 and based on 1,250 personal interviews. Sample: national adult. Sample size is approximate. As reported in The Washington Post [USHARRIS.010366.R4]. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
handling of Vietnam, while 45% said they disapproved.\textsuperscript{49} However, the disapproval was not simply related to a sense that the war was being conducted inefficiently or that US forces were not succeeding in their forays against the Viet Cong. Rather, there was a growing impression among a majority of the public that the government was not being completely honest with them about the conflict. When asked in the same Gallup poll, “Do you think the Johnson administration is or is not telling the public all they should know about the Vietnam war?” 65% of respondents replied that the administration “is not telling the truth” while only 23% expressed a belief in the administration’s truthfulness.\textsuperscript{50} This impression of dishonesty only continued to grow over the course of the year. When the same question was asked on a poll conducted October 6-11, 21% still thought the administration was being truthful, but 71% answered that the administration “is not telling the truth.”\textsuperscript{51}

This perception of a lack of candor coming from the presidential administration affected how the public perceived both Johnson himself as a leader and the office of the President more generally speaking. When polled on six different occasions throughout 1967 about Johnson’s leadership qualities and his performance “inspiring confidence personally,” over 50% of respondents consistently answered “Only Fair” or “Poor.”

\textsuperscript{49} Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization March 9-March 14, 1967, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 2,192. [USGALLUP.742.Q05] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

\textsuperscript{50} Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization March 9-March 14, 1967, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 2,192. [USGALLUP.742.Q15A] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

\textsuperscript{51} Conducted by Gallup Organization, October 1967. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
“How would you rate the job President (Lyndon) Johnson has done inspiring confidence personally: excellent, pretty good, only fair or poor?”

Figure 24: Confidence in Johnson\textsuperscript{52}

This negative perception of Johnson as president spilled over into the public's view of the presidential office in general, indicating a loss of trust and confidence in the presidency within the US government. In December of 1967, the Harris Survey asked respondents to “rate the job President Johnson has done on... inspiring confidence in the White House – excellent, pretty good, only fair or poor?” Only 32% chose “Excellent/Pretty Good,” while 68% chose “Only Fair/Poor.” These numbers are especially significant when compared to the earlier polling that asked respondents to rate their level of trust in each branch of government. In September 1964, 67% of respondents had given the Executive Branch a “trust and confidence” rating of 7 or higher on a ten-point scale. This represents an almost complete reversal of public opinion in only three years.

The President’s Damage Control Strategy

In light of his decreasing poll numbers and the growing mistrust held by the American people, President Johnson’s administration launched a “progress campaign” in the autumn of 1967, seeking to demonstrate quantifiable benchmarks of progress in South Vietnam and convince the American people that the United States was succeeding in its endeavors. In September, the president gave a televised speech, in which he reasserted the importance of US involvement and highlighted both military and political advances. On the political front, he pointed to the recent popular elections for a South Vietnamese legislative body:

On November 1, subject to the action, of course, of the Constituent Assembly, an elected government will be inaugurated and an elected Senate and Legislature

53 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during December, 1967, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,602. [USHARRIS.020568.R1H] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
will be installed. Their responsibility is clear: To answer the desires of the South Vietnamese people for self-determination and for peace, for an attack on corruption, for economic development, and for social justice.\(^{54}\)

On the military side, he explained that so far US forces had succeeded in their first initial goal: to prevent Hanoi from completely overtaking South Vietnam. Beyond that palliative measure, however, he noted, “Since our commitment of major forces in July 1965 the proportion of the population living under Communist control has been reduced to well under 20 percent. Tonight the secure proportion of the population has grown from about 45 percent to 65 percent—and in the contested areas, the tide continues to run with us.”\(^{55}\)

Other strategies included conveying to reporters “captured documents indicating the hardships faced by the communist forces; special achievements such as pacified villages; ... and statistical analyses produced a glut of data about lowered infiltration rates, reduced enemy troop strength, and increased enemy casualties.”\(^{56}\) In November, military leaders reported “substantial progress,” while at the end of December the president announced, “All the challenges have been met. The enemy is not beaten but he knows that he has met his master in the field.”\(^{57}\)

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\(^{54}\) Lyndon Baines Johnson (September 29, 1967), “Speech on Vietnam” (http://millercenter.org/cripps/archive/speeches/detail/4041)

\(^{55}\) Lyndon Baines Johnson (September 29, 1967), “Speech on Vietnam” (http://millercenter.org/cripps/archive/speeches/detail/4041)


From a public opinion standpoint, the strategy worked to a degree: while in July a Gallup poll found that only 38% believed the US was “making progress” in Vietnam, by the end of November that proportion had risen to 51%.\textsuperscript{58}

\section*{1968: Failure, Deception, and No Reelection}

\subsection*{The Tet Offensive – Perceptions of Failure}

At the end of January, the North Vietnamese forces launched massive attacks throughout South Vietnam, taking US and South Vietnamese forces by surprise. Over the next few days of intense combat, US and SVN troops were able to push the NVN forces back out of Saigon and other locations, although in some cities the fighting continued until April. While the Communist forces suffered far heavier losses than the US and SVN forces, and failed to gain control of any new territory, the unexpected initiation of and heavy fighting during the offensive came as a severe shock to US military leaders, the US government, and the American public. Although President Johnson characterized the outcome of the battles as a victory for the US and South Vietnamese, the media did not agree. Walter Cronkite, CBS news anchor, declared in a 27 February broadcast, “We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds” adding, “To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory, conclusion. … [T]he only rational

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{58} Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization, July 13 - July 18, 1967 and based on 1,518 personal interviews. Sample: national adult. [USGALLUP.748.Q08]; Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization, November 16 - November 21, 1967 and based on 1,583 personal interviews. Sample: national adult. [USGALLUP.754.Q03]. Data provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.}
way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.”

The criticism largely had to do with the overly optimistic claims President Johnson had made throughout 1967, especially in the autumn when the administration heavily emphasized that victory was not only inevitable, but also imminent. Based on his previous picture of the war, nobody expected the North Vietnamese to employ such a wide-ranging, well-coordinated attack. The opponent had demonstrated surprising fortitude, making it clear that an easy defeat for NVN was not imminent. As one ABC commentator observed, even considering the outcome on the ground a military success, “it is also the exact opposite of what American leaders have for months been leading us to expect.”

Public opinion responded in kind; by the end of February, the proportion who believed the US was “making progress” in Vietnam had plummeted to 31%.

However, not only did Tet inspire doubts that the United States was headed toward success in Vietnam, it confirmed growing doubts about President Johnson’s honesty concerning the war. The dissonance between earlier proclamations of optimism and the evidence the public saw during Tet added to the administration’s “credibility gap.” As Johnson and Tierney explain, “The media and the public, possibly for the first time in US history, began to assume that what their government was telling them about a foreign war

was deliberately false. Therefore leaders were not believed even when battles did start going well."63

The Fulbright Hearings, 1968

Compounding the ill effects of Tet, in late February the initial validity of the war was called into question as Senator Fulbright scheduled hearings in the Committee on Foreign Relations in late February 1968 to investigate the Gulf of Tonkin incidents. Although these were not televised as the 1966 hearings had been, public interest in the hearings was quite high and Senator Fulbright released a public transcript within a few days after the hearings ended. Although the public was already increasingly dissatisfied by the perceived failure of Tet and the doubts it cast on President Johnson’s depiction of the war’s progress, following release of these hearings approval continued to drop. Whereas in 1966 the members of the Committee on Foreign Relations were not questioning the purported basis for the Resolution so much as its limitations as justification for ever-escalating war, the 1968 hearings aimed at “establishing the truth about the Tonkin Gulf incidents of August 2 and 4, 1964.”64

Although the truly “smoking guns” from these hearings – comments by senators expressing their sense of being deliberately misled by the president and his advisors – are found in the portions of the hearings marked “Executive Sessions” (not publicly released until 2010), the published record clearly shows that many of the Committee members were increasingly unconvinced by Defense Secretary McNamara’s explanations of the evidence.

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63 Dominic D.P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney (2006), Failing to Win perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics (Cambridge, Harvard University Press): 149,

While the attack on 2 August 1964, in which the Maddox and the Ticonderoga swiftly bested the North Vietnamese boats, was clearly confirmed by the evidence, the case for the “second” attack of 4 August seemed increasingly ill-supported. Senator Fulbright emphasized the cable sent by Commander Herrick several hours after first reporting that the Maddox had been attacked:

Review of action makes many recorded contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects and over-eager sonarman may have accounted for many reports. No actual visual sightings by Maddox. Suggest complete evaluation before any further action.65

Senator Fulbright used this cable as a point of questioning for McNamara, who insisted that precisely because of the questions raised by the message, he had ordered that the incident be investigated and confirmed before retaliation. However, the senators were not satisfied as other details – including the testimony gained from a captured NVN naval officer who declared no knowledge that any attack plan had been made for 4 August (added to the official statement of the NVN government at the time denying any such attack).66

Senator Gore questioned McNamara’s claims that an “unimpeachable source” had “reported, while the engagement was in progress on August 4, that the attack was under way.”:

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66 See also Letter from Fulbright (29 May 1968) to Hon. Clark M. Clifford, Assistant Secretary of Defense, in “The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents—Part II,” Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Ninetieth Congress, Second Session, Supplementary Documents to February 20, 1968 Hearing With Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara (released 16 December 1968): 11-13,
I do not in any sense question your patriotism or your sincerely. On the other hand, I feel that I have been misled, and that the American people have been misled. Indeed the statement that you released today does not comport with the testimony that you gave to this committee today. ...

I submit, Mr. Secretary, you have given us nothing from the intercepted message to support that.67

Not only was the public disappointed in the inability of the American forces to easily best the North Vietnamese during Tet, they could read the transcripts of the Fulbright hearings and recognize the dissatisfaction of the senators and their clear distrust of the administration’s claims about the 4 August Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Public Opinion: View of Anti-War Protestors

In August 1968, respondents were asked if they thought that anti-Vietnam demonstrators were “a major cause of a breakdown of law and order, a minor cause, or hardly a cause at all.” While 38% saw the anti-war protesters as a “major cause,” 40% believed them to be a “minor cause” and 13% thought them “hardly a cause at all.”68

An incident of particular importance for assessing the weight of anti-war demonstrators’ concerns with the general public’s opinion was the clash between protesters and police in Chicago during the Democratic Party national convention in late August 1968. Police confronted the demonstrators with considerable force and violence, and television news reporting on the incident was broadly and consistently favorable to the

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68 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates August 24, 1968, and based on personal interviews with a national voters sample of 1,481. [USHARRIS.090968.R1E] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
protesters and disapproving of the police behavior. However, despite the direct visual images of the violent clash and the framing provided by reporters that cast the protesters sympathetically, the general public by and large resisted this frame and viewed the demonstrators negatively and the police positively. The September 1968 Harris Survey found that 66% of respondents agreed that “Mayor Daley was right the way he used police against demonstrators,” while only 20% disagreed. Furthermore, when asked if “Anti-Vietnam demonstrators had protest rights taken away unlawfully” during the events surrounding the Democratic Convention, only 14% believed this to be true while 66% did not think that the demonstrators’ rights had been wrongly revoked.

As John P. Robinson (1969) notes,

Counter to the expectations of these commentators, and of the demonstrators themselves, the August 30 edition of the New York Times reported that a nationwide sample of close to one thousand persons (reached by telephone on August 29 by the Sindlinger organization) overwhelmingly supported police behavior. About the same time, television networks were flooded with mail protesting the newsmen’s interpretation of events in Chicago. CBS reported an 11-to-1 margin of unfavorable to favorable letters, an even more pro-police reaction than Sindlinger obtained. Such results provide a dramatic example of the mass media’s relative impotence in changing strongly held public attitudes.

69 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates September 11-September 13, 1968, and based on personal interviews with a national voters sample of 1,324. [USHARRIS.100368.R2B] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
70 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates September 11-September 13, 1968, and based on personal interviews with a national voters sample of 1,324. [USHARRIS.100368.R2F] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
In his analysis, Robinson discovers that fully 35% of those he surveyed had extremely ‘cold’ attitudes toward the anti-Vietnam protesters (a rating of zero on a hundred-point thermometer). Thus, it appears that for the general public, even if they disagreed with the way in which President Johnson was handing the Vietnam War, there was still a great distance between their disapproval and the positions and actions taken by the anti-war demonstrators.

Assessing Disapproval and its Consequences

In comparing the general public’s growing disapproval of President Johnson’s handling of the Vietnam War with the active disapproval of the anti-war demonstrators and protesters, it is important to understand why the general public began to disapprove. For the protesters, they were motivated largely by ideology: the United States had no business in Vietnam; war in general was unfair to the American people in terms of costs and benefits; and a broader dislike for the way in which politics in the US were being conducted. Notably, some protesters feared that the resources and attention devoted to the war meant the lack of attention to other social and domestic issues they felt were important, including the economy, employment, civil rights, and university politics.

Thus, in this case, the public’s perception of deception had been triggered earlier, and was reflected in their diminished approval levels and growing lack of support for Johnson’s policies on Vietnam. However, we can look at Johnson’s decision to pull out of the race for the Democratic nomination in 1968, following the perceived failure of Tet and the mistrust elicited during the Fulbright hearings, as evidence of his concerns over prospective punishment from displeased voters. When he took only a 7% lead over Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire primary, followed in only a few days by Robert Kennedy’s
announcement of his own candidacy, Johnson may have realized that his likelihood of carrying the Democratic nomination was in doubt, not to mention the chances he would have in the general election against a Republican opponent. Therefore, he may have decided that the best decision for himself and for the country was to cut his losses and accept giving up the chance for the Democratic nomination in an effort to show a good faith intention to the American people for the remainder of his term.

Consequently, just over two weeks after the New Hampshire primary, Johnson announced in a national address on March 31, 1968, “With America’s sons in the fields far away, with America’s future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world’s hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office – the Presidency of your country. Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.”

Here we can look at the “damage control strategy” pursued by President Johnson as being one of withdrawal.

Table 26: President Johnson’s Damage Control Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Perceived Deception</th>
<th>Public Response</th>
<th>President’s Damage Control Strategy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- lies</td>
<td>- change in public opinion (approval →)</td>
<td>- Reiteration</td>
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<tr>
<td>- concealment</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- spin</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Withdrawal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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72 Lyndon Baines Johnson, “Remarks on Decision not to Seek Re-Election” (March 31, 1968) (http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3388)
### As seen in this case

| - all justification for war derived from Resolution based on 'second attack' (Gulf of Tonkin incident), despite doubts | - change in public opinion (approval → disapproval) on the policy related to the perceived deception | - Johnson continued to emphasize his initial reasons throughout the conflict without acknowledging the misleadingly sanguine tone he had taken with the public. |
| - Resolution wording broad response to incident; Congress felt deceived | - overall drop in public opinion / approval / satisfaction level regarding the administration | - Recognizing the irreversibility of the downward trend in public opinion on all fronts, particularly regarding his handling of Vietnam and his truthfulness, Johnson removes himself from consideration for Presidential candidacy, to |
| - didn’t tell public the prospective costs in time, money, and soldiers’ lives (made task seem easier than it really was) | - agitation and public demonstration | |
| - exaggeration of SVN political will for American | - lack of support for Johnson as 2nd term candidate, | |
Johnson’s decision to withdraw from the presidential race and demonstrably commit himself to bringing the situation in Vietnam to something at least resembling a ceasefire, if not a peace agreement, before the inauguration of whoever would be elected, was in part an effort to redeem himself in the eyes of the American public as they had grown so discontented with his leadership and skeptical of his honesty. In the remaining months of his term, he sought to demonstrate authenticity, reliability, and consistency through his decision-making, as well as show clear signs of success in Vietnam, pointing to a potentially soon end to the conflict. One such signal was the decision to stop bombing in parts of North Vietnam conditioned upon progress in the Paris peace talks. He explained, “in the light of the progress that has been made in recent weeks, ... I have finally decided to take this step now and to really determine the good faith of those who have assured us that progress will result when bombing ceases and to try to ascertain if an early peace is possible.”\(^73\) However, he continued to emphasize caution, noting:

But it should be clear to all of us that the new phase of negotiations which opens on November 6th does not—repeat, does not—mean that a stable peace has yet come to Southeast Asia. There may well be very hard fighting ahead. Certainly,

there is going to be some very hard negotiating, because many difficult and critically important issues are still facing these negotiators.74

Here Johnson wished to show progress and identifiable signs of success – the ability to stop bombing without immediately jeopardizing the lives of all the US soldiers on the ground, as well as the upcoming peace talks at which South Vietnamese representatives would be invited to the table for the first time – while avoiding overselling the strides being made (thus further harming his credibility).

President Johnson further contextualized this decision in terms of seeking to act carefully, while maintaining a united front at home and paving the way to ease the future president into the leadership role awaiting him. He declared:

I have devoted every resource of the Presidency to the search for peace in Southeast Asia. Throughout the entire summer and fall I have kept all of the presidential candidates fully briefed on developments in Paris as well as in Vietnam. I have made it abundantly clear that no one candidate would have the advantage over others – either in information about those developments, or in advance notice of the policy the Government intended to follow. ...

... [G]enerally speaking, however, throughout the campaign we have been able to present a united voice supporting our Government and supporting our men in Vietnam. I hope, and I believe, that this can continue until January 20th of next year

when a new President takes office. Because in this critical hour, we just simply
cannot afford more than one voice speaking for our Nation in the search for peace.75

Two points he made here should be emphasized. First of all, Johnson wanted to
decisively communicate his full withdrawal from politics-as-politics, placing himself above
and outside of the petty fray of partisanship. In this manner, he wanted to convey to the
American people his good faith effort in dedicating himself to bringing about the best
outcome for the country during his remaining time in office. Second, his call for “a united
voice” and claim that “we ... cannot afford more than one voice speaking for our Nation” at
this time indicated his desire to gloss over past criticisms on order to focus on new positive
developments. Rather than seeking to open further space for debate and discussion at this
crucial juncture, Johnson’s invocation of unity was meant as an opportunity to show himself
as a firm and generous leader whose chief concern was for the well-being of the country as
a whole.

Nixon Elected

Richard Nixon’s strong win over Humphrey in the general election of 1968 was a
strong signal from the public that they were tired of the Johnson administration’s policies
and apparent inability to win or end the war. Voting in a Republican hawk indicated the
public’s desire to see change happen with regard to Vietnam and America’s effort there.
Because the public viewed Nixon as pursuing a different strategy on Vietnam than had his
predecessor, they consistent gave him significantly higher approval ratings when asked

75 Lyndon Baines Johnson (October 30, 1968), “Remarks on the Cessation of Bombing of North Vietnam”
(http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3389)
about his handling of Vietnam, compared to Johnson.\(^7\) This held true for the first several years of Nixon’s presidency. Part of this positive assessment was the result of perceptions of success through particular political and military initiatives pursued under Nixon’s tenure. Whereas under Johnson, there did not seem a strong chance of ending the war soon, Nixon successfully conveyed the impression that he could bring America out of Vietnam with dignity and some stability remaining for the South Vietnamese.

**1969-1971: The Nixon Administration**

Barely a week before Richard Nixon was to take office, Johnson gave his final State of the Union address. Again, he frames the status of Vietnam as one of hope for the Paris peace talks to go forward and meet with success.

> The quest for peace tonight continues in Vietnam, and in the Paris talks.

> I regret more than any of you know that it has not been possible to restore peace to South Vietnam.

> The prospects, I think, for peace are better today than at any time since North Vietnam began its invasion with its regular forces more than 4 years ago.

> The free nations of Asia know what they were not sure of at that time: that America cares about their freedom, and it also cares about America’s own vital interests in Asia and throughout the Pacific.

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\(^7\)Gallup polls consistently chart Nixon’s approval levels on “handling the situation in Vietnam” at near or above 50%, while the Harris Poll’s numbers tend to be lower on approval and higher on disapproval (for Nixon’s “handling of the war in Vietnam”), approval ratings still exceed Johnson’s.
The North Vietnamese know that they cannot achieve their aggressive purposes by force. There may be hard fighting before a settlement is reached; but, I can assure you, it will yield no victory to the Communist cause.77

Here, he recalls one of his earliest justifications for escalation of American military force in the region: US national security and reputational stakes in supporting non-communist governments against communist encroachment in Asia. While he acknowledges lack of success in bringing peace to Vietnam, he points to the potential peace that may develop out of the ongoing negotiations.

Public Opinion

Outcome Expectations

When President Nixon took office, he sought to make good on his campaign promises to step up the war effort, setting himself apart from his predecessor’s policies, and aiming for a swift yet successful conclusion to the conflict. This move resonated well with the American public, who agreed that Nixon’s policies on Vietnam were different from Johnson’s. Their satisfaction with this point was reflected in high approval levels for his handling of Vietnam.

77 Lyndon Baines Johnson (January 14, 1969) "State of the Union Address" (http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/5667)
In general, do you think that Nixon is following President Johnson's policy on Vietnam, or do you think he is following a different policy?

Figure 25: Nixon’s Policy on Vietnam

When questioned in December 1968 regarding what they would like to see in President-elect Nixon's policies on Vietnam, respondents overwhelmingly wanted the war to end. While a mere 1% wanted American forces to remain in Vietnam and continue fighting, 45% wanted to “stop the war—(nonspecific)”; 17% wanted “peace, continue peace talks (no mention of honor)”; 11% wanted to “stop fighting, pull out”; and 10% sought an “honorable peace.” When asked what they believed Nixon would actually do about the Vietnam War, only 3% guessed “honorable peace”; 19% expected “peace, continue peace talks, no mention of honor”; 2% thought “stop fighting, pull out”; and 24% thought he would
“stop the war (no mention of how).” Only 11% anticipated “nothing different, follow present policy.” This shows that the public had firm hopes that Nixon would pursue a policy that not only differed from Johnson’s, but also would suffice to extricate US troops from Vietnam one way or another.78

Why did Richard Nixon consistently receive higher approval ratings of his handling of Vietnam than his predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson, despite being evaluated just as poorly in the truth-telling and candor department? The primary and most compelling reason is that the public believed for the last several years of Johnson’s term that he was pursuing ineffective and poorly-considered policies in Vietnam, and that American forces were not succeeding because of these policies.

The public’s general approval for Nixon’s policies as different from those of Johnson provided encouragement for the president even in the face of mounting anti-war protests. President Nixon, like Johnson before him, cared strongly about the tenor of public opinion and throughout his time in office sought to gain measures of public opinion to gauge how his polices were being received. In a CBS News poll of November 1969, respondents were asked: “President (Richard) Nixon says a silent majority of American people support his Vietnam policies, and a vocal minority oppose them. Do you see yourself as closer to the silent majority or the vocal minority?” A full 74% answered that they saw themselves as part of the supportive “silent majority,” while 21% felt part of the anti-war “vocal minority.”

78 Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization December 5-December 10, 1968, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,497. [USGALLUP.772.Q006A] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization December 5-December 10, 1968, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,497. [USGALLUP.772.Q006B] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
This further confirmed the president’s reasons for confidence that he could pursue his policies without fail.79

**Perceptions of Deception**

However, despite this initial upturn in public opinion regarding the president’s handling of the war, the American public increasingly felt that they were not being given all the facts of the ongoing conflict. In July 1969, the Nixon Poll found that when respondents were asked: “How much do you think the Nixon administration is telling the American people about what is going on in Vietnam – most of the facts, some of the facts, very few of the facts, or is it distorting the facts?”; 17% believed they were told “most of the facts”; 40% believed Nixon had told “some of the facts”; and 27% of them though the administration had revealed “very few of the facts.” Only 9% thought that the Nixon administration had been “distorting the facts.”

With the exception of the poll taken in July 1970, more respondents believed that President Nixon had not been telling the public the “real truth” about the ongoing war in Southeast Asia than those who thought him “frank and straightforward.” Furthermore, from August 1971 to April 1972, a majority of respondents doubted the president’s honesty with regard to Vietnam. This trend continued through the rest of 1972, as Time Magazine found in August that 80% of those polled agreed that the president “has not told the American people that real truth about what’s happening in Vietnam.” When asked the same question

79 Methodology: Conducted by CBS News November 23-November 25, 1969, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,154. [USCBS.6904.R01] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
in October of that year, 75% of respondents still agreed that President Nixon had not been entirely truthful.  

“Do you think the Nixon administration is or is not telling the public all they should know about the Vietnam War?”

![Bar Chart]

Figure 26: Nixon - Telling the Public?

80 36% answered “Agree completely” and 44% answered “Agree partially.” Methodology: Conducted by Daniel Yankelovich, Inc. July 24-August 11, 1972, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult in 17 largest states according to electoral votes sample of 2,522. [USYANK.72VOT1.Q12A] Although the combined percentage of those who agreed was 5% lower in this poll than in that taken in July, the percentage that “agreed[d] completely” in October was 40%, an increase of 4%. Thirty-five percent responded “Agree partially.” Methodology: Conducted by Daniel Yankelovich, Inc. during October, 1972, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult in the 17 largest states according to electoral votes sample of 3,012. [USYANK.72VOT4.Q12BA1] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
In assessing the Nixon administration’s reliability, the public tended to be critical but not extremely harsh. When the Harris Survey asked in May 1971 if “Television news has not been fair in the way it has covered President Nixon’s stand on the Vietnam War,” only 30% agreed and 44% disagreed.\textsuperscript{81} The release of the Pentagon Papers was a significant event for American domestic politics in 1971 and could have reflected badly on the US government as a whole as well as specifically on the Nixon administration. However, when asked: “In this whole situation of publishing the secret Pentagon study (on the Vietnam War), who do you think is most guilty of doing something wrong – the person who gave the study to the New York Times, the newspapers that published it, the previous Johnson Administration, or the Nixon Administration?” 38% placed blame on the “person who gave study to the New York Times” and 31% blamed the “Johnson Administration.” Only 10% blamed the “Nixon Administration.”\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{81} Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during May, 1971, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,600. [USHARRIS.71MAY.R41H] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

\textsuperscript{82} Note: Asked of those who have seen, read or heard something about the New York Times and other newspapers publishing material from a secret Pentagon study on the Vietnam War (51%). Adds to more than 100% due to multiple responses. Survey by See note: Methodology: Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation June 21, 1971, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 607. One of a series of surveys conducted for Richard Nixon while he was President. [USORC.062171.R15] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
Of interest is the consistent discrepancy in the findings from the Harris Survey compared to the Gallup. Between April 1969 and January 1973, the Gallup Poll measured approval ratings of Nixon’s handling of the Vietnam War as being significantly more favorable than unfavorable, aside from three polling dates. However, by contrast, the Harris Survey consistently found a higher percentage of respondents who thought Nixon’s performance was “only fair” or “poor,” than who thought he was doing an “excellent” or “pretty good” job with Vietnam.
“Do you approve or disapprove of President Nixon’s handling of the Vietnam situation?” (Gallup)

Figure 28: Nixon - Handling Vietnam Situation

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Survey by ORC. See note: Methodology: Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation July 28-August 4, 1969, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,579. One of a series of surveys conducted for Richard Nixon while he was President. [USORC.080469.R12] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
"[D]o you think President Nixon has been frank and straightforward about the war [in Vietnam and Cambodia], or do you think he has not told the American people the real truth about the situation there?"

Figure 29: Nixon - the Real Truth?

Public Opinion: Views of Protesters

Just as the protesters believed they could bring about the end of the Vietnam War through pressure on the US government via the attention they were attracting through their demonstrations, so the government feared that these volatile domestic conditions would convey an impression of failing resolve to both allies and opponents abroad. It appears that the general public also picked up on this concern, allowing it to help shape their attitudes toward the protesters. This is the finding gathered from the Nixon poll taken in May 1971, during a set of major protests took place in Washington, D.C. When initially asked whether or not they approved of the demonstrations, 64% of respondents disapproved and 30% approved. The following question asked, “Do you believe that demonstrations such as these (taking place in Washington) will help or hurt our chances of bringing the (Vietnam) war to an end?” Although 25% believed the demonstrations would help end the war, and 23% had no opinion on the issue, 52% were convinced that the protests would “hurt our chances” of ending the war. From this data we can observe that the general public’s high percentage of skepticism and disapproval of the protesters was not the result of pro-war, or pro-presidential attitudes. Rather, the majority of the public disapproved of the war as well as both presidents’ handling of it, but they also did not want to see the US mired down in the conflict. Because they wanted the war to end, they disapproved of the demonstrations because they did not believe that was an effective means of bringing about an end to the

85 Methodology: Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation May 1-May 2, 1971, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,026. One of a series of surveys conducted for Richard Nixon while he was President. [USORC.050271.R11] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

86 Methodology: Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation May 1-May 2, 1971, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,026. One of a series of surveys conducted for Richard Nixon while he was President. [USORC.050271.R12] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
war and could even prolong its duration (if perceptions of the nation as weak and divided were to invigorate foes and make it more difficult for US forces to be extricated from Vietnam).

1972-1973: The Pentagon Papers and Peace With Honor

The Pentagon Papers

After the Pentagon Papers were leaked during the Nixon administration, two different polls asked respondents questions about their views on the Johnson administration and the Vietnam War on the basis of the new information that was now available from these documents.

The “Nixon Poll,” conducted in June 1971, asked “Do you feel these secret papers (Pentagon study on the Vietnam War) show that the Johnson Administration deceived the public regarding the escalation of the war, or not?” A full 57% of respondents agreed that this showed Johnson had been deceptive, while only 20% believed that Johnson had not deceived the public.87 Similarly, the Harris Survey, taken in July 1971, first asked respondents to retrospectively rate President Johnson’s handling of Vietnam. Only 18% chose “Excellent/Very Good,” while 76% chose “Only Fair/Poor.”88 The survey continued by asking if those polled thought that Johnson “was frank and straightforward about the

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87 Note: Asked of those who have seen, read or heard something about the New York Times and other newspapers publishing material from a secret Pentagon study on the Vietnam War (51%). Methodology: Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation on June 21, 1971, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 607. One of a series of surveys conducted for Richard Nixon while he was President. [USORC.062171.R09] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

88 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during July, 1971, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,600. [USHARRIS.71JUL.R04] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
(Vietnam) war, or do you think he did not tell the American people the real truth about the situation there?” Again, only 18% expressed the belief that the former president had been “frank and straightforward,” while 63% held that he did not tell the “real truth.”89

From this polling data, particularly that from the July 1971 Harris Survey, it becomes apparent that the public perception of deception from the Johnson administration affected their overall view of Johnson’s performance as president, particularly of how he conducted the Vietnam War. Whereas the last poll before the 1968 presidential elections that asked respondents to approve or disapprove of Johnson’s “handling the situation in Vietnam” found approval rates of 41% and disapproval rates of 46%, we can see that retrospective approval rates dropped again by more than half when the Pentagon Papers confirmed for many the suspicions of deception they already held.90

Peace With Honor

In January 1972, the poll that President Nixon commissioned from Opinion Research Corporation posed to respondents the question: “President Nixon has often been criticized in recent months for his handling of the Vietnam war. Do you feel the President, in his speech, adequately answered his critics regarding Vietnam negotiations, or not?” Fifty-six percent replied that Nixon’s speech was adequate, while 34% did not think he “adequately answer[ed]” the criticisms.91

89 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during July, 1971, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,600. [USHARRIS.71JUL.R14] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
91 Note: Asked of those who saw, heard or read something about President Nixon’s speech on the Vietnam peace negotiations (77%) Survey by See note: Methodology: Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation January 26-January 27, 1972, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,026. One of a series of
The public’s desire for transparency and openness regarding high-level decision-making was reaffirmed in January 1972 when the Nixon Poll asked: “Do you agree or disagree with President Nixon’s decision to make public the details of the secret (Vietnam) peace negotiations in Paris?” A full 76% agreed that this was the right thing to do, while 17% disagreed. This means that the public thought that sharing the history of the Paris negotiations was a sign of good faith and indicated favorable prospects for settling the conflict.

In February 1972, the Harris Survey asked a series of questions to gauge public approval for each aspect of the president’s plans for a settlement in Vietnam. These points included “to exchange all prisoners of war” (91% approval); “to have a cease-fire in all Indochina” (85% approval); “withdraw all US troops 6 months after agreement” (80% approval); “hold new South Vietnam elections under international control” (64% approval); and “send US economic aid to all Vietnam after fighting ends” (34% approval and 45% disapproval). Overall, however, although the public approved of most of the policies Nixon was recommending as part of the Vietnam negotiations, they did not hold a strongly positive view of his skill in the negotiations. When the same Harris Survey asked respondents to “rate the job President Nixon has done in negotiating an end to the war with

surveys conducted for Richard Nixon while he was President. [USORC.012772.R09] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
92 Note: Asked of those who saw, heard or read something about President Nixon’s speech on the Vietnam peace negotiations (77%) Survey by See note: Methodology: Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation January 26-January 27, 1972, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,026. One of a series of surveys conducted for Richard Nixon while he was President. [USORC.012772.R10] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
North Vietnam and the Communists,” although 43% gave a positive rating of “excellent” or “pretty good,” 53% had a negative opinion, answering “only fair” or “poor.”

How would you rate President Nixon on...Bringing the war in Vietnam to a close--excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor? (Harris)

**Figure 30: Nixon - Ending the War**

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94 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates during February, 1972, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,557. [USHARRIS.031672.R7] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

Additionally, when asked in April 1973 to evaluate Nixon’s performance in “bringing the POW’s (prisoners of war) home from Vietnam,” 80% of respondents answered “excellent” or “pretty good,” while 18% thought he did “only fair” or a “poor” job.96

In the weeks leading up to the 1973 inauguration, protests and demonstrations against the Vietnam War continued, and as Washington continued to direct heavy bombing of North Vietnam, various commentators and officials suggested that no end to the conflict was in sight. However, a mere three days after Nixon’s second inaugural, the Paris negotiations finally seemed to bear fruit, as Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and North Vietnam’s “chief negotiator” put their initials on an agreement “to end the war and bring peace with honor in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.” As the New York Times reported on 24 January 1973:

Mr. Nixon said that under the terms of the accord – which will be formally signed on Saturday – all American prisoners of war would be released and the remaining 23,700-man American force in South Vietnam would be withdrawn within 60 days.

He referred to “peace” in Southeast Asia, suggesting that the accords extended to Laos and Cambodia, which have also been engaged in the war.

... Mr. Nixon also said nothing about the controversial problem of the demilitarized zone that straddles the border between North and South Vietnam. Saigon had wanted this line reaffirmed to make sure, legally, that there are two

96 Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates April 18-April 23, 1973, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,537. [USHARRIS.050773.R1B] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
Vietnams, and Hanoi had resisted this. All that the President said on the subject was that the people of South Vietnam “have been guaranteed the right to determine their own future without outside interference.”

This intention to sign an accord that apparently met with acceptance from the governments of both the North and the South, combined with the rapid withdrawal schedule for the US forces still in South Vietnam, should have come as a welcome surprise to many on both sides of the debate about the war. And, in fact, on the next and final Gallup poll that asked, “Do you approve or disapprove of President Nixon’s handling of the Vietnam situation?” a full 75% of respondents approved, with fewer than 20% expressing disapproval. This represented a significant jump in approval levels as compared to the poll of 15 January, at which time disapproval levels exceeded approval by a small margin.

Two factors appear to be of importance in sparking this highly favorable view in response to the accord. First was the simple fact of the end of the war and the return of all remaining US troops. This was a move that would satisfy those opposed to the war for any variety of reasons, who simply wished to see the United States pull out entirely from the region. However, it was also an act that would appeal to those who had supported Nixon’s policies on Vietnam with the hope that an end to the conflict could be found that would bring US troops home without overturning the political goals that had for so long justified US involvement in Vietnam. Second, President Nixon’s framing of the accord as one that would “bring peace with honor,” and emphasis that the terms of the agreement met with approval from the South Vietnamese leadership, appealed to the sector of the American

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population who were concerned with the country’s reputation for strength abroad and who agreed with former President Johnson’s long-standing fear of the domino effect that could be precipitated if South Vietnam were not bolstered. Projecting this frame was clearly important to President Nixon, as he averred that the agreement satisfied, “the goals that we considered essential for peace with honor.”

In general, do you feel the pace at which the President (Nixon) is withdrawing troops from Vietnam is too fast, too slow, or about right?

Figure 31: Rate of Withdrawal

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Final Discussion

While we can attribute the slow rise in anti-Vietnam sentiment in part to the slow progress of the public's perception of deception in this case, aided to some extent by the gradual perception of failure in the conflict, as time went on it became clear that this hypothesis did not fully hold in this case. That is, although the public cared strongly about combating communism and demonstrating America's strength, these motives for staying in Vietnam were not sufficient to compensate for the public's growing mistrust of President Johnson.

In both this case and in the case of Grenada in 1983 (see Chapter 6), the issue of Communism was highly salient in public concern. Thus, the public – like the US Congress – was willingly supportive of President Johnson's decision to take strong, decisive action in response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Just as the Johnson administration feared the potential consequences of the progress of communism in South Asia, so did the public fear any rise in Soviet or Chinese power in that region. We have only to look at the high public support for John F. Kennedy's actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis to understand the American public's desire for a strong, united American response to any encroachment or aggression from communist forces.\(^{100}\) However, while the results factor predicts this high

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\(^{100}\) The Gallup poll of 25 September 1962 found that 63% of respondents approved of "the way Kennedy is handling his job as President," while 22% disapproved. When polled again on 24 October, at the height of the crisis, 62% of respondents approved and 25% disapproved. By 21 November, however, after all 42 of the Soviet missiles had left Cuba on ships, public approval of President Kennedy had risen to 74%, with only 14% disapproval. The poll of 18 December, almost two weeks after the Soviet bombers were also removed, showed 76% of respondents approving of the president with only 13% disapproving. Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization September 20-September 25, 1962, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,701. [USGALLUP.62-663.R001] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization October 19-October 24, 1962, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,644. [USGALLUP.62-664.R001] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization November 16-November 21, 1962, and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample
level of support for presidential policy framed under a salient issue, the *competence factor* demands successful outcomes if the issue-linkage were to be cast into doubt. Thus, while American concerns about the spread of communism meant that President Johnson’s justifications for further US involvement were appreciated by the public, over time they began to doubt both the initial extent of the threat to American interests as well as the likelihood that the United States could make significant political headway in the region.

When the public is receiving compatible cues from all of its sources – the president, other political elites, and the news media – it is unlikely to perceive deception. However, when there is elite dissensus or competing cues from the media, the public must select from among the alternate frames available. Here we must inquire about the alternate frames being presented to the public throughout the course of the Vietnam War. In the immediate aftermath of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, as Moïse (1996) points out, the drive to achieve elite consensus and avoid cognitive dissonance was overwhelming within the White House and military leadership, leading to a unified message because all conflicting information was glossed over and downplayed. Moïse (1996) further notes that the media voluntarily went along with this message, rather than pushing for a more nuanced examination of the evidence at hand and the statements (and likely motivations) of the North Vietnamese.

In particular, we can see that as the message uniformity decayed, as deception was revealed, and while the conflict continued with no end in sight, the public grew increasingly dissatisfied and became more critical both of the duration of the US involvement and the original justifications for escalating US commitment in the first place. This shows that
message control can be helpful for attracting and holding public approval in the short-term, but as events unfold that invite different framing, the public grows less convinced by the official frame.

**Conclusion**

In the case of Vietnam, we see that President Johnson's justifications for American escalation in Vietnam were initially believed and supported by the public, but that as time passed, the public began to doubt both his personal integrity and professional competence. These doubts were confirmed by the discrepancies in the story of the 4 August Gulf of Tonkin Incident on which the Resolution had been based, then used to justify all further escalation. Although the public remained concerned about communism's influence on the world, it grew less fearful of communism's direct effects on American security, after several years of conflict in Southeast Asia had neither stabilized the region nor clearly harmed American interests. Rather, the public saw continued involvement without victory as detrimental in itself to US interests, both at home and abroad, and they sought to punish President Johnson for his unfulfilled promises of a short involvement and for the apparently exaggerated account of what would happen worldwide if the US did not stabilize Vietnam.

Ultimately, by 1971 the public’s highest preference was for the conflict in Vietnam to end and for the US troops to return home. Because they had already given up hope of a successful victory, resetting their reference point in a way, approval levels could increase when President Nixon began withdrawing troops. Even though the US involvement in Vietnam had not accomplished all the goals with which it had been entrusted, the prospect
of bringing the troops home was superior to the state of uncertainty experienced in previous years. Thus, President Nixon was able to avoid punishment for failure because he partially redeemed that failure by finally ending the conflict that had dragged on for so long.
Chapter 6: The US Intervention in Grenada, 1983

Introduction

The case of the United States’ intervention in Grenada in 1983 is selected as a case of military success in which some of the political elites and the news media accused the president of hypocrisy and concealment, but the majority of the civilian population did not perceive deception.

As we have seen in this dissertation thus far, at stake is the question of how important are normative beliefs in public opinion formation. Does the public approve of truth and disapprove of deception, or do opinion patterns exclusively mimic partisan elite views or react to successful or failed outcomes? As put forth by my theory, the results factor suggests that approval of an event’s outcome may mitigate disapproval provoked by deception (this should show most clearly where there is success). Additionally, the competence factor suggests that a president whose policies in general are favored by the public will be less likely to be perceived as deceptive, and more likely to be excused if deception is perceived. However, the converse should also hold such that if the president’s performance in other policy areas is viewed as suboptimal, we should expect less room for grace from the public. That is, if we find the public supporting the president while ignoring elite disapproval on the issue in question, even if they are not wholly satisfied with other aspects of his leadership or policies, we may consider such an observation a strong indicator that the public indeed believes the president’s war justifications.
The case of the United States intervention in Grenada in October 1983 was selected because it represents a case of a successful military outcome in which the president’s justifications were criticized by the news media and various political elites with accusations of concealment, hypocrisy, and diversionary intent – yet the majority of the public was not convinced by the allegations of deception, and instead supported the president. A prevalent narrative of these events holds that President Reagan sent US troops to Grenada 1) to solidify the United States’ sphere of influence in the Caribbean, and 2) to divert public attention from the tragedy of the Marine barracks bombing in Lebanon. Critics who take these lines of interpretation point to the secrecy surrounding the launch of troops, the fact that Congress was not notified until shortly before the troops landed, and the press ban that remained in effect for the first days of ground combat, in addition to the timing of the invasion. A further basis for critique rests with the military training exercises held in 1981 that appeared to be a prefiguration of the invasion of Grenada as it actually transpired. This view holds that the United States – never having established friendly relations with Maurice Bishop’s ousted government – had long established a plan for invading and enforcing regime change, but had been waiting for an opportune time with a plausible excuse. Thus, it is argued, the violent coup and resulting instability was not a crisis demanding a response, but rather an opportunity to be exploited. Additionally, charges of hypocrisy were leveled

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3 See Steven Zunes (October 2003), "The US Invasion of Grenada" (http://globalpolicy.org).
at the president for sending a military intervention for the purpose of regime change in a third-party state, when the administration had long been harshly critical of the Soviet Union’s efforts to squelch revolutions in its satellite states, not to mention the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan. This position explains public support for the intervention exclusively in terms of success. That is, the rapid conclusion of hostilities, clearly achieved goals of regime change and return of the American medical students, and short duration of troop commitments inspired a ‘rally effect’ that satisfied the public’s desire for success.⁴ This view does not offer a strong explanation for why elite disapproval failed to sway public opinion against the president, aside from suggesting that success is more satisfying than partisan loyalties are compelling.

For this case, my theory offers an alternative explanation of these events, which accounts for the otherwise surprising level of public support for the president even in the context of elite and media criticism and accusations of deception. Most important is the dominant belief among the public that President Reagan’s war justifications were true, not deceptive. When asked about their perceptions of the justifications President Reagan had offered for the US invasion of Grenada, the public reported strong acceptance of his reasons. In particular, after his speech of 26 October, 1983, over 50% of respondents believed that the primary reason for the intervention was the OECS request, while on 28 October, nearly 60% of respondents agreed that the president “had no choice but to order the invasion” after receiving the OECS request.⁵

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⁵ Harris Poll, 28 October 1983. See Figure 34, below. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
This perception was strengthened by the events following the military action, as documentation revealing close ties between the coup-instated government and other Communist countries was uncovered and publicized. Additionally, the safe return and joyful response of the American medical students, as well as the stability that accompanied the interim government (which culminated in free elections by the end of 1984), also served to confirm the validity of the president’s stated reasons for intervening.\(^6\) Furthermore, the low impact of co-partisan elite criticism in motivating public disapproval of the president found in my experimental research suggests that Congressional disapproval could have amplified preexisting public mistrust, but that such criticism in itself would not be expected to convince the public to disbelieve and disapprove of the president.\(^7\) Given these factors – belief in the president’s justifications and observed success of the mission – my theory explains the puzzle of high public approval, even in the face of elite and media-voiced criticism.

**Overview of the Case**

The island of Grenada had held its independence from Britain only since 1974. While then-Prime Minister Eric Gairy was out of the country in 1979, Maurice Bishop (leader of opposition party the New Jewel Movement) staged a swift revolution and took over the government. As the new prime minister, Bishop established stronger ties with Cuba but also enacted policies supporting women’s rights and free market economic development. However, the US government maintained a relatively cold position vis à vis


\(^7\) See Chapter 4 of this volume, “The ‘Voter Responses to Leaders’ War Justifications’ Study, pt. 2.”
Bishop, resisting his overtures as late as June 1983. While the extent to which this response strained Bishop’s standing at home is unclear, he was overthrown in a coup d’état on 13 October 1983. Following the coup, which was launched by Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard along with military generals from the NJM’s far left wing, Bishop was placed under house arrest. Public riots broke out in protest, temporarily gaining Bishop’s release. Within a few days, however, the coup-leaders recaptured and summarily executed Bishop and several other key political leaders.8

The newly established military regime quickly instated restrictions on freedom of movement, including a four-day 24-hour shoot-on-sight curfew, to prevent further popular uprising. News of the coup immediately worried Grenada’s democratic neighbors, fellow members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), along with Barbados and Jamaica. However, this concern became fear as reports of Bishop's execution and the new regime’s draconian measures began to spread. In response, leaders of the OECS, Barbados, and Jamaica met to assess the situation. They agreed that the new regime in Grenada was threatening the whole Caribbean region with instability, and worried that it would seek even stronger ties with Cuba and increased Soviet dominance in the region.9 Because none of those potential developments were acceptable to these states, they saw forced regime change to reinstate democratic governance as their only recourse. According to the OECS

9 Telegram documenting the discussions at the OECS meeting as reported to U.S. officials. See telegram "From American Embassy Bridgetown, To Secretary of State, Washington D.C., Subject: The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Officially, Formally Resolves Unanimously To Intervene By Force if Necessary On Grenada and Pleads For U.S. Assistance. DE RUEHWN = 6514/01 2950737, 0, 220735Z Oct 83 ZFF4 – pp.01-04". OECS members involved: St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, Dominica, and Antigua and Barbuda; also involved were Barbados and Jamaica, neither of which was an OECS member state. St. Kitts and Nevis and Montserrat refrained from voting on the resolution. However, throughout this piece, the designation “OECS” is intended to include Barbados and Jamaica in addition to the OECS member states. See also William C. Gilmore (1984), The Grenada Intervention: Analysis and Documentation (Berlin: Berlin-Verlag).
governing charter, member states were allowed to take military action for self-defense. The other states held that it was within the purview of legitimate collective self-defense to forcibly enact regime change in this situation because Grenada was a signatory to the governing charter. However, this goal was impossible given the OECS members’ insufficient military might; therefore, they sought help from the United States.10

President Reagan’s Response

After receiving the formal OECS request for assistance, President Reagan and his advisors discussed how to respond. Besides the reasons articulated in the OECS request, US officials were concerned for the safety of the American citizens on the island, including several hundred medical students. Because the OECS members emphasized the immediacy of the threat posed by Grenada’s continuing instability to the rest of the states in the region, the president and his advisors treated the situation as one requiring immediate action, without time to consult Congress or gain official congressional approval.11

11 See “Public Statement by the President” and “Letter to the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate.”
It is important to understand the context in which the general public became aware of the United States’ role intervening in Grenada. Although planning for a US-led intervention was underway since shortly after the OECS request was received, due to the emphasis on the time-sensitive nature of the situation, the administration did not seek advance Congressional approval in order to maintain secrecy and achieve the element of surprise against the Grenadian regime. However, while planning for the invasion was still underway in Washington, in the early hours of 23 October 1983 US forces in Beirut, Lebanon suffered a surprise attack. The barracks housing US troops stationed with the Multinational Forces in Lebanon was struck by a truck bomb, which destroyed the building killing 241 US soldiers.12 Because the Grenada invasion was being planned secretly, it was not public knowledge as news of the bombing spread. Thus, when word leaked out revealing the US-led action begun in Grenada on 25 October, some alleged that this invasion was an attempt to distract from the tragic loss in Lebanon.13 (In fact, the bombing attacks were major cause of US and subsequent MNF withdrawal within the next four months – a withdrawal that could be construed as a foreign policy failure for the United States.)

After launching US troops, President Reagan gave a public address outlining justifications for the intervention. This speech echoed the reasons he had earlier presented to Congress. First, the goal was to protect the well being of US citizens and the Grenadian people given the violence that proceeded from the coup, including the shoot-on-sight

curfew imposed by the new military leaders. Second, the mission aimed to aid the OECS in their exercise of collective self-defense by restoring the “rule of law” on the island. Third, emphasizing both US national interests and stated OECS concerns, the mission sought to end Cuban and Soviet influence in Grenada, thereby preventing their entrenchment in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{14} Although establishing a democratic government in Grenada was a topic of discussion among the OECS leaders, within the Reagan administration, and between US and OECS officials, the Reagan administration strenuously avoided citing “democratization” as a focus of the intervention, rather restricting regime aims to restoring “rule of law.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Justifications for Intervention}

Table 27: President Reagan’s Justifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason Given</th>
<th>Type of Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assist the OECS countries in containing events on Grenada and restoring “rule of law”</td>
<td>Self-defense / Collective Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue of American medical students</td>
<td>Self-defense; Human Rights; US National Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of the Grenadian people</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting off Communist influence in Grenadian politics</td>
<td>US National Interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{15} See “White House Office of the Press Secretary, 25 October, Statement by the President and the Prime Minister of Dominica Eugenia Charles on U.S. Involvement in Grenada”.

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Each of these reasons met with some criticism that called into question the veracity and legitimacy of the president’s justifications. First, the weight of the OECS request as a basis for *United States* involvement was disputed on the basis of international law and prior US criticism of Soviet interventions for regime change. Because the US was not an ECS member, it had no military rights on the basis of collective self-defense pursuant to the charter and was therefore violating international law.\(^{16}\) In a speech he presented in the Senate, US Senator Lowell P. Weicker, Jr. (R-Conn.) stated, “The President is in violation of the terms of that treaty of the Organization of American States, of which we are a part. The President is in violation of the War Powers Act on Grenada. The President is in violation of the Constitution of the United States as far as freedom of the press is concerned.”\(^{17}\) Furthermore, other Western democracies disagreed with US participation in the intervention. Britain had a historical relationship with Grenada, because since its independence that nation had been a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and still maintained a Governor General appointed by Britain.\(^{18}\) Notably, however, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher staunchly opposed any intervention in Grenada when President Reagan approached her regarding the multinational force.\(^{19}\) This action was thus subject to the charge of hypocrisy. The problem with justifying US efforts to promote democracy by overthrowing the ruling regime of a sovereign state was that this sort of regime change paralleled the Soviet practice of toppling governments to support or promote


\(^{18}\) Governor General Paul Scoon had been imprisoned during the coup and was reinstated to lead the interim government after the invasion.

Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale castigated the president, saying, “One of the things I worry about is that what we’ve done here undermines our ability to effectively criticize what the Soviets have done in their brutal intervention in Afghanistan, in Poland, and elsewhere.” Because US leaders historically had vocally and publicly condemned Soviet actions, the Reagan administration feared losing international credibility if the US were viewed as hypocritically pursuing regime change for its own political ideology.

Second, the principle of sovereignty, defined and protected in international law, opened the US to international criticism. President Reagan sought to dispel this charge by emphasizing the United States’ intention to restore the “rule of law” in the island, with free elections to follow, remaining agnostic on the type of government that might be elected. Second, although nobody disputed the notion that keeping US citizens from harm was a relevant national interest, the justification for an invasion to rescue the medical students was criticized as excessive, possibly unnecessary, and potentially the riskier choice. The most relevant basis for the first half of this criticism was that other countries had successfully evacuated some of their nationals in the days immediately prior to the invasion. At the time of the invasion, no Americans had been taken hostage, and were not experiencing direct or targeted threats to their lives. While it was widely understood that the administration strongly wished to avoid a repeat of the 1980 Iran hostage crisis, some

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20 See “Statement by the Honorable Kenneth W. Dam, Deputy Secretary of State, before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. house of Representatives, 2 November 1983” p.11 of 15 total.
argued that the military incursion onto the island could have increased the likelihood of a hostage crisis, as one might expect a cornered opponent to become increasingly desperate. Thus, both the necessity and prospective success of the invasion to protect US citizens was doubted. Questions were also raised about the legitimacy of the goal of limiting Communist influence in the region. In addition to the charge of hypocrisy discussed earlier, some critics alleged that the administration deliberately exaggerated the scope of Cuban and Soviet influence. The existence of a growing Communist military threat hinged upon interpreting the 10,000 foot airstrip under construction at the airport (a project supported by Cuban assistance) as a principally military project intended for Communist force-projection in the region. Critics pointed out that an improved airport had been planned since the 1950s when Grenada was still a British territory, and that most of the Cuban labor force were simply construction workers. That is, while ongoing Cuban relations with Grenada were undisputed, there was no clear reason to believe Cuban forces had fomented or abetted the coup that presented the immediate *casus belli* for the OECS.

Both the president and members of his administration offered varying responses to these criticisms. Chief among them was that the administration was concerned principally with the well being of its own citizens and the ability of the Grenadian people to make their own political decisions. This position was bolstered by the US ability to point to the action as a direct response to the OECS request, which itself was based on those states’ concerns.

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24 *New York Times* (28 October 1983), "Mondale Assails Grenada Move And a Lack of Security in Beirut": A12; 25 See President Ronald Reagan (23 March 1983), "Address to the Nation on National Security" (http://millercenter.org/cripps/archive/speeches/detail/5454). 26 And, it must be noted, Cuba’s government responded to the coup and execution of Bishop and his ministers with stern condemnation of the violence, and declared it had nothing to do with these particular events. See also: Jo Thomas (29 October 1983), "Cuban Asserts Reagan Told 'Several Lies' About Grenada," Special to *The New York Times*: 7.
about regional stability and their assertion that Article 8 of the OECS charter (to which Grenada was a signatory), provided for “whatever measures are necessary to defend the region and preserve the peace,” up to and including military intervention. While this position was repeated in the inter-departmental communications in Washington, the underlying assumption was that if given a fairly competitive choice, the Grenadian people would in fact choose a moderate democratic government, and in the post-intervention period the US hoped to create the circumstances to enable such a choice. US Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger explained this position in an interview:

Q: Mr. Secretary, what makes you confident that a democratic government will be restored in the long term? If we’re going to open it up to the choice of the Grenadians, might they not select another Marxist?

A: Well, they might select another Marxist, they might select anybody they wish. The important thing is for the process to be such that they can do that, and when you have people being murdered and crowds being fired into and people in the government taken in and shot in cold blood in various buildings, why you don’t have anything remotely resembling a democratic form of government. The form of government that we want to get into Grenada is the form of government that enables the people to choose the kind of government they wish. And we certainly want to respect the justified worried [sic] and fears of the neighboring islands who

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are the ones who requested us to go in. And so obviously they should have a role in helping establish this provisional restoration of civil authority which is totally lacking now and have some way in which this kind of, type of government, and indeed just simple going back to the Grenadian constitution can be achieved and as soon as possible.”

Thus, the US government’s hope and expectation was for a Grenadian government that would be democratically elected, as well as democratic in nature; however, the president and other officials wanted it to be clear that the United States was not seeking to impose any specific type of regime, let alone micromanage a particular long-term government.

Without the OECS request, the US may have sought to evacuate its citizens instead, as did several other states in the days immediately following the coup. Even if a military rescue operation had been selected as the most prudent option, absent the OECS request it is likely that this decision would have been made with greater deliberation and that the US would not have unilaterally pursued regime change. Without the OECS members’ plea for quick and decisive action, President Reagan might have had greater incentive to pursue debate with Congress on the feasibility of intervention.

In the context of the secrecy of the invasion, combined with the attack on the US Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon only a few days earlier, there was an outcry from the media that President Reagan was lying about the reasons for sending troops and was instead seeking to divert attention from the tragedy, to avoid serious discussion of the consequences of US policy in the Middle East. Domestically, the majority of news media

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28"News conference with Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger at the Pentagon, Wednesday, October 26, 1983 – 4:30PM", p.9
outlets viewed the action negatively. This latter opinion was in no small part due to the falling out between the White House and the media because of the high level of secrecy surrounding the launch of the invasion and the press ban during the first few days of action.

Managing editor of The New York Times, Seymour Topping, said, “We have strenuously protested to the White House and the Defense Department about the lack of access to the story in Grenada ... We also are disturbed by the paucity of details about the operation released by the Pentagon at a time when the American people require all the facts to make judgments about the actions of our government.”

White House Press Secretary Larry Speakes stated that he “was given virtually no information regarding the Grenada action – either before or after” and that this situation had led to “the Reagan Administration [being] accused of lying or deliberately misleading the public.” Furthermore, Les Janka, the Deputy White House Press Secretary on Foreign Affairs resigned on 28 October over this issue, writing in an op-ed: “With no knowledge of the impending operation, press officers unwittingly passed to the press false and misleading information. Withholding and protecting sensitive information is something experienced press officers know how to do, but lying to the media, even unwittingly, is a cardinal sin against credibility.”

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Congress was not even informed of the impending invasion until mere hours before the first Army Rangers and Marines landed – played a key role in the allegations of deception and willful misleading leveled at the Reagan administration by both the news media and members of Congress. In an opinion piece bitterly titled, “What Was He Hiding?” Anthony Lewis wrote: “The American people needed light on such questions from the start to enable them to perform their duty of critical judgment on official policy. But Mr. Reagan did not want the inconvenience of democratic judgment. He wanted unrestrained power. Hence his great effort to keep the public in powerless ignorance.”

Since much of the initial uproar focused on the mission’s secrecy (the media ban, no ex ante request for congressional permission), how did the public respond to the president’s justifications? Which criticisms gained most currency? If the public did not doubt President Reagan's justifications as a result of the criticisms, why did they not?

Public opinion: Approval and Perceptions

During the year prior to the US intervention in Grenada, President Reagan’s foreign policy approval ratings with the public were not very high. These ratings were partially due to concerns regarding his more aggressive stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, inciting fears that he might be able to prompt a nuclear crisis or a larger scale war with the Soviet Union directly. Thus far, conflict between the two superpowers had been confined to proxy wars

in Asia and Central America, and the public feared any potential further escalation.\textsuperscript{35} However, despite the low ratings for Reagan’s handling of foreign policy overall, the majority of the public responded favorably to his handling of the situation in Grenada. Here, it is important to recall the theoretical importance of this finding. If we find the public ignoring elite disapproval and instead believing the president, even if they are not wholly satisfied with other aspects of his leadership or policies, this should serve as a strong indicator that the public accepts the president’s reasons.

\textsuperscript{35} In a CBS/NYT poll from April 1983, when asked: “Do you think a United States military buildup will convince the Soviet Union to negotiate seriously about arms control, or that a U.S. buildup will make the Soviet Union want to produce more weapons rather than negotiate?” 57\% of respondents feared that the SU would “want to produce more weapons.” Methodology: Conducted by CBS News/New York Times, April 7 - April 11, 1983 and based on 1,489 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. [USCBSNYT.040083.R16]. In a Gallup Poll also taken in April 1983, 41\% of respondents disapproved of how President Reagan was “handling relations with the Soviet Union.” Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization, April 15 - April 18, 1983 and based on 1,509 personal interviews. Sample: national adult. [USGALLUP.1212.R04F]. Furthermore, an ABC News/Washington Post poll also from April 1983 found that 37\% of respondents feared that nuclear war between the US and SU in the next few years was “Very” or “Somewhat” likely. Methodology: Conducted by ABC News/Washington Post, April 8 - April 12, 1983 and based on 1,516 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. [USABCWP.73.R15].
Interestingly, while approval of the president’s handling of Grenada remained strong throughout the year following the action, this event did not raise his overall ratings in the foreign policy realm. At minimum, this finding indicates that a reflexive rally in response to military action cannot be expected to carry over to all related areas of the president’s job, let alone unrelated issues (i.e. domestic politics). However the idea that a popular president is more likely to be believed and met with favor does not provide an easy explanation for this case, because lower overall popularity scores suggest that Reagan was
not simply drawing upon his store of foreign policy capital. Thus, we cannot argue that it was the popularity of Reagan’s other foreign policy actions that had a positive contamination effect for Grenada. Rather, that intervention was uniquely popular among other decisions the president made. This finding is further confirmed by data from 1984 that show President Reagan’s foreign policy approval rates did not enjoy a sustained upswing as a result of the successful intervention.

**1984:**

**Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling foreign policy?**

![Reagan Handling Foreign Policy - 1984](image)

*Figure 33: Reagan Handling Foreign Policy - 1984*
When asked about their perceptions of the justifications President Reagan had offered for the US invasion of Grenada, the public reported strong acceptance of his reasons. In particular, after his speech of 26 October, 1983, over 50% of respondents believed that the primary reason for the intervention was the OECS request, while on 28 October, nearly 60% of respondents agreed that the president “had no choice but to order the invasion” after receiving the OECS request. 

Figure 34: Public Perceptions of Justifications

36 Harris Poll, 28 October 1983. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
Public approval of the Grenada mission can be defined in terms of pragmatic and normative values that correspond to belief in the president’s justifications and preference for success. On the pragmatic side, the public approved of the speed with which the outcome was achieved and that it was successful (pragmatic). However, the symbolic importance of the action and its results for the country of Grenada also mattered to the public (normative – democratic values). That is, the American people valued the act of helping a smaller country whose government had been overthrown by a violent communist regime. Furthermore, the public thought it communicated to the Soviet Union that the United States was serious about combating communism and would not tolerate aggressive expansion of Cuban and Soviet influence in the Caribbean (normative – democratic values / pragmatic – US national interests and security). This position met with strong approval, as a strong majority agreed, “[President Reagan] showed Fidel Castro and the Russians that there’s a limit to how much they can push us around.”37 Additionally, the fact that civilian American lives had been endangered and were all safely rescued factored into the public’s favorable post hoc evaluation of Reagan’s handling of the situation (pragmatic – US national interests). We can compare the goals stated and achieved in Grenada with

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37 See exposition of this point below. Time/Yankelovich, Skelly & White Poll [December, 1983] (On the subject of United States foreign policy, I am going to read you some statements that people in leadership positions have made. Some criticize the President (Reagan), and others praise him. For each one, please tell me whether you tend to agree or disagree with each of these statements.)...A leader who praised the President for taking swift military action in Grenada, saying 'He showed Fidel Castro and the Russians that there's a limit to how much they can push us around'. Do you agree or disagree?
78% Agree
19% Disagree
4% Not sure (vol.)
Subpopulation: Registered voters
Survey by Time. Methodology: Conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly & White December 6-December 8, 1983, and based on telephone interviews with a registered voters sample of 1,000. [USYANK.835652.R25B] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
the issues most people said they cared about both before and after American troops were committed.

Figure 35: Responses to Invasion

The negative reaction from much of Congress, contrasted with public support for the intervention, appears to contradict the partisan-oriented hypotheses that expect criticism by elite co-partisans to inspire public disapproval. Although negative elite cues were communicated to the public – assertions that the President and other key actors were trying to hoodwink the public and Congress by secretly initiating an unjustifiable and illegal
war – the majority of public opinion did not turn against the President as a result. Instead, despite these criticisms from the media and political elites, a majority of the public supported the intervention and did not perceive the President as having acted illegally and deceptively. The public accepted the justification for the intervention as a multilateral effort to assist neighboring countries, and also viewed it as protecting US national security. Furthermore, part of Congress’s inability to restrain or shame the Reagan administration had to do with the speed with which the US forces were able to complete combat operations and rescue the medical students.

What factors account for the increased public support in the face of these accusations? We may attribute the high positive level of public opinion to a few possible causes. First, we can find public approval for key aspects of the intervention itself (notably, rescuing the American medical students and ousting a radical Communist regime in Amer’ca’s “neighborhood”). These reasons strongly resonated with the public, such that they were received as highly justifiable and popular reasons for invading. In particular, the Time/Yankelovich poll conducted in June 1983 found that a full 74% of registered voters who responded agreed that “maintaining good relations with our allies” was “very

38 See “ABC Nightline Poll as reported in WHCMF summary report for the period 4:00 PM October 27 to 4:00 AM October 28, 1983”: 64% approved of “U.S. invasion of Grenada” before the President’s speech compared to 86% approval after hearing the speech; 82% found Reagan’s explanation for the invasion “Good enough”; and 74% agreed with the statement “I feel good about the US using its power to protect its own interests.” See also “President Reagan’s Speech Continues to Receive Support”: USA Today poll 31 October 1983, before the President’s speech, 48% responded “Approve the invasion of Grenada,” compared to 68% after the speech. Washington Post-ABC News poll found before the speech that 53% said they “Approve handling of Grenada by the President” compared to 63% after the speech, while 44% said they “Generally approve President’s handling of foreign affairs” before the speech, compared to 57% afterwards, and 52% before the speech said they “Approve the invasion of Grenada with U.S. troops” compared to 65% afterwards; additionally, prior to the speech 58% of those polled thought “the U.S. [is] doing too much with Armed Forces overseas,” compared to only 48% after the speech. New York Times/CBS News poll found an increase in approval after the speech from 46% to 55% approval for troops being sent to Grenada; before the speech 51% believed that “U.S. lives were in danger in Grenada”, rising to 65% after the speech; also the percentage of those polled who approved of “the President’s ability to handle a crisis wisely” increased from 34% to 44% after the speech.
important,” while another 17% thought this was “moderately important.”³⁹ This indicates that the public was already inclined to respond favorably to US foreign policy aimed at assisting allies who would request help from the United States. Thus, when the president described the OECS request as the catalyst for sending US forces, the public was predisposed to lend its favor and support to the president. When asked the same question again in a December 1983 poll, after US forces had already been in Grenada for over a month, 74% still saw “maintaining good relations with our allies” as “very important” with 17% agreeing it was “moderately important.”⁴⁰ Additionally, when asked in December’s poll how important they thought “protecting our allies and friends when they are in danger” was as a US foreign policy goal, 52% agreed it was “very important,” while another 27% affirmed this aim as “moderately important.”⁴¹ Two other goals evaluated that related to America’s position in the world – “strengthening America’s military security” and “maintaining America’s leadership in the world” – both received favorable response from the registered voters polled. The former was considered “very important” by 65% of respondents, while the latter was considered “very important” by 68% of respondents.⁴²

³⁹ Survey by Time Methodology: Conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly & White June 27-June 29, 1983, and based on telephone interviews with a registered voters sample of 1,007. [USYANK.835632.R21F] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
⁴⁰ Survey by Time. Methodology: Conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly & White December 6-December 8, 1983, and based on telephone interviews with a registered voters sample of 1,000. [USYANK.835652.R22D] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
⁴¹ Survey by Time. Methodology: Conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly & White December 6-December 8, 1983, and based on telephone interviews with a registered voters sample of 1,000. [USYANK.835652.R22F] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
⁴² These questions were not asked in the June survey. Survey by Time. Methodology: Conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly & White December 6-December 8, 1983, and based on telephone interviews with a registered voters sample of 1,000. [USYANK.835652.R22G] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
These responses again speak to the high salience of projecting American power and standing against Communism, especially in nearby regions.

In assessing the explanatory value of the outcome-related hypotheses, we recall that the public desires success, and that a contributing factor to perceived success is clear understanding of the intended goals combined with a favorable attitude towards those goals. If outcome-based preferences dominate in the public’s opinion formation, then we could expect them to disregard perceived deception as long as they view the outcome as desirable. However, as the experimental findings have shown, successful outcomes did not make respondents less likely to perceive deception. On the contrary, failure to achieve goals made some respondents doubtful of the stated reasons.

The general public's acceptance of the secret nature of the invasion as justifiable, and their resistance to coding this secrecy as deliberate deception or hypocrisy can be related to their favorable view of the mission's goals. In this case, situated at the height of the Cold War in the early 1980s, the public was strongly in favor of resisting communism through American foreign policy. In June 1983 when the Time/Yankelovich poll asked registered voters how important they thought were various concerns or goals of US foreign policy, 61% agreed that “stopping communism from spreading” was “very important,” while another 21% thought this goal was “moderately important.”

Furthermore, when Time/Yankelovich again polled registered voters in December 1983, after US forces had been sent to Grenada, 63% still thought “stopping communism from spreading” was “very important,” while another 18% thought this goal was

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“moderately important.” When this same survey asked how important respondents thought “representing the values America stands for – liberty and democracy” were, 80% agreed that this was “very important,” with another 10% claiming moderate importance for this goal. That same poll asked registered voters whether they agreed or disagreed with “A leader who praised the President for taking swift military action in Grenada, saying 'He showed Fidel Castro and the Russians that there’s a limit to how much they can push us around.'” A full 78% agreed while only 19% disagreed with this viewpoint, demonstrating an overwhelming public concern with America’s ability to present a strong image as democracy’s defender upon the world stage. Thus, the intervention’s popularity hinged both on the immediate effects of assisting the Grenadian people and the OECS, but also on the mission’s success as a demonstration of President Reagan’s leadership abilities and America’s capacity to stand against communism more broadly speaking.

The basis for these views is a confluence of pragmatic and normative reasons. They are normative because of the emphasis on promoting and defending American values of freedom and democracy; they are pragmatic in the sense of the deep-rooted fear that any communist expansion close to US borders would constitute a threat to national security. This attitude means that not only was the public willing to believe that communist influence did exist, and that it was indeed a threat, but also they believed it was an important reason

44 Survey by Time. Methodology: Conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly & White December 6-December 8, 1983, and based on telephone interviews with a registered voters sample of 1,000. [USYANK.835652.R22C] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
45 Survey by Time. Methodology: Conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly & White December 6-December 8, 1983, and based on telephone interviews with a registered voters sample of 1,000. [USYANK.835652.R22H] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
46 Subpopulation: Registered voters. Survey by Time. Methodology: Conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly & White December 6-December 8, 1983, and based on telephone interviews with a registered voters sample of 1,000. [USYANK.835652.R25B] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
for taking action. Of those registered voters who responded in December 1983 that “military activities such as those that the United States has taken recently in such areas as Grenada and Central America are in the best interests of the nation,” 65% explained they felt this way because “it was important at this time for us as a nation to assert ourselves,” while 24% of that group thought “they achieved specific foreign policy objectives.” Thus, we find that resisting communism and demonstrating US power were highly-valued foreign policy preferences for the American public in 1983, and as such, not only did they believe President Reagan when he cited countering communist influence as a justification for the Grenada invasion, but they agreed that it was an important reason.

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47 Survey by Time. Methodology: Conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly & White December 6-December 8, 1983, and based on telephone interviews with a registered voters sample of 1,000. [USYANK.835652.R05D] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
Second, not only were the goals of the invasion popular, but the administration was able to quickly demonstrate success in accomplishing those goals, namely returning the medical students to US soil and removing the ruling regime from power. This demonstration of competence speaks to the public’s desire for successful outcomes. We can also see slight increases in public support for the intervention immediately following President Reagan’s speech, before success had been fully achieved. This distinguishes support relating to belief in and valuation of the motives and reasons for action from
outcome-based support. However, as success is expected to garner positive responses from
the public, we would expect to see even stronger expressions of public support when
success is clear.

As we find in the public opinion poll responses, the public wanted the United States
to stand firm in the face of communist aggression, maintain an image as a strong world
leader, and support and protect allies. Of particular importance were the measurable,
observable markers of success by which President Reagan was able to establish
benchmarks for the mission, which connected to the public's foreign policy preferences.
With the US military's rapid acquisition and control of territory previously occupied by the
coup-supporting forces, combined with the safe return of the medical students to the United
States and the overthrow of the coup-instated regime, the American public was able to see
the connection between the goals and justifications for action that the president had
expressed in his speech, and the results of the US intervention. Consequently, they were
able to perceive the outcome of that action as highly successful.

Following the 1984 presidential election, in which President Reagan won a strong
victory (carrying 49 of the 50 states) against his opponent, Walter Mondale, the American
National Election Study re-polled voters they had polled prior to the election. In the survey,
one of the questions asked respondents if they agreed or disagreed with the statement:
"[T]his country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves
with problems in other parts of the world." A full 73% disagreed, while 24% agreed with
the more isolationist position. From this information, we find further confirmation that

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Note: Asked of those in Long Form with personal interviews 50% of Long Form, 49% of sample.
Methodology: Conducted by Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan November 7-January 25, 1985,
and based on personal and telephone (see note) interviews with a national adult re-interviewed (see note)
the public's underlying preferences did not lean toward isolationism, but rather they were concerned with America's ability to help with problems around the world – as long as it was not likely to spark a fight with the Soviet Union. 49

49 In a CBS/NYT poll from April 1983, when asked: "Do you think a United States military buildup will convince the Soviet Union to negotiate seriously about arms control, or that a U.S. buildup will make the Soviet Union want to produce more weapons rather than negotiate?" 57% of respondents feared that the SU would "want to produce more weapons." Methodology: Conducted by CBS News/New York Times, April 7 - April 11, 1983 and based on 1,489 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. [USCBSNYT.040083.R16]. In a Gallup Poll also taken in April 1983, 41% of respondents disapproved of how President Reagan was "handling relations with the Soviet Union." Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization, April 15 - April 18, 1983 and based on 1,509 personal interviews. Sample: national adult. [USGALLUP.1212.R04F]. Furthermore, an ABC News/Washington Post poll also from April 1983 found that 37% of respondents feared that nuclear war between the US and SU in the next few years was "Very" or "Somewhat" likely. Methodology: Conducted by ABC News/Washington Post, April 8 - April 12, 1983 and based on 1,516 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. [USABCWP.73.R15].
As discussed above, while we might expect preexisting beliefs in the president’s competence to make the public less likely to perceive deception, if these prior positive views are not present, we cannot credit this bias as a source of public approval for a military action. This latter point is crucial in interpreting the case of Grenada. The public perception of President Reagan’s ability to inspire confidence in the White House during the first half of 1983 is notable for the majority holding a negative opinion through the early fall. By the end of the year, negative and positive views were almost evenly split, but from January-October 1984, there was a steady increase in positive views, with concomitantly decreasing negative
views. By June of 1984, more than 50% of respondents thought that President Reagan was doing a good job inspiring confidence in the office of the President. This upward trend continued for the rest of that year. We may attribute some of this increased confidence to the success in Grenada and the goals achieved, but we cannot attribute initial approval of the intervention to the public's prior positive beliefs about the president.

Do you trust Reagan to make the right decisions or not when it comes to what the United States should do in world affairs?

Figure 38: Trust Reagan to Make Right Decisions?

However, despite the public’s hesitance regarding President Reagan’s general foreign policy performance, combined with a sense that he did not inspire much confidence
in the White House, we also find a majority opinion expressing trust in his ability to make right decisions, as well as his trustworthiness and truth-telling. Here we see expression of trust, even though respondents do not necessarily think that the president is doing an excellent job with foreign policy more generally. This poll question further delves into the concerns and views highlighted in the previous figure. Here, we see that when specifically asked whether or not President Reagan could be trusted to make the “right decisions” about foreign affairs, a majority of the public believed this to be true, even during the summer and early fall of 1983. This measure of trust increased after the President’s speech explaining why he had sent US forces to Grenada. Although this uptick did not last long-term, the new, lowered rating measured in May and July 1983 was very similar to that in the previous summer. That is, Reagan’s ability to inspire trust in his decision-making stayed consistently above 50% approval levels. It is also worth noting that on the poll of 8 December, just over a month after the invasion of Grenada, the percentage of respondents who rated President Reagan with a low trust ranking reached its lowest, dropping below 20%. At the same time, the “High” trustworthiness rating remained strong. This result is most likely due to the achievements on the ground that stabilized the country and confirmed President Reagan’s stated reasons for intervention.
Furthermore, not only do we fail to see a rise in public mistrust of Reagan or the presidency following the media’s allegations of deception, but we also see a contrary phenomenon – backlash against the media. Letters to the editor in a wide variety of local and national newspapers and news magazines show examples of support for the President
combined with criticism of the media’s attitude, self-perceived role, and its critique of the executive, with reactions as extreme as calling the news establishment “unpatriotic.”

Although this factor is complicated in this situation, we can see how in-group / out-group demarcation could account for some of the public support for the Grenada mission. Although partisanship was theoretically expected to have the strongest effect in determining the public’s in-group / out-group identifiers, the experimental findings have shown that co-partisan elite criticism of the president has only a weak influence on opinion formation as compared to the effects of perceived truthfulness and outcome. The main role played by partisanship is found to be far more basic in that study. Respondents who are co-partisans of the sitting president are predisposed to approve of his actions and policies, while opposition partisans are predisposed to disapprove of the sitting president, regardless of elite critics’ partisanship. At the same time, however, a predisposition toward hawkishness or doveishness may inspire approval or disapproval for specifically military actions, which may run contrary to party-based expectations.

By coding media criticism as mean-spirited opposition to the President, significant sectors of the public drew in-group / out-group markers not on the basis of partisan affiliation, but rather in terms of legitimately elected leadership versus un-elected media outlets. Here we can look at the research that has been conducted on the trends of growing


51 See Chapter 4 in this volume.
public mistrust of the news media across time. As Jeffrey Cohen (2008) argues, there has been an increasing perception that the news media not only seeks to be an agenda-setter for elected officials, but also that it wants to communicate its own particular agenda to the public, as opposed to straightforward reporting of news. During the months preceding the Grenada mission, the public expressed high confidence in various media sources. Nationally renowned news outlets, especially television news, ranked highly, but people seemed to place even greater confidence in their local media sources.52

From the early 1980s onward the press became more harsh, antagonistic, and critical in its approach to the president.53 Over time, Cohen argues that this trend reduces the impact of reporting – if all news is critical, the public will find it harder to determine when they should be critical enough to exact punishment – but also it causes the public to perceive the news media as operating more from a negative agenda than from an interest in fact-finding. Thus, even if the public has a higher degree of confidence in the factual accuracy of news reporting, at the same time the public resents negative spin and therefore can simultaneously trust the reporting of events while rejecting negative criticism of the president.

52 See Figure 42 and discussion, below.
In the summer of 1983, the president did not fare so well by ranking of trustworthiness in comparison to other institutions such as the news media – broadly speaking – and Congress. While Congress garnered the highest percentage of responses ranking it with “medium” trustworthiness (70%), and the president earned the highest percentage ranking him with “low” trustworthiness (29%), the media received the lowest percentage ranking it “low” in trustworthiness (12%). Furthermore, the media’s “high” trustworthiness ranking (30%) surpassed that of the president (27%). This makes the
public response to the criticisms of Reagan over the invasion of Grenada even more surprising, as this poll in June seems to suggest the public was primed to trust the media more than the president.

**Figure 41: Confidence in Institutions**

This finding is prefigured in greater detail by the April 1983 Garth Analysis Survey's questions about the trustworthiness of different information sources. Again, President Reagan received the highest percentage of “low” trustworthiness rankings compared to the
notable news sources mentioned. However, he earned a higher percentage of “high”
trustworthiness ratings than the Washington Post, roughly equal to those gained by Good
Morning America, and only slightly exceeded by the New York Times. The top three most-
trusted information sources were “Local TV News,” ABC News Tonight, and CBS Evening
News. Notably, all three of these sources – each of which earned a trustworthiness rating
close to 60% – are television news sources. The only print news source that broke the 50%
mark for “high” rankings was Time Magazine, followed most closely by “Local Newspaper”
(49%), with Newsweek Magazine coming in at third place (47%).

54 33%
55 38%, 32%, 38%, and 40%, respectively.
Figure 42: Trustworthiness of Information Sources

The high level of trust placed in television news programs should not be surprising, as it reflects the public's impression that when they watch televised news they are observing events just as they took place. Thus, people should be more inclined to trust the reported facts when they believe they have observed the evidence of these facts in the first-person, as opposed to receiving that information through the filter of a reporter's printed column.
With regard to the negative reactions from some members of Congress, there are several factors to consider. The initial wave of criticism stemmed from dissatisfaction that the president had neither consulted with Congress nor requested official approval before a) agreeing to the OECS request and b) sending troops in order to fulfill that agreement. On the same day that the Senate voted to apply the War Powers Act to Grenada, Speaker of the House Thomas P. O’Neill Jr. commented, “To be perfectly truthful, his policy scares me.”

The tactic used by Representative John Conyers and others, a civil suit against the president invoking the War Powers Resolution, was an effort to both express displeasure towards and disapproval of President Reagan’s action and to reassert congressional authority. Although one may argue that this gesture was largely symbolic in nature (especially because the suit neither succeeded nor did Congress successfully wield the War Powers Act against the president), the partisanship-oriented hypotheses nonetheless expect that if the public had been paying attention, this movement in Congress should have prompted disapproval since Congress had been ranked more trustworthy than the president. Therefore, we must ask why this negative public backlash did not happen. Two strong possibilities arise. First, actions such as the Conyers suit may have been seen as infighting. This explanation is supported by the failure of the two houses to impose the 60-90 day timeframe of the War Powers Resolution. Although the House and the Senate independently passed measures to declare section 4(a)(1) of the War Powers Resolution in effect as of 25 October, they failed

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to hold a conference and jointly approve either of the bills.\textsuperscript{58} From the public perspective, if the Congress could not successfully enact legal measures to increase its responsibility and restrict the President’s use of the armed forces in this case, then there must not be serious problems with the President’s actions. Second, successive completion of various specific goals served both to confirm the validity of President Reagan’s initial justifications while providing the successful outcomes that the public appreciates.

There was significant dispute in Congress over the action, with legislators from both parties banding together to criticize Reagan for not consulting Congress before launching US forces, and asserting that this action was a violation of the Constitution and the War Powers Resolution. This response culminated in a civil suit brought against the President by a handful of legislators. In \textit{Conyers et al. v. Reagan et al.}, the suit alleged, “This invasion, initiated unilaterally by the defendants, and the ongoing military operations in Grenada constitute a violation of the constitutional authority of these congressional plaintiffs to declare war under Article 1, Section 8, Clause 11 of the United States Constitution” and through it the plaintiffs wished to secure “a Writ of Mandamus and/or an injunction directing defendant ... to withdraw all United States Armed Forces.”\textsuperscript{59} These actions were attempts to reassert congressional authority and limit the president’s capacity to act without congressional approval, but they failed to successfully punish President Reagan, and neither had a significant effect on his domestic reputation.


The issue here revealed is that the public consistently rated President Reagan trustworthy when asked about his characteristics as an individual. However, when asked to rank the president relative to other government bodies or information sources, he was judged less favorably. Does this finding suggest that the public’s majority decision to believe the president’s justifications for the invasion of Grenada, despite criticisms from the media and members of Congress, is irrational given the relatively higher trustworthiness ratings attributed to the news media and Congress? As I discuss further below, I hold that the public’s response to the president is instead both intelligible and explicable by my theoretical framework.

**Factors Affecting the Public’s Failure to Seek Punishment**

As a result of the public’s positive view of the president’s decision-making on Grenada, the public neither sought to punish the president, nor did his approval ratings suffer. As discussed above, my theory predicts that several factors should have contributed both to the low incidence of perceived deception by the general public, and their unwillingness to punish even when cues from political elites and media claimed deception. While the secrecy surrounding the invasion’s launch was a strong cause of the media and political elites’ dissatisfaction and accusations of deception, it was helpful for message control purposes because the earliest messages the public received about the invasion were those directly presented by the president in his televised national address. Thus, we can see the rise in approval ratings regarding Grenada following this speech as a good indication of the effectiveness of his message in both reaching and convincing the public.
Additionally, the nature of the operation meant that it was possible to gauge “success” or “failure” fairly rapidly within the first few days after combat began. Again, the media ban during the first few days stirred up anger and resentment from that establishment, and meant that only White House approved reports reached the public, but it also meant that combat operations were nearly complete by the time the media had free rein to report their perspective. The range of objectives for the mission was also useful in gaining the public’s approval. While goals such as “reestablishing the rule of law,” and “protecting the Grenadian people” are nebulous and difficult to quantify, measure, or evaluate, the goal of “rescuing the American medical students” was highly visible, easy to identify whether it had succeeded or failed, and provided images that resonated with the broader American public on moral, emotional, and patriotic levels. Thus, even if it was initially doubtful or not clear that the US would and could achieve the wider political goals stated, the public could see the evacuated medical students on the nightly news and in the newspapers celebrating their safe return in the arms of their tearful and relieved parents.60

**The President’s Damage Control Strategy**

In this case, the audience threatening the president and his administration with punishment was not the electorate, but rather other political elites within Congress. In response to this situation, the administration had to call upon legal reasoning both to argue against those who claimed that the military intervention was unconstitutional and in violation of the War Powers Resolution, as well as against those arguing that the action was

60 Perhaps ironically, this suggests that it may very well have been due the confidence the public placed in the television media that confirmed to them the legitimacy of Reagan’s reasons for intervention and his effectiveness as a leader as the mission unfolded successfully.
a clear violation of the sovereignty principle and therefore in contravention of international law and thereby impermissible.

We also find Reagan and his advisors reiterating the original reasons given. The initial message does not change over time, but rather is reemphasized and bolstered. Especially after the medical students were rescued and that goal was clearly achieved, the administration continued making the case that a sustained US troop presence was required in order to maintain stability in Grenada, rebuild the infrastructure and restore the economy, and pave the way for free and fair elections (which would be another clearly visible milestone). To keep the public willing to support these operations and stave off domestic and international criticisms, the administration had to reaffirm these goals as sufficient justification for the intervention as well as essential to sustain the victory and fulfill US responsibilities in the region. At the same time, the administration had to provide evidence of progress towards achieving these objectives, to prevent doubts about success on this front. The important benefit of being able to demonstrate consistent progress was that then the president would not be accused of changing his mind or backing down from those originally stated goals, further demonstrating his consistency, competence, and ability to follow through on his commitments to Grenada. While the experimental findings showed that success does not appear to mitigate negative responses to perceived deception, success does contribute to higher approval rates in cases of perceived truth. Thus, initial belief in and support for the reasons behind the invasion grew as goals were accomplished.

The military successes also meant that the Reagan administration was able to credibly promise to draw down troop levels on the island within a relatively constrained time frame, which further undercut the criticisms of the legislators opposed to the action.
Furthermore, although American public opinion favored the president's handling of Grenada, because of the threatened punishment from these congressional members (the civil suit), and international criticism, the Executive branch needed to be sure to keep the electorate's favor retrospectively (regarding the justifiability of the completed military action) and prospectively (through the ongoing regime transfer and reconstruction efforts on the island). Therefore, President Reagan and his administration had to be very public about the US commitment to these efforts, both to demonstrate successful accomplishment of stated goals in cooperation with the OECS members, and to reinforce the moral justifiability of the action. That is, he had to show tangible markers of good accomplished for the Grenadian people as well as for the American citizens.

On this point, the US supported Grenadian economic growth in the year following the invasion in several ways. First, the US committed to the building project for a large airport. Because during the invasion the US had destroyed the Cuban-managed airport construction project already underway, the US government committed funds and labor to complete a larger airport in order to boost the Grenadian tourism industry. The US government encouraged investment in the island, which also provided an incentive for holding competitive elections as soon as possible, to prove that the island had become a stable and safe place for foreign investment. Additionally, the US sought to strengthen its political relationship with Grenada by establishing an embassy directly on the island, whereas previously the US envoy to Grenada had been stationed in Barbados. The leader of the new embassy was a Charge d’Affaires who reported directly to the President from the
outset, and he worked very closely with the interim government to help the projects continue smoothly and maintain positive relations between the countries.⁶¹

The Reagan administration held forth its original message throughout the duration and aftermath of the intervention and was able to provide clear evidence of success on some of the more immediate and tangible goals within a few days of the troops’ first landings. Additionally, over time even some of the more nebulous goals – restoring democracy and reducing Communist influence in the Caribbean – were met. Notably, highly sensitive documents from the Grenadian government were discovered and captured during the operation that revealed secret arms deals between Grenada and other Communist countries including the USSR, North Korea, and Cuba. This offered strong support to the US and OECS claims that a pressing military threat had been developing in the region due to G’enada’s growing ties with the Soviets and Cubans. By publicizing portions of these documents, the administration was able to gain further public approval for the justifiability of that stated reason for intervention.

Perception of long-term success was gained through the stability of the interim government followed by a smooth transition to a freely-elected Grenadian government. The interim government in Grenada established immediately following the conclusion of hostilities was led by the British-appointed Governor General Sir Paul Scoon. In accordance with the stated US goal of restoring the “rule of law,” it stabilized the country with the help of the peacekeeping forces that remained. One of the first actions Scoon took as head of the interim government was to reinstate the Grenadian Constitution (which had been suspended when President Bishop and the New Jewel Movement took power in 1979).

Peace and stability, political freedom, liberation of political prisoners, and steady economic growth endured throughout the following year. At first, there was some international criticism about the duration of the interim government, as other states questioned whether Grenada was simply going to exist as a US-controlled proxy state instead of an independent democracy. However, competitive and free elections were held in December 1984, achieving the goal of restoring the rule of law and independent self-governance to Grenada.

In this case, we find evidence for two distinct normative perspectives contributing to the positive orientation of public opinion towards the president: first, aiding allies, and second, maintaining a strong face against Communism in the region. In evaluating the content of the president’s justifications for intervention, the public believed his reasons for intervention and considered them morally sound. Because the public viewed these as justifiable reasons for intervention, they were not convinced by the accusation of deception that centered on the secrecy of the invasion’s launch.

Conclusion

The case of the US intervention in Grenada in 1983 offers several implications for my theory. First of all, we find that perceived deception does indeed matter – as seen in the harshly critical reactions of some members of Congress, the news media, and the protesters – but the general trend of public opinion will not respond to these allegations if the public

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63 See “Message from American Embassy Kingston to RUEHC Secretary of State Washington D.C., DE RUEHKG #0476/09 2990129, ZNR UUUUU ZZI, 0 252357Z.”

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does not agree that the President acted deceitfully. If, instead, the general public rejects charges of deception, contrary to overt cues from the media and other political elites, it will not seek to punish the President. Therefore, as a means of maintaining public trust in the president and avoiding the perception of deception, the factors of message control and competence are found to be highly important in this case, as is the original content of the justifications combined with evidence from events on the ground that credibly maps on to the president’s original reasons (interpreted as confirmatory by the public). Successful achievement of stated goals in this case, along with adherence to a transparent timetable for troop withdrawal and transfer of authority, serve to reinforce public support for approved military action over time. Finally, partisanship is not found to be a strong determinant of public response to and interpretation of the president’s justification for his policies and actions in this case.
Chapter 7: The Persian Gulf War

Introduction

The Persian Gulf War of 1990 is selected as a case study because it is a case in which trust in the president, elite cues, and expectations and perceptions of success all contributed to high public approval for the war. My analysis of this case follows Berinsky’s¹ and Zaller’s² arguments regarding elite cues and discourse as a cause of the low public desire for war during the autumn, and the congressional vote authorizing war as spurring the rally supporting war in January, and Kull and Ramsay’s³ assessment of the value of success in public evaluations of the war’s on-the-ground progress and retrospective judgments. I also expand Mueller’s⁴ point that President Bush did not “[convince] a growing number of Americans of the wisdom of war,” but ultimately earned public support for reasons including, “he and his aides enjoyed what appears to have been a fair amount of trust in this matter.”⁵ I argue that President Bush’s perceived trustworthiness and honesty contributed to public acceptance of his reasons for action against Iraq, ranging from protecting oil flows in the Persian Gulf to thwarting aggression.⁶ The case is divided into three parts: First,

⁶ Note that acceptance of justifications as true – believing that certain reasons are among the administration’s true reasons for pursuing military action – is categorically distinct from accepting those reasons as good or valid (“justifiable”) reasons. For example, in the case of the Persian Gulf War, during the autumn of 1990 the public believed that protecting US interests in oil was one of the administration’s reasons for pursuing firmer action (unsurprisingly, as the president had stated as much), but that this was not a good reason to escalate beyond
public opinion prior to and immediately following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in the context of President Bush’s speeches regarding the situation, extending through the autumn in the context of congressional debate and UN approval; second, the rally in support of the war following the congressional vote in January, in the context of early signs of progress; and third, retrospective views after the war ended, encompassing perceptions of success, justifiability, and whether or not the success was qualified by the administration’s decision not to depose Saddam Hussein. My theory expects a high degree of approval due to the mission’s success, and support for the president’s justifications for the mission if people believed them, and opposition from those who doubted the reasons. This case will illuminate more clearly how perceptions of truth-telling work in tandem with perceptions of success to elicit high levels of public support for military action.

**Key Questions**

In evaluating this case, I will answer the following questions to more fully understand how public opinion responded to the president’s decisions and action regarding Iraq:

1) During the lead-up to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, did the American public have any interest in the region?

2) How did the public respond to the president’s decision to increase troop levels after the midterm elections?

3) What were overall views of the president’s honesty?

sanctions to force. However, the public also accepted as a true reason using military action to counter Saddam Hussein’s aggression, which it considered a good reason. Over time, concomitant with congressional support, this latter justification became the reason that held dominant place in the public’s consideration.
Did the public assess the outcome of the war as a success?

**Background to the Case**

As administration officials would later recall, although President Bush had signed a National Security Directive on US policy on the Persian Gulf in 1989, during the first part of his administration Iraq did not feature very prominently in foreign policy calculations because the gradual collapse of the Soviet Union and its implications for the future of Europe were more salient. The Directive emphasized,

> Access to Persian Gulf oil and the security of key friendly states in the area are vital to U.S. national security. The U.S. remains committed to defend its vital interests in the region, if necessary and appropriate through the use of U.S. military force, against the Soviet Union or any other regional power with interests inimical to our own. The U.S. also remains committed to support the individual and collective self-defense of friendly countries in the area[.]

The Directive continued with Iraq-specific policy, expressing a desire to improve relations for the sake of regional stability, but declared that any “illegal use of chemical and/or biological weapons will lead to political and economic sanctions [...] Iraq should be urged to cease its meddling in external affairs, [...] and be encouraged to play a constructive role in [...] cooperating with the Middle East peace process.”

However, in February 1990, the administration began to grow concerned as Iraqi President Saddam Hussein “pressed and threatened other Arab governments” at the Arab

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Cooperation Council meeting, insisting they “forgive Iraq’s considerable debts,” and asserting that the US Navy ought to leave the region now that the Iran-Iraq War had ended. In response, the US placed a hold on a set of credit guarantees previously promised to Iraq.8

Starting in May, however, there were disagreements among OPEC members as they sought to stop Kuwait from producing oil above its quota, because overproduction was driving down the worldwide per-barrel price of oil. In particular, Saddam Hussein charged Kuwait with intentionally forcing prices down in order to damage Iraq’s struggling economy.9

Through the summer, the dispute escalated as Saddam Hussein accused Kuwait of stealing Iraqi oil as part of a US-led plot to hold down oil prices, and threatened additional action “if words were not enough to protect Iraqis.”10 Within a few days, Iraq had sent troops to the Kuwait border.11 Summoning US Ambassador April Glaspie for a special meeting, Hussein described a litany of complaints against Kuwait and the United States, but affirmed his commitment to pursue scheduled negotiations to resolve the oil dispute, while Glaspie pointed out that President Bush had recommended that Congress not impose economic sanctions against Iraq.12 Given Hussein’s reassurances, the Bush administration

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did not expect Iraq to launch an attack against Kuwait, although both houses voted in favor of economic sanctions within a few days.\(^\text{13}\)

**Invasion of Kuwait**

However, after an abortive start to the negotiations, Saddam Hussein’s forces invaded Kuwait during 1 and 2 August and the Kuwaiti royal family fled to Saudi Arabia.\(^\text{14}\) President Bush went to the UN for a resolution to pressure Iraq to withdraw, and although he was not yet ready to commit to using American military forces, he felt clear that Iraq could not be allowed to hold onto Kuwait. If Iraq, a militarily strong, belligerent power, could control the flow of oil in the Persian Gulf, it would be intransigent. Furthermore, Saddam Hussein retained stores of chemical and biological weapons developed and used during the Iran-Iraq war and against his own people; the Bush administration feared Iraq would use them against Israel or the other Arab states. In particular, President Bush and his advisors worried about prospects for maintaining the territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia, their strongest ally in the region.

On 6 August, President Bush told the press, “I view very seriously our determination to reverse this aggression. There are an awful lot of countries that are in total accord with what I’ve just said. We will be working with them all for collective action [...] This will not


stand. This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait.”

Although some reporters characterized the president’s statement as “all but committing himself to use military force against Iraq if diplomatic efforts and economic sanctions fail,” he first sought UN authorization and a wider base of international support. Additionally, the public was not yet prepared to support an armed response to the situation.

Public Opinion and the President’s Response

As of 4 August, only 6% of respondents believed that the appropriate US response would be to “send in troops,” while 14% advocated “do nothing” and 13% wanted to “wait and see/wait for further developments.” When asked directly, 68% opposed “direct US military action against Iraq.” However, 60% favored military action if Iraq proceeded to invade Saudi Arabia as well, and 77% supported intervention if any US citizens were taken hostage. This initial response suggests that at this point, the American public did not consider the stakes in the situation sufficiently high to merit US military involvement.

Nonetheless, they were willing to support economic and trade sanctions.


On 8 August 1990, President Bush addressed the American people about the invasion. He emphasized that the United States and the rest of the world community ought to take careful measures to compel Iraq to withdraw, but that a military solution was not going to be the first recourse as troops were being sent to Saudi Arabia to defend its borders against possible attack.

I want to be clear about what we are doing and why. America does not seek conflict, nor do we seek to chart the destiny of other nations. But America will stand by her friends. The mission of our troops is wholly defensive. Hopefully, they will not be needed long. They will not initiate hostilities, but they will defend themselves, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and other friends in the Persian Gulf.  

Thus, the pre-intervention reasoning for committing troops to a defensive, non-combative posture focused on support for and defense of allies, with reference to the principle of self-determination and non-interference.

Following this speech, American public opinion jumped in favor of the president’s handling of Iraq and policy measures that fell short of committing US forces to direct engagement with Iraq. In particular, 64% favored sending troops to Saudi Arabia as a defensive measure. Despite majorities opposing any military action against Iraq – whether through bombing or a ground campaign – a *USA Today* poll found that 73% believed the

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20 Methodology: Conducted by Associated Press, August 8 - August 12, 1990 and based on 1,004 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. Interviewing was conducted by ICR Survey Research Group. [USAP.90-832.R1]. Data provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.
United States was “very” or “somewhat” likely to become involved in combat as a result of the crisis.\footnote{Survey by USA Today. Methodology: Conducted by Gordon S. Black Corporation on August 8, 1990 and based on 610 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. [USGBUSA.903218.R08]. Data provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.}

In September, President Bush explained the rationale for sending troops to defend the Saudi Arabian border:

> Our objectives in the Persian Gulf are clear, our goals defined and familiar: Iraq must withdraw from Kuwait completely, immediately, and without condition. Kuwait’s legitimate government must be restored. The security and stability of the Persian Gulf must be assured. And American citizens abroad must be protected. These goals are not ours alone. They’ve been endorsed by the United Nations Security Council five times in as many weeks. Most countries share our concern for principle. And many have a stake in the stability of the Persian Gulf. This is not, as Saddam Hussein would have it, the United States against Iraq. It is Iraq against the world.\footnote{George H.W. Bush (11 September 1990), “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress” (http://millercenter.org/scrpss/archive/speeches/detail/3425)}

Aside from the pragmatic justifications of protecting the other borders in the Middle East and deterring further expansion by Iraq, as well as the dual humanitarian and pragmatic objective of liberating Kuwait, President Bush stated a further overarching goal underlying the military action.

> Out of these troubled times, our fifth objective—a new world order—can emerge: a new era—freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world,
East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony. A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we’ve known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.23

This vision of “new world order” is not well-specified, other than expressing a desire for a post-Cold War era characterized by cooperation as opposed to power struggles. The president characterized the coalition united against Iraq’s aggression – remarkable both for the overall number of countries involved as well as for its composition, bringing together Arab and Western states – as symbolic of the future for interstate cooperation in the interest of peace and stability. In terms of providing justification for the intervention, establishing a “new world order” was not proposed as an end in itself. However, because the coalition would be the means to counteract Iraq’s territorial ambitions (demonstrating the dual goals of cooperation and peace-seeking), while the immediate aim was to liberate Kuwait, a longer-term goal was to set a precedent by which to usher in the “new world order.”

However, even at this point in time, President Bush was not thoroughly committed to a military plan to liberate Kuwait. He was, however, firmly determined to act in concert with the United Nations and a coalition of other nations to respond to Iraq. There was no sense of US intent to go-it-alone or act unilaterally. Part of this approach depended on the

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issue of oil. An effective boycott of Iraq’s oil would require a significant number of its current and potential customers, as a US-only boycott would not exert sufficient pressure. Seeking to avoid a military solution if possible, the United Nations met a full five times during the month spanning Iraq’s August invasion of Kuwait and Bush’s speech to Congress on 11 September 1990. During these meetings, resolutions were passed, including the Iraq Sanctions Act of 1990, setting economic sanctions against Iraq, boycotting its oil supplies and further prohibiting import into Iraq of other supplies.24 A stipulation was made that if it became clear that the Iraqi civilian population were suffering too much through the sanctions, humanitarian provisions would be allowed. The rationale behind the sanctions was that Iraq’s government would soon find itself in short supply of cash due to the boycott, while the hard-pressed population would rise up in anger against the dictator whose actions were responsible for their compounded suffering. However, this supposition failed to take into account Saddam Hussein’s personal insulation from the population, given his elite Republican Guard, and the fact that the population had been so well-intimidated and oppressed by his regime that they did not have any confidence in being able to rise against him. Thus, the true effects of the sanctions were to harm Iraqi civilians without significantly affecting Saddam Hussein’s ability to hold his country and the occupied Kuwaiti territory.25

Therefore, when it became clear that despite sanctions, Saddam Hussein was not paying attention to the ultimatum for withdrawal from Kuwait, the UN Security Council

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passed Resolution 678 on 29 November 1990, which gave Chapter 7 authorization to member states to “use all necessary means to uphold and implement resolution 660(1990) and all subsequent relevant resolutions and to restore international peace and security in the area.” This provided, from President Bush’s perspective, the legitimacy required to enact a military solution to the situation. At this time, he and all his military advisors were convinced that they could not succeed without significant American casualties, which worried them because they believed the American public was suffering from ‘Vietnam syndrome’ – deep-rooted casualty aversion. This attitude was largely due to the fact that all the top military advisors and generals were Vietnam veterans and they had experienced the demoralizing effects of declining public opinion over the course of that war. President Bush, on the other hand, was a veteran of World War II, and he saw the world in the black-and-white terms that were relevant to that era. Thus, for him the situation became one of Hussein being the ultimate evil dictator – President Bush compared the situation to that of Hitler’s push across Europe (with no sense of hyperbole) – which became a driving motivation for taking decisive action. This also made him less cautious than his military advisors.

Notably, as early as 10 August, a New York Times poll found that 61% of respondents believed that likening Saddam Hussein and his actions in Kuwait to Hitler’s behavior in the 1930s, such that “it is important to stop him now or he will just seize one country after another” was a “good way to look at the situation.” At the same time, 52% though that it was

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“not a good comparison” to say that engaging Iraq would be “a lot like getting involved in Vietnam in the 1960s and a small commitment at first can lead to years of conflict without clear results”\textsuperscript{28} However, despite willingly comparing Saddam Hussein to Hitler, and disbelieving that another Vietnam would result, a majority of the public still did not favor direct military action.

\textbf{Perceptions of the President’s Honesty}

Leading into the Persian Gulf War, well over 50\% of those polled expressed their trust that President Bush and his advisors would make the right decisions regarding whether or not to go to war in the Mideast.\textsuperscript{29} Furthermore, in November of 1990, when ABC News and the Washington Post asked respondents if they trusted President Bush to “do the right thing” in this situation, 69\% expressed their trust, while 24\% said they did not trust

\textsuperscript{28} Methodology: Conducted by New York Times, August 9 - August 10, 1990 and based on 670 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. [USNYT.90MIDE.R14]; [USNYT.90MIDE.R15]. Data provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.

Figure 43: Trust Bush to Make Right Decision?

Here we see that a majority of respondents agreed that the president’s decision-making with regard to the situation involving Iraq and Kuwait was trustworthy and reliable.31


When the NBC News and Wall Street Journal took a poll asking how well respondents thought the phrase: “Honest, a person you can trust” described President Bush, 53% thought it described him well (a rating of 4 or 5 on a five-point scale). Twenty-five percent thought that was a moderately good descriptor (a rating of 3), while twenty percent replied that it was not at all a good description (a rating of 1 or 2). These responses show that nine months following the US intervention against Iraq, a majority still had confidence in President Bush’s honesty.  

Figure 44: President Bush - Honesty

Consistently, the American public asserts reasonably high confidence in President Bush’s honesty and trustworthiness when it comes to making good decision about foreign policy writ large, and specifically with regard to policy on the Mideast, most specifically how to respond to Iraq and deal with the situation in Kuwait. The public was less sanguine over his potential abilities to mediate the Israel-Palestine conflict, however, so there was not a blanket perception that he would be equally capable in all areas of resolving Mideast conflict.

In terms of Bush’s straightforwardness about the war and whether or not his communications were perceived as such by the American people, the “Americans Talk Security” survey in September 1990 referenced perception of untruth during the Vietnam War, and asked “if a shooting war does start, do you think that the U.S. government would or would not tell us that Iraq started it, when the U.S. had really launched the war?” Here, 47% believed that the government would lie about the outbreak of war, while 42% did not believe such deception would occur.\(^{33}\)

On a related note, a further issue that may be raised is the timing of the decision to double the number of troops in Saudi Arabia as part of Operation Provide Relief. Although the decision was made at the end of October, the president did not publicly announce that troop numbers would be doubled until after the midterm election. Was this deliberately misleading on Bush’s part? Was it justifiable to take that strategy? According to analyst Rick Atkinson,

\(^{33}\) Survey by Americans Talk Security. Methodology: Conducted by Market Strategies September 21-September 26, 1990, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,000. [USMS.14ATS.R20] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
It didn’t take a genius to recognize that announcing this on the eve of the elections was bad politics. That it would become immediately a serious election issue with uncertain consequences. So, the decision was made in the White House – not surprisingly I think in retrospect, although somewhat duplicitous – that the decision would not be announced until after the election. A belief that you didn’t want to complicate matters by making it even more of a political issue than it already was.34

This was an instance of deliberately concealing information about upcoming troop commitments precisely for the reason of not raising the indignation of the public over having to send more American soldiers than they initially believed, out of a concern that the Democratic candidates would use this information to discredit the Republican candidates in association with President Bush’s policy. The question then is whether or not, once the information was revealed, if the public was dismayed and viewed the president as having been deceptive on this issue.35 Nevertheless, public views of the president’s own integrity were quite high, with 52% of respondents identifying “Honest, a person you can trust” as a quality that “closely” described the President Bush, and 24% thought it “somewhat” described him – only 24% felt it described him “not very closely.”36

In terms of the possible reasons by which to justify military action, all except lowering oil prices met with majority support, although “prevent Saddam Hussein from

35 Initial public discomfort with this move may explain the decrease in approval levels and increase in disapproval levels observed in Figure 39 (below) during the month between 14 October and 15 November 1990. Note, however, that after the low point of 50% approval of President Bush’s “handling the situation with Iraq,” approval levels again begin to rise steadily, with concomitant lowering of disapproval levels.
36 NBC/Wall Street Journal poll from 21 October 1990; see Figure 37, above. A year after the question was first asked, respondents affirmed equally strong confidence in the president’s honesty (29 October 1991).
threatening the region with chemical and biological weapons” was the most popular (gaining well over 70% approval in both November and December 1990).

![Figure 45: Evaluating Reasons for War Against Iraq](image)

In a poll conducted by ABC News and the Washington Post on 13 January 1991, respondents were asked whether they approved or disapproved of the congressional vote “to allow President Bush to go to war against Iraq” if the 15 January withdrawal deadline were not met. The public expressed both their confidence in Congress and in the president’s decision-making, as well as their acceptance of military action in response to this situation
when 76% approved and only 22% disapproved. A week later, 83% of respondents approved of how the president was “handling the situation in the Persian Gulf,” while 14% disapproved. Further confirmation of the public’s willingness to see military force as a valid course of action by which to resolve circumstances in the Persian Gulf is found in a March 1991 survey from the Americans Talk Issues Foundation. This survey asked, “Before George Bush ordered the start of the war against Iraq on January 16th (1991), did you favor using military force right away, did you want to give sanctions a longer time to work, or did you oppose getting involved at all?” Here, 64% of respondents recalled having supported military action, while 24% recalled wanting to allow more time for sanctions to work. Only 11%, however, said that they had “opposed involvement” altogether. This retrospective shift in opinion indicates the remarkable rallying power of military force.

Entman and Page find that although there was considerable debate over escalating to an active military response, critical views were marginally reported in ABC News television broadcasts, and were underreported in The New York Times and The Washington Post. They suggest that these reporting decisions have more to do with a desire to inform the public of powerful decision-makers’ positions than with a desire to promote the

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administration’s stance. However, the authors also comment, “The paucity of well-supported substantive criticism may help to explain why most of those initially opposed to the Bush policy converted as war approached and began. They had little foundation for continued opposition once proper procedures had apparently been followed – the UN and Congress gave their blessing.”  

Without compelling dissenting arguments put forth in the press, the public could not help but perceive elite unity and, as Zaller suggests, follow in support of the war. However, from Entman and Page’s analysis, it seems that the content of the debate itself did not call into question the basic goals or presuppositions that the Bush administration had held from the beginning. The authors admit, “The arguments put forward by Nunn, Crowe, Jones, and others did not contest the goal of dislodgement, or the mean of force, but merely the question of immediate necessity.”

As John Zaller (1994) points out, the public will choose among competing media or elite frames based on partisanship (the “polarization effect”), but when there is elite unity, there is strong message control. This means that the public will be persuaded in what Zaller calls “elite leadership of public opinion,” as distinct partisan frames will not exist as a convenient proxy. Thus, it should be unsurprising that the public would come to support the war once Congress had taken an authorizing vote and inception of hostilities seemed inevitable.

Figure 46: President Bush Handling Situation with Iraq

With regard to his overall management of the situation in Iraq, approval ratings started at a high level around the time President Bush agreed to UN-approved sanctions against Iraq shortly after the August 1990 invasion, and jumped by over ten percentage points following his speech in which he outlined the need to stand firm against aggression. These approval ratings further increased when US troops entered into combat against Iraqi forces in January 1991, the combined result of the confluence of UN and congressional approval for using force to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, and the rallying effect that tends to accompany military action. The dip in November, while never falling below 50 percent
approval ratings, is probably related to the revelation that a greater quantity of US troops must be sent to Saudi Arabia than originally announced. This information was released to the public after the November midterm elections, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and it may be that the public suspected deliberate withholding of this information, as the administration did not want the decision to negatively affect Republican candidates in the election.

**News Coverage During Combat Operations**

Because of the high availability of news from the ground, especially on television, a CBS News poll at the end of January 1991 found that 67% of respondents believed that the US military was “holding back” some information about ongoing events. When asked whether they thought the withholding was to “avoid giving helpful information to Iraq” or to “avoid giving Americans bad news about mistakes and setbacks in the war,” 58% thought it was to prevent key information from getting to Iraqi leadership, while 24% thought it was for both reasons. Only 15% believed information was being withheld exclusively to keep the public unaware of bad news.44

As Iyengar and Simon find in their study of the relationship between media coverage and public opinion of the Persian Gulf War, the increased media coverage increased the salience of foreign policy as an indicator of President Bush’s popularity overall. Whereas earlier in his administration, and at the end of Reagan’s administration,

economic performance held the place of highest importance in determining the public’s feelings toward the president, this changed after the Gulf War had begun. The authors find, “Increases in the impact of foreign policy performance assessments on global evaluations of the president were accompanied by small decreases in the importance of economic evaluations. [...] Because the public rated Bush more favorably on foreign policy, their overall impression of the president was made more positive.” The authors also find that both higher-informed respondents and those exposed to more media coverage of events in the Persian Gulf were more likely to support a military response over a diplomatic solution. They argue that this shows an episodic framing effect of the media coverage, such that viewers are more likely to think of an issue in terms of responsibility of “particular individuals or groups.”

As Barbara Allen et al. argue in their analysis of CNN coverage of the Gulf War juxtaposed with public opinion polling day prior to the onset of the air war, the way the media chose to report both on events in the Persian Gulf and on domestic public opinion in response to the war affected public willingness to approve of the military action once it had started. In particular, Allen et al. point to minimal coverage of the protests against the military action, and note that that coverage was negative in tone. Thus, they argue for a conflux of the rally effect and spiral of silence model to explain that people who

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disapproved of the military action became more likely to change their negative views or keep silent because they were not being told of others who agreed with their views.\footnote{Barbara Allen et al. (1994), "The Media and the Gulf War: Framing, Priming, and the Spiral of Silence," \textit{Polity} 27(2): 255-284.}

**Views of Protests against War in the Persian Gulf:**
If the United States went to war against Iraq, do you think Americans who oppose such a war should be able to hold protest marches and rallies or would that hurt the war effort? (CBS/NYT)
Do you think it is appropriate for Americans to continue to protest the war in Iraq now that the United States forces are in combat, or not? (LAT)

![Figure 47: Views of Anti-War Protests](image)

Mueller argues that the media was in fact responding to the (correctly) perceived desires of the public to see a great deal of reporting on the “exciting war” and to avoid hearing anything critical once that war had started. Thus, it was an effort to better sell the news product that resulted in minimal, negative reporting of dissent. However, he also
suggests that the protest movement itself “lost steam” as it was preempted by the UN-set date of 15 January mandating Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, while major protests had been scheduled for 19 and 26 January. He also argues that US officials routinely claimed that the war would be very short – perhaps only a few days’ duration – and low in American casualties (although he notes that President Bush avoided explicitly “playing the numbers game”). Thus, he attributes the rise in support for the war once it started to a rally effect driven by the media’s promotion of the administration’s position (and “propaganda,” as he calls it).

In February and March 1991, Gallup also examined the public’s interpretation of news coverage and leaders’ cooperation with the media in transmitting information to the public. When asked whether or not they “think the Bush Administration and the military have been cooperative enough in providing information to the news organizations (about the war with Iraq),” 80% of respondents agreed that leadership had been cooperative, whereas only 16% disagreed. Additionally, when asked to evaluate news coverage of the conflict, 71% approved of how the news media “handled the situation in the Persian Gulf,” with 27% disapproving. This finding indicates high levels of confidence both in the news

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media’s ability to accurately report on events and in leadership’s honesty in allowing those events to be reported. It is worth noting, however, that some respondents expressed concerns about how so much exposure to live media coverage of the conflict might affect their opinion formation. When a February Gallup poll asked if “Live coverage leads to impatience for a quick ending” was applicable to the US media’s coverage of the war, 53% believed this was a real effect, while 37% did not think it was applicable.\(^5\)

**Success**

The high media salience of the war also contributed to the public's perceptions of success. Analyst Rick Atkinson later suggested that the US military’s careful attempt to forestall negative reporting also had the unintended effect of presenting the actual details of the conflict in very narrow, perhaps unrealistic terms:

> I think people came away believing that this war was basically bloodless.

> That it was a sanitary exercise in which no one was really hurt, no one really died.

> And I think that’s dangerous. I think it makes it easier to go to war the next time.

> That it devalues the human suffering that war always brings.\(^6\)

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\(^5\) Additionally, 64% believed that the news coverage “Makes it harder for U.S. officials to conduct the war,” while 30% did not believe it had that effect. Survey by Newsweek. Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization February 14-February 15, 1991, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 493. [USGALNEW.105137.Q09B] And [USGALNEW.105137.Q09C] Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

However, although it may be suggested that press restrictions offered the public an inaccurate means by which to assess progress during the conflict, doubts regarding war reporting could not have affected their perceptions of success because the public did not indicate holding such doubts.

Another issue during the war, relating to how the military successes were being reported in the media and by administration officials to the public had to do with the accuracy and highly touted success rates of the Patriot missiles at intercepting enemy missiles. The fact was that although they were believed to be astonishingly accurate at the time, later analysis showed that they had not in fact intercepted almost all of the targets at which they had been directed. The military success was still undeniable, but the faulty appraisal of information about the accuracy of this weaponry meant that the public was being told a story about the war effort that did not actually take place. Atkinson argues that it was beneficial for the public to believe that the Patriot was “infallible,” because then they would be less worried about casualties. More than that, however, he casts it in terms of necessary for good relations with Israel, avoiding popular unrest that might jeopardize the situation with the other Arab countries if Israel’s leaders felt compelled to become militarily involved.53

By July of that year, even though overall approval levels of how President Bush was “handling his job as President” had begun to decline, largely due to growing domestic concerns about employment and the economy, public perception of the president’s performance in foreign policy matters, particularly regarding Iraq and Kuwait, remained strongly positive. A Gallup poll from 21 July found that 80% of respondents approved of

how President Bush “handled the situation in the Persian Gulf,” with only 18% disapproving.54

Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as President?

![Graph showing approval and disapproval ratings for George Bush's job handling](image)

**Figure 48: Bush Handling Job as President**

In his speech to the nation at the beginning of the war, the President had explained US goals and objectives:

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We are determined to knock out Saddam Hussein’s nuclear bomb potential. We will also destroy his chemical weapons facilities. Much of Saddam’s artillery and tanks will be destroyed. …

Our objectives are clear: Saddam Hussein’s forces will leave Kuwait. The legitimate government of Kuwait will be restored to its rightful place, and Kuwait will once again be free. Iraq will eventually comply with all relevant United Nations resolutions, and then, when peace is restored, it is our hope that Iraq will live as a peaceful and cooperative member of the family of nations, thus enhancing the security and stability of the Gulf.55

At the end of February, he declared that the war had ended, and that it had been a success, referring back to those original objectives:

Kuwait is liberated. Iraq’s army is defeated. Our military objectives are met.

Kuwait is once more in the hands of Kuwaitis, in control of their own destiny. …

Seven months ago, America and the world drew a line in the sand. We declared that the aggression against Kuwait would not stand. And tonight, America and the world have kept their word.56

Public approved of the war began at a very high level, with 79% approval and 15% disapproval on 16 January, and it remained strong throughout the conflict.57 When

President Bush announced the war had ended 82% approved and 11% disapproved of the US having gone to war, largely due to the speed and success of the operation.\(^{58}\)

**Conclusion**

The largest driving factor in the high approval ratings for the Gulf War seems to have been the agreement among the Congress, the President, and the United Nations that it was both appropriate and necessary to move against Iraq immediately after the January deadline. Although throughout the autumn of 1990 the public expressed opinions indicating that they accepted as true President Bush’s justifications for retributive action against Iraq, and even declared that many of those reasons resonated with them not only as justifications for economic sanctions, but as reasons for war, there was not a strong move in support of moving beyond sanctions until the end of November, after the United Nations Security Council vote to authorize force if Iraq did not meet the 15 January withdrawal deadline. Both overall perceptions of President Bush’s honesty and competence concerning the war in the Persian Gulf, as well as high perception of the action as successful, contributed to the public’s strong approval ratings of the President during this conflict.

\(^{58}\) Methodology: Conducted by Washington Post March 1-March 5, 1991, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,006. Interviewing was conducted by ICR Survey Research Group. [USWASHP.91909G.Q1]. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
Chapter 8: The United States Intervention in Somalia, 1992-1994

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the United States intervention in Somalia as a case in which the presidents involved were not suspected of deception per se, but in which the goals for the US military mission were not as clearly defined as they were made out to be in the first place, and then were changed by the president over the duration of the intervention. Various criticisms of spin or distortion were raised against both presidents involved. President George H.W. Bush, who made the initial decision to commit US forces to Somalia, was at one point accused of hypocrisy by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali for paying more attention to the Balkan crisis than to events in Somalia. However, when the US did intervene in Somalia, some argued that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had advocated for that mission as easier than going in Bosnia – and that this decision was an avoidance measure. When President Clinton assumed office and gained responsibility for the mission, he also oversaw the transition from US-led Operation Restore Hope to UN leadership under UNOSOM II. The conditions surrounding this transition and the period immediately following involved President Clinton changing the mission’s goals, moving from the initial justifications (set forth by President Bush and reiterated by President Clinton) of humanitarian activity to protect aid convoys and ensure food distribution, to pursuing warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid. While not explicitly viewed as deceptive, this mission shift was not favorably received and (as US forces were unable to capture Aidid or halt the warlords’ violent raids) began to look like a failure. Finally, following the Black
Hawk Down incident and the Battle of Mogadishu, President Clinton again reframed the remaining goals for the mission and initiated troop withdrawal which, while not widely perceived as deceptive spin, at least indicated indecision and acquiescence, which confirmed the mission as a failure.

While my theory emphasizes that the public is likely to respond with disapproval when they perceive spin or other deception from the president, it also affirms the extant public opinion and audience costs literature that expects the public to react poorly to perceived failure. In the case of Somalia, one of the administration’s reasons for withdrawing troops quickly after the Battle of Mogadishu was the perception that the public was highly casualty averse and would not sustain support for continued US involvement in Somalia. The conventional wisdom regarding this case serves as the basis for two ideas regarding the relationship between public sensibilities and the costs of war, although they have been increasingly challenged. The first, the “CNN effect,” has two iterations. The most well-known is the idea that in an era of continually televised news footage, the disturbing imagery of dead soldiers and war’s devastation will cause the public to lose support for the conflict. The second iteration of the “CNN effect” has to do with the effect of news footage on inspiring presidents and other leaders to take action. The other is called “Somalia syndrome,” and refers to the claim that the public is so casualty averse that upon facing any

casualties, the public will immediately call for withdrawal and refuse to support a continued mission. Although these ideas have held popular sway to some degree, they have since been contested. However, I argue that the irony in the Somalia case is that President Clinton’s swift move for withdrawal cemented the public’s perception of failure, whereas (as some scholars argue) the public may not have otherwise perceived failure due to the casualties. In this chapter, I argue that despite the perceived success of the humanitarian objectives of Operation Restore Hope, the subsequent mission shift and apparent inability to meet the new goals, combined with President Clinton’s inability to make a compelling case for staying in Somalia after the Battle of Mogadishu, the public ultimately perceived the mission as a failure and so disapproved and withdrew their support.

*Overview of the Case and Key Questions*

Following the overthrow of dictator Siad Barre’s government in late 1991, the East African country of Somalia descended into civil war between the various clans led by warlords. The chaos created by the ongoing violence was compounded by drought and famine, resulting in severe food shortages among the general population. Although the United Nations Operation In Somalia (UNOSOM I) was authorized in April of that year, the civil war impeded food and aid disbursement as aid workers were continually menaced by the combatants.² Although initially reluctant to involve the United States at all in Somalia, President Bush approved first an airlift in August 1992 and then a ground operation in December (Operation Restore Hope), providing military protection for food storage and aid convoys. Just two months after President Clinton took office, the humanitarian program was

² UNITED NATIONS OPERATION IN SOMALIA I (http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unosomi.htm)
largely deemed a success and leadership of the endeavor was returned to the United Nations (UNOSOM II), with a revised emphasis on peacekeeping and nation-building. However, in subsequent months the violence intensified as warlord Mohamed Farah Aidid targeted US and UN forces, and President Clinton called for his capture. After several more months of unsuccessful efforts to target Aidid, US forces suffered their heaviest casualties in Somalia thus far, with the “Black Hawk Down” incident during the Battle of Mogadishu. News of the 18 American deaths and ostentatious maltreatment of some of the bodies was received by the Clinton administration as a shocking failure; in his public address four days afterwards, President Clinton announced that he would withdraw all US combat forces by the next March.

While this case roughly corresponds to the “Truth/Failure” cell in my theoretical structure, as we saw in the previous cases, real-world events are quite a bit more complicated than the basic theoretical model. In assessing the relationship among the perceived truth-quality of the presidents’ justifications, perceptions of success or failure, and public approval or disapproval of the mission, I will explore the following research questions that flow from my theoretical framework:

1) What were President Bush’s initial justifications for US involvement in August 1992? How did his public reasons change in December when he authorized the direct military mission? How did the coetaneous crisis in Bosnia influence the president’s justifications and public perceptions thereof?

2) What was the state of public discourse on Somalia in August and December? Was there positive or negative pressure from (a) the US Congress, (b) the news media, (c) the general public regarding intervention?
3) How did the public assess the mission in Somalia and President Bush’s foreign policy performance broadly following those two points?

4) When UNITAF transitioned to UNOSOM II at the end of March 1993, what was the public perception of the humanitarian mission’s outcome? Did President Clinton redefine the goals and reasons for US involvement in Somalia in association with UNOSOM II? Were there domestic responses to this participation?

5) How did the situation in Somalia change over the next six months? How did President Clinton justify the changing mission goals? How did the public respond? Did their impressions of the mission’s outcome change?

6) What were the responses of the public, the President, and his advisors to the Black Hawk Down incident and the casualties suffered during the Battle of Mogadishu? Did the public’s assessment of the mission change retrospectively?

The rest of this chapter will proceed through the case by examining and answering these questions in three sections. The first will explore the lead-up to US engagement until the end of UNITAF. The second section will analyze the transition to UNOSOM II and the shifting mission goals through the summer of 1993. The third section focuses on the Black Hawk Down incident and the Battle of Mogadishu, examining cues from the administration and Congress, coupled with the general public’s responses in the aftermath. Each of these sections marks a “crucial point” within the case for evaluating the causal processes at work in public opinion formation and response.

In the first section, time t1 approval for intervention in Somalia will be established in the context of competing frames of discourse coming from the Bush administration, Congress, political opponents (the Clinton campaign), and the media. In particular, the
The controversy surrounding the Bush administration’s public framing of the Bosnia crisis will be explored – did it in any way sully President Bush’s moral justifications for intervention in Somalia? If the American public did not believe the president had been deceptive about the situation in Bosnia, what were the factors they considered important in evaluating the president’s handling of Somalia and Bosnia? The theoretical expectations generated by the competence factor, effectiveness factor, weight of moral justifications, and message control factor will be here analyzed.

The second section, beginning in March 1993, will examine the transition to UNOSOM II with its stronger mandate, the effectiveness of nation-building strategies, and the shift in focus to attempted capture of General Mohamed Farah Aidid during the summer, in light of the public’s assessments of UNITAF’s outcome. What effect did the perception of humanitarian success have on the public’s responses to new mission goals? How did their feelings about the validity of the new goals affect approval of the mission more generally? It will be possible to differentiate between disagreement with the mission’s goals and disappointment in failure to achieve those goals by evaluating the temporality of responses to polling questions vis à vis events on the ground. The theoretical expectations generated by the competence factor, effectiveness factor, and message control factor will be considered under this analysis.

In the third section, the forces at work in reducing public support for the mission in Somalia after the Battle of Mogadishu will be explored according to the theoretical claims of the “CNN effect,” casualty sensitivity, and anticipation or perception of success. The theoretical expectations of the competence factor, message control factor, results factor, and elite dissensus/unity will be analyzed. The competing theoretical literature of particular
interest is that dealing with public support for war and casualty tolerance and will be evaluated in light of my theory’s predictions about the effects of failure on public approval.

**Discussion and Process Tracing**

With the overthrow of Siad Barre’s authoritarian government in late 1991, Somalia fell into a severe humanitarian crisis as drought and famine, exacerbated by violent conflict among warlords vying for power, left thousands of people starving. Although the United Nations Operation In Somalia (UNOSOM I) was authorized in April 1992, the civil war made it almost impossible to disburse food and medical supplies. During this whole year, the general perspective of White House officials was that intervening in Somalia should not be a priority for the United States, and minimal attention was given to the developing situation. In July, the UN brokered a ceasefire between the warring factions, which included expanding the purview of the UN forces and sending 50 military observers to monitor the ceasefire compliance. Furthermore, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali endeavored to facilitate the aid distribution and increase the effectiveness of the humanitarian mission by creating a “100-Day Action Programme for Accelerated Humanitarian Assistance.” The goals of this program included:

1. massive infusion of food aid;
2. aggressive expansion of supplementary feeding;
3. provision of basic health services and mass measles immunization;
4. urgent provision of clean water, sanitation and hygiene;
5. provision of shelter materials, blankets and clothes;
6. simultaneous delivery of seeds, tools and animal vaccines with food rations;
7. prevention of further refugee outflows and the

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3 UNITED NATIONS OPERATION IN SOMALIA I (http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unosomi.htm).
promotion of returnee programmes; (8) institution-building and rehabilitation of civil society.4

The ceasefire proved ineffective, however, and the UN forces were unable either to enforce it or to carry out the objectives of the Action Programme.

Section 1: Situation in Somalia and Context of US Debate Over Somalia and Bosnia 1992

1) What were President Bush’s initial justifications for US involvement in August 1992? How did his public reasons change in December when he authorized the direct military mission? How did the coetaneous crisis in Bosnia influence the president’s justifications and public perceptions thereof? 2) What was the state of public discourse on Somalia in August and December? Was there positive or negative pressure from (a) the US Congress, (b) the news media, (c) the general public regarding intervention?

During 1992, attitudes in the US government were also changing for a variety of reasons. While it was true that several journalists had taken up the cause of Somalia and had begun calling for a US response since January, there was not a great deal of awareness of or push for action from the mass public.5 While some stories about Somalia ran on CNN and the national news networks, they were sporadic and not lengthy.6 The Joint Chiefs of Staff and officials in the Bush administration recommended against US involvement; as Brent Scowcroft later recalled, Somalia was yet “another collapsed state with no effective government and no US interests. This was clearly an issue for the United Nations, not for

4 UNITED NATIONS OPERATION IN SOMALIA I (http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unosomi.htm).
5 Jon Western (2005), Selling Intervention and War: the Presidency, the Media, and the American Public (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press): 152-153.

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us.”7 At the same time the famine was worsening in Somalia, however, conditions in the former Yugoslavia had also taken a downturn.

Not long after Croatia and Slovenia gained their independence in 1991, the United Nations imposed an arms embargo on all of the former Yugoslavia in an effort to stop the growing unrest in the remainder of the Yugoslav territories, Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular.8 This embargo had the perverse effect of disadvantaging the Bosnian Muslim population relative to the Serbians because the latter inherited arms from the former Yugoslav National Army. At the end of April, after Bosnia declared independence, Serbian and Bosnian Serb paramilitary groups initiated large-scale attacks on Croats and Bosnian Muslims. In an effort to report the news even-handedly, the US media largely portrayed the violence as the natural outgrowth of long-standing and deep-rooted ethnic rivalries, in which both sides shared culpability.9 President Bush, his civilian advisors, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) were all adamantly opposed to US involvement in the region, fearing a quagmire akin to Vietnam. Although American military might, as proven in the recent Persian Gulf War, was clearly more than a match for the conventional Serbian army, the JCS – especially General Colin Powell – feared the potential escalation of US military involvement (in effect, a repeat of Vietnam) should the Serbs choose to switch to guerrilla

tactics once US forces had been committed. However, some argued that a desire to signal good intent to Russia and maintain friendly relations was also a crucial factor in US inaction at this time.

Now, it must here be noted that “inaction” here refers to the lack of direct military involvement at this time. The United States had recognized the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and lifted economic sanctions in early April, but had not expressed any plan for action in response to the resurgence of violence in the region. In May, President Bush announced stronger sanctions against the Serbian government in Belgrade and expelled Serbia’s diplomats from two consulates on US soil. By the end of June, President Bush was pressing for agreement with European states over how to overcome the blockade maintaining the siege of Sarajevo and provide humanitarian aid. The issue of contention was whether and how to use ground forces (for relief, not combat operations) to protect and distribute the aid supplies once they had arrived by airlift. As a 29 June article from the New York Times explained,


11 David Halberstam (2002), War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals (New York, Simon & Schuster): 33. He writes: "Gorbachev feared the accelerating potential for breakaway provinces in his empire and the rage it would stir up among his more jingoistic enemies on the domestic right and in the military. That, too, had repercussions in our dealings with Yugoslavia. For America could not appear to back a breakaway province in Yugoslavia without setting a dangerous precedent for a Soviet Union and Russia that might also splinter apart.”


Senior Defense Department officials repeated their strong objections to the use of American ground troops in any multinational force sent to Yugoslavia. “I’d be very, very surprised if any U.S. ground forces were used,” said one senior Pentagon official. It was unclear today which other countries might contribute ground forces.14

This reluctance to commit any ground forces in the Balkans derived from the US assessment that the Balkan conflict was principally a “European problem”; that a large force of at least 50,000 troops would be required just to secure the Sarajevo airport, which intervention in itself could potentially inspire rather than deter further Serbian aggression; and fear that Serbian forces would entrench themselves and persistently target intervention forces through guerilla tactics.15 Whatever the particularities of US leadership’s motivation, they continued to seek to pursue action that would avoid any direct military involvement in the Balkans at this time.16

By this time, American journalists had concluded that – contrary to the position taken by the White House – the conflict in the Balkans was not simply a spontaneous civil war based in centuries-old ethnic rivalries shared equally among the factions, but rather “a clear and deliberate campaign by ruthless elites (mostly Serbs).”17 Furthermore, Democratic

16 Even nearly six weeks later, this indecision had not been resolved, as the UN Security Council was still debating how to word a resolution to authorize “all necessary means” – which could include direct military involvement – to enable food and aid distribution in Bosnia. As of 9 August, Lawrence Eagleburger still warned: “We have to be very careful that we don’t get into a quagmire from which we cannot extract ourselves.” Quoted in Andrew Rosenthal (10 August 1992), “Allies Inch Closer to Bosnia Aid Pact: Agree on Strong Words, but Differ on Strong Actions,” Special to The New York Times: A8.
17 Jon Western (2005), Selling Intervention and War: the Presidency, the Media, and the American Public (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press): 156. See, among others: Tom Gjelten, NPR reporter, interviewed by
presidential nominee Bill Clinton had strongly criticized the Bush administration’s inaction in the Balkans and Somalia, which President Bush feared would damage his chance for reelection.\textsuperscript{18}

**Public Opinion on the Balkans**

Events in the Balkans appeared to be more salient for the American public during the summer of 1992. As of early July 1992, 27\% of respondents asked by an NBC poll favored while 64\% opposed sending US forces to try to stop the civil war in the region.\textsuperscript{19} The figure below shows the range of opinion in mid-July regarding possible courses of action for the region.

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It should be noted that the second most strongly supported policy option – economic sanctions – was a policy the Bush administration had pursued against Serbia since May, while the most popular option – sending UN peacekeepers – might have been considered the lowest-cost option for the US by the average individual.²⁰

In August, more of the public seemed positively disposed towards direct US involvement in the Balkans, as 13% approved participating in UN-backed air attacks against

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²⁰Subpopulation/Note: See note. Those who have heard/read about the fighting (79%). Methodology: Conducted by Louis Harris & Associates, July 17 - July 19, 1992 and based on 1,256 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. [USHARRIS.081192.R5]. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
Serbian forces; 6% approved participating in UN-backed ground action against Serbian forces; and 34% approved both, while 35% opposed both.\(^{21}\) However, in another survey, 54% of respondents were still opposed to sending US forces to try to stop the civil war when the UN was not mentioned in the question.\(^{22}\) Additionally, another survey found that 81% of respondents expected the United States to insist on European participation before taking any military action in the region.\(^{23}\) Finally, a Time survey found that while 59% of respondents believed the US ought to “do more” to “provide humanitarian aid to the victims of the war in Sarajevo and Bosnia,” whereas when asked about “stop[ping] the war,” only 37% thought the US should “do more,” while 49% thought the US had “done enough.” At the same time, however, 66% thought the US should not “send troops to end the violence in Sarajevo,” and 71% held the UN ought to be responsible “for ending the war in Bosnia and Sarajevo and providing humanitarian aid to the victims of that war” (15% attributed major responsibility to Western Europe).\(^{24}\)

What does this relative glut of information tell us about the American public’s views on the former Yugoslavia? Basically, the American public is willing and even generously eager to offer humanitarian aid when they see it is needed and when it is in the context or

\(^{21}\) Subpopulation/Note: Registered voters/Don’t have to register (79%). Survey by Newsweek. Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization, August 6 - August 7, 1992 and based on 930 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. [USGALNEW.305023.R13]. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.


burden-sharing. However, they are not going to hasten to involve the US in a war that seems to be somebody else’s business. Western comments, “Many journalists at the time expressed bewilderment at the public indifference to the conflict [in Bosnia]. Warren Strobel suggests that action in Bosnia was characterized as having such a high degree of futility that most Americans simply did not believe the United States could do anything about the problems there.”25 While Western appears to blame US leadership for over-emphasizing the difficulty of making a difference in Bosnia with troops, and finds that various senior administration officials and reporters retrospectively became willing to describe the framing and articulation of these policies as deceptive spin, there is no evidence within the polling data to indicate that the American public perceived any deception in the president’s reasoning. At the very least, the Bush administration’s fears of the “futility” of troop involvement was not a uniquely American concern, as evidenced by the UN Secretary-General’s repeated rejections of an enlarged peacekeeping force in April and May (due to concerns over the scope of the violence), and willingness to transfer troops out of Bosnia back to Croatia later in the summer.

That is, based on news reports, while the tragedy of the situation in Bosnia was undeniable, there was no clear evidence to convince the public that the United States could solve the problems in the region, or that would belie President Bush’s position that the US could not do so. Finally, the lesser actions taken by the US – diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions against Serbia – could have been a sign of good faith in addressing the situation.

Developments on Somalia

Meanwhile, Senators Nancy Kassebaum and Paul Simon had embarked on a fact-finding trip to Somalia in June, which moved the situation in Somalia to a more prominent place on the Washington agenda over the summer. As a result, the US Congress and President Bush committed to a limited food airlift in conjunction with the UN, “Operation Provide Relief,” which would last for the next two months. Crucially, however, committing to Somalia meant that the US would have a good reason not to involve its forces directly in the Balkans. Based on retrospective interviews with several individuals who were then advisors to the president, Western argues that President Bush’s decision in early August to contribute support to the UN-run food airlift should be seen as a “response to the increasing pressure to take action and to the political backlash on Bosnia.” In fact, it “did divert media and liberal attention away from critical coverage and commentary on Bosnia and to sympathetic stories on Somalia.” (Ironically, in July the United States and other members of the UN Security Council had been strongly criticized by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali for being “more concerned with the ‘rich man’s war’ in the Balkans than with the situation in Somalia, [and so] employing a ‘naked double standard’.”)

There is unfortunately no data available regarding public opinion of US participation in the food airlift to Somalia in August. The first poll question asked about Somalia was not

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27 Jon Western (2005), Selling Intervention and War: the Presidency, the Media, and the American Public (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press): 150-151.
28 Jon Western (2005), Selling Intervention and War: the Presidency, the Media, and the American Public (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press): 162-163.
until 10 September; the question itself – “[T]ell me [how closely] you happened to follow this news story... The civil war and famine in Somalia” – revealed that only 35% of respondents were following it “very” or “fairly” closely, compared to 64% following the reports “not too” or “not at all” closely. While the question does not seek respondents’ views of the situation or relevant US policy, it clearly shows the low importance of the issue for a majority of the public – and coming less than a month after the US began assisting the UN with the airlift, it would appear that this event did not capture the public’s attention at this time.30

Operation Restore Hope

After losing his reelection bid to Bill Clinton in November, President Bush felt free to pursue whatever course of action he thought best in the remaining months of his tenure, and sought to increase US commitment in Somalia because the airlift, while getting more tonnage of food into the country, could not solve the distribution problem which was the main cause of mass starvation at this time.31 Despite the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s initial reluctance to send US ground forces to Somalia, at the end of November the Pentagon reported that they were capable of sending troops as needed.32 Halberstam explains,

Powell believed that as many as half a million Somali lives could be saved. Americans could protect themselves with a limited but adequate force [...] and by

keeping the mission limited and clearly defined, in time it could be turned over to
the UN, thereby enabling the Americans to get out quickly. Looked at that way, he
thought the job was manageable.33

With a US-led ground mission thus recast as a manageable policy, President Bush
approached the United Nations about making the transition.34 An agreement between the
US and the UN was reached, and with the adoption of UN Resolution 794(1992) on 3
December 1992, the Unified Task Force (UNITAF) could be launched.

The mission’s goals were explicitly defined as humanitarian in nature. In his address
to the nation on 4 December, President Bush explained the purpose of UNITAF, whose
mission was called Operation Restore Hope, to the American people. He declared:

The people of Somalia, especially the children of Somalia, need our help.
We’re able to ease their suffering. We must help them live. We must give them hope.
America must act.

In taking this action, I want to emphasize that I understand the United States
alone cannot right the world’s wrongs. But we also know that some crises in the
world cannot be resolved without American involvement, that American action is
often necessary as a catalyst for broader involvement of the community of nations.
Only the United States has the global reach to place a large security force on the

Schuster): 251.
ground in such a distant place quickly and efficiently and thus save thousands of innocents from death.\textsuperscript{35}

According to President Bush’s speech, the goal of UNITAF was singular and straightforward: “create a secure environment in the hardest hit parts of Somalia, so that food can move from ships over land to the people in the countryside now devastated by starvation.”

Emphasizing the limited nature of these objectives, the president stated that after this goal was accomplished, these US forces were to be removed, “handing the security mission back to a regular U.N. peacekeeping force.”\textsuperscript{36} In this speech, President Bush conveyed to the public that the UNITAF mission was 1) humanitarian, 2) limited in its aims, 3) not intended as a long-term commitment to nation-building. From these stated goals and intentions, the public formed their initial expectations of how the US effort in Somalia would look and how long it would last. As will be discussed in Section 2, these expectations influenced later trends in public approval levels over the next year.

\textit{George H.W. Bush: Reasons for sending troops to Somalia to lead UNITAF:}

\textbf{Table 28: Reasons}

| Humanitarian | Protect aid workers, supply convoys, and distribution sites to ensure disbursement of humanitarian aid |

\textsuperscript{35} President George H.W. Bush, “Address on Somalia (December 4, 1992),” (http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3984)

\textsuperscript{36} President George H.W. Bush, “Address on Somalia (December 4, 1992),” (http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3984)
Public Opinion – Approval and Perceptions

3) How did the public assess Operation Restore Hope and President Bush’s foreign policy performance more broadly?

Initial Approval

When President George H.W. Bush announced the US commitment to lead the United Nations Task Force in Somalia, popular response was overwhelmingly positive. Having already lost his bid for reelection to Bill Clinton, Bush’s decision to send troops to Somalia to secure the distribution of humanitarian aid boosted his approval ratings that had declined over the previous year. While retrospective opinion was less kind, as approval of Bush’s handling of Somalia dropped below 60% when polled near the end of Clinton’s first year in office, the public opinion over the month and a half from when President Bush announced his decision until President Clinton’s inauguration was strongly in his favor.
When asked specifically about the decision to commit troops to Somalia, public approval remained high through the remainder of Bush’s tenure in office. Although the events of the year following under President Clinton’s administration led to a general drop in interest in and approval for US involvement in Somalia, the retrospective approval level for President Bush sending troops to Somalia remained above 50% in October 1993.
How long do you think the US troops will have to remain in Somalia?

![Bar chart showing public sentiment on the duration of US troops in Somalia over different dates and poll organizations.]

**Figure 51: Duration of Commitment**

We may look at the public’s perception of how a president is doing his job to ascertain overall confidence in the president's competence. President George H.W. Bush’s polling numbers were at an all-time high in the immediate aftermath of the popular and successful Persian Gulf War, in which the United States and a coalition pushed invading Iraqi forces back out of Kuwait. However, in the subsequent year they dropped, largely in response to domestic economic issues, until the autumn of 1992 when he lost his bid for reelection to Bill Clinton.

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37 See chapter on the Persian Gulf War in this volume.
Approval for President Bush's overall handling of his office failed to reach forty-five percent and dropped as low as thirty percent, while disapproval levels hovered over fifty percent during most of 1992. This trend finally began to reverse in early December, when the President announced his decision to launch Operation Restore Hope, sending troops to Somalia. Approval levels remained steadily close to fifty percent through the end of December. Furthermore, in January, while the public was asked to reflect on Bush's presidency in the weeks before Clinton's inauguration, sentiment was more favorable than
it had been for the entire previous year, with approval levels close to fifty-five percent and disapproval levels around forty percent.

Ratings of President Bush’s performance in the area of foreign policy and foreign affairs had remained relatively strong, but significant jump in approval for the president’s foreign policy occurred in early December, coinciding with the announcement of Operation Restore Hope.

**How President Bush is handling foreign affairs/foreign policy**

![Graph showing approval and disapproval rates](image)

**Figure 53: President Bush - Handling Foreign Affairs**

In the weeks in January just before Clinton’s inauguration, the public’s retrospective judgment of Bush’s management of foreign affairs is even more compelling, polled between 70 and 80 percent across three major surveys. This finding, when viewed in conjunction
with the record 80% approval rating of President Bush’s decisions about Somalia, strongly indicates the public’s high approval for the action in Somalia and that their approval of Bush’s foreign policy performance was augmented by their favorable opinion of this specific issue.\(^{38}\)

Following the launch of Operation Restore Hope, not only did the public overwhelmingly approve of how President Bush was handling Somalia, but they had also accepted President Bush’s justifications for the intervention. His apparently clear policy direction, expressed in his 4 December speech, convinced a majority that Somalia, rather than Yugoslavia, was the right place for US forces at this time.\(^{39}\) That is, while it is not possible to disprove suggestions of strongly mixed motives for the timing of the airlift to Somalia (less than a month after Clinton had roundly criticized Bush’s foreign policy), or the November decision to make a commitment to Somalia while not pursuing greater involvement in the Balkans, there is also no evidence to show that the public did or ought to have perceived anything underhanded about the president’s decision. However, many believed that sending troops to Somalia increased the likelihood that US forces would later be sent to Bosnia, although there still was not a strong movement in favor of direct intervention in the Balkans.\(^{40}\)

Prospects and Expectations

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\(^{38}\) See graph above: ABC News poll, 13 January 1993.

\(^{39}\) Methodology: Conducted by CBS News on December 6, 1992 and based on 835 telephone interviews. Sample: national adult. [USCBS.120792.R10]. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

The public also had well-defined beliefs about acceptable goals for the mission and expected costs. The figure below shows expectations for the mission goals. While the Newsweek and Gallup polls indicate a more conservative view of how much US forces could realistically accomplish, when the issue was framed in terms of abandoning a vulnerable people to "warring gangs," a strong majority thought that it was better to "stay until a new and effective government is put in place, even if it takes a long time."\footnote{Notably, some analysts from the non-governmental organization African Rights argued at the time that the case for military intervention in Operation Restore Hope claimed that it was necessary and the only way to alleviate the ongoing humanitarian crisis – but that in reality, the incoming aid had in fact made significant improvements in the lives of vulnerable Somalis (Omaar and de Waal 1993). Therefore, the authors contend that a military intervention was not necessary, and that it was harmful because it interfered with the ongoing aid process, and ultimately left Somalia worse off. However, these objections were not widely-publicized, and do not seem to factor into public perceptions of and expectations for the mission. Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal (1993), *Somalia: Operation Restore Hope: A Preliminary Assessment* (African Rights, London). See also: Walter C. Soderlund et al (2008), *Humanitarian Crises and Intervention: Reassessing the impact of mass media* (Kumarian Press, Sterling VA).}
Furthermore, the public’s anticipation of the costs of the mission was not exceedingly naïve. Although a December Gallup poll showed a majority of respondents expressing confidence that “the US will be able to accomplish its goals with very few or no American casualties,” and slight majority expressed confidence that “US troops will be able to withdraw within a few months, as planned,” other data indicates that the public had more sober expectations as well. In that same poll, when asked about prospects for the mission’s success, although 49% expressed confidence that the US would succeed in ending the
famine, 46% doubted that the mission would succeed.\textsuperscript{42} Additionally, a CBS poll found that 42% of respondents were “very concerned” and 37% were “somewhat concerned” that the US could become “bogged down in the civil war that’s been going on in Somalia.”\textsuperscript{43} However, despite the uncertainty about the mission’s prospective outcome, when that same poll asked, “Given the possible loss of American lives, the financial costs, and other risks involved, do you think sending US troops to make sure food gets through to the people of Somalia is worth the cost, or not?” 70% of respondents agreed that the mission would be “worth it,” while only 21% disagreed. Finally, when an NBC poll asked what would be the “ultimate result” of the intervention, although 39% of respondents thought that “America will achieve its objectives without military conflict,” 38% believed “America will achieve its objectives, but only with military conflict,” and 17% acknowledged the possibility that “America will have to withdraw without achieving its objectives.”\textsuperscript{44}

These polling data show that although the public was inclined to be optimistic about US prospects for success at low cost in Somalia, its strong support of President Bush’s decision to commit troops to the mission was not predicated on the assumption that success would come immediately or painlessly. In particular, the CBS poll finding that 70% believed the mission would be “worth the cost” is especially significant given that 79% of those same respondents recognized the possibility that the US could get “bogged down” in Somalia’s

\textsuperscript{42} Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization December 4-December 6, 1992, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,005. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

\textsuperscript{43} Methodology: Conducted by CBS News/New York Times December 7-December 9, 1992, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,333. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

\textsuperscript{44} Survey by NBC News, Wall Street Journal. Methodology: Conducted by Hart and Breglio Research Companies December 12-December 15, 1992, and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,004. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
civil war. Furthermore, the public’s belief about the likely length of time US forces would remain in Somalia was less optimistic than the estimate offered by President Bush.\textsuperscript{45}

How long do you think the US troops will have to remain in Somalia?

![Figure 55: Expected Duration of Commitment](image)

Through the first month of Operation Restore Hope, a combined majority of the public expected the mission to last anywhere from three to twelve months. By 12 January, in the last poll on the issue taken before President Clinton’s inauguration, the combined majority expected the mission to last six months to a year or more. Despite these

expectations of duration, as well as the above-discussed concerns about whether or not US forces might become “bogged down” or suffer other costs, the public overwhelmingly approved of Operation Restore Hope and President’s Bush’s foreign policy performance more generally as a result.

![Support or Opposition to Different Policies in Somalia](image)

**Figure 56: Opinion on Policies for Somalia**

As discussed above, although President Bush had emphasized the very short-term, specific mission of providing humanitarian aid to alleviate mass starvation, the public was
aware of other possible goals and expressed support for them. As Figure 54, above, shows, although there was low support for the idea of using US forces to try to permanently end the civil war, the public was supportive of stabilizing the country and did not want to leave Somalia in the hands of the factions of warlords. This willingness to support other goals beyond providing and distributing food aid is significant because of the evidence early in the mission that the Somali people were expecting the US to work at stabilizing the country as well.

The in-print reporting on the hopes and expectations of the Somali people communicated (to some degree) to the American people that there was more at stake for them than a straightforward need for food and humanitarian aid.,

Many Somalis welcome the imminent American military intervention in their country, but they view the narrowly focused goal of protecting the delivery of food to the destitute as a mere sideshow to what really interests them: an end to the clan violence, economic reconstruction and political reconciliation. And they expect the Americans to deliver on all counts.46

The prevailing concern was that if the foreign troops were successful in protecting the aid convoys, the foiled looters would turn their violence and greed against ordinary citizens. This fear was compounded by uncertainty within the country over the aim and leadership of the approaching forces. As a Somali citizen working at the UN’s offices in Mogadishu commented, “Whether it is the United States or the United Nations – this makes an

important difference ... If it is the United Nations it will be useless.”47 The source of this deep-seated mistrust of the UN stemmed both from the perceived inefficiency of its humanitarian efforts under UNOSOM I and from the Somalis’ distrust of Egypt, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s home country. Thus, in this context, the burden of hope and anticipation of what the Americans could achieve was great. Even at the outset, the sanguine account of a short-term, simplistic aid distribution mission prophesied by US political and military leaders already stood in stark contrast to the hopes and expectations of the Somali people seeking respite from the conflict that had destroyed their civil society and political infrastructure. As CIA officials had warned during debates among US leadership over the prospective details of a US-led force deployment, long-term stabilization of Somalia was most likely an intangible goal for the US to achieve.48 In seeking to focus on aid distribution alone, President Bush hoped to improve the lot of the majority of the Somali people so that eventually they could figure out what to do about the armed gunmen pervading the region, but the problem was that this was not what the Somali people wanted or expected.

Although President Bush reiterated the expectation and intention that the US-led effort would be short-lived, perhaps even finishing before President-elect Clinton’s inauguration, the Pentagon officials insisted that such a plan was overly optimistic. Their principal fear, as reported in the New York Times, was that the warring factions would go

into hiding when coalition forces arrived, but would then reemerge and return the country into chaos and conflict as soon as UNITAF forces were withdrawn.

“The idea is that we will be the peacemaking force and then we'll turn it over the U.N. peacekeepers,” said a senior Pentagon official, who asked not to be named.

“But how do we know when we are done?”

He continued: “If the armed clans fade away in the night because we have deployed overwhelming force and we go a month without sniping attacks, you could say that the country is pacified. Then after we get up to leave, the clans could come back out of the woodwork again. Between the stuff the Russians and we stuck in there during the great cold war, there are enough arms in Somalia to fuel hostilities for 100 years.”

Thus, although President Bush’s message to the American public had focused on the asymmetry between the firepower, skill, and training of the UNITAF contingent and the Somali warlords and their cronies, his advisors held out a more cautious stance and expected the mission to last longer and require deeper involvement than the president hoped.

Initial Perceptions of Success

The progress of the mission in Somalia as of early January could be viewed by the public as a gradual success, as US forces were able to protect the aid distribution sites and

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the worst problems of starvation were beginning to be remediated. Furthermore, prospects for a negotiated peace among the various factions seemed hopeful.\textsuperscript{50}

However, many Somalis were unhappy with the role the United Nations was playing in the mediation process, viewing the United States as a more neutral party, without its own political stake in the region. On the day of Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali’s planned meeting with the faction leaders, demonstrators surrounded the UN compound in Mogadishu shouting and tossing pamphlets into the compound.

The literature referred to the “colonization policy” of the United Nations, and said, “We the people of Somalia want the United States armed forces to stay in our country and help us rebuild our nation.” It referred to President Bush as the “saver of the Somali nation.” ...

The growing sentiment in Somalia for American troops to remain at least a year until the nation is stabilized also presents a diplomatic problem for Washington. The Administration has insisted that United States soldiers will hand over their role to United Nations peacekeeping troops and begin a withdrawal as early as late January, when President-elect Bill Clinton is inaugurated.\textsuperscript{51}

The success that the US was garnering thus far was in itself providing incentive for the Somali people to expect a longer, firmer commitment from the United States. In large part, these expectations hinged on a desire for mass disarmament of all competing factions, as


the citizens were convinced that peace would last and stability return only if the gunmen no longer had guns.52

From the perspective of policymakers in Washington and the military commanders in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as early as January 1993 the endeavor was succeeding in accomplishing the aims of reducing levels of violence, distributing food, and enabling communities to rebuild themselves after earlier displacements due to the internal fighting. On 24 January, the first contingent of 1,100 US soldiers were sent home from Somalia, in accordance with President Bush’s promise to begin drawing down troops before President Clinton’s inauguration. However, the over 24,000 troops remaining did not yet have a timetable for withdrawal, as there was still significant ongoing violence. One US official characterized the symbolic withdrawal as a signal to the UN that the United States was serious about turning over the mission to a UN operation.53

At the hearing before the Senate Committee on Armed Services at the end of January 1993, almost two months since Operation Restore Hope was launched, Admiral Cramer testified,

The immediate impact of Restore Hope is absolutely reduced factional fighting. That does not mean that occasional fighting does not occur. ... But by and large, there has been none – no – zero – organized resistance to either U.S. forces or the coalition forces by any of the major factions. ...

Gradually, at least in the major cities, and perhaps even more importantly, the smaller cities around the countryside, are beginning to return to normal commerce and economic relations. Now, in some cases, the food being traded is, in fact, humanitarian relief food, but at least a barter economy and other aspects of life slowly are beginning to return to normal, particularly outside Mogadishu and Kismayo.54

General Brandtner followed this report with a presentation of the operational phases of UNITAF that had already been completed, emphasizing the military success of securing humanitarian aid areas that was protecting NGO personnel and aid workers and facilitating distribution of supplies.

From these early, tentative hallmarks of success, Operation Restore Hope continued over the next few months under President Clinton with growing optimism. Although the United States had emphasized aid provision as its principal objective, its troops were also beginning to disarm warring factions, which the UN forces could not do as effectively because of their fewer numbers.55 The goal remained, however, to complete the relief operation and turn over to the UN the responsibility for rebuilding the country. Although US military leaders continued to express confidence about the prospective transition, humanitarian aid workers and Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali worried that without full

54 “Joint Chiefs of Staff Briefing on Current Military Operations in Somalia, Iraq, and Yugoslavia,” Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, 29 January 1993: 4.
disarmament, UN forces would be unable to maintain security and manage the nation-building project.\textsuperscript{56}

Although US officials repeatedly emphasized that UNITAF was successfully fulfilling its mission goals – securing the transportation routes for food and aid distribution and disarming the factions, the day-to-day progress on the ground was much murkier. Faction leaders were often “disarmed” by being asked to leave the more populated areas (or they simply slipped away with their weapons stores before US forces could locate them), whereas relief workers and the non-combatant Somali people were required to give up the weapons they used to protect themselves. By March, US envoy to Somalia Robert Oakley reported that the US-led mission would close successfully, emphasizing the progress made in bringing the different factions into negotiation with each other. UN officials still worried, however, that the stability achieved would deteriorate once the bulk of US forces departed.\textsuperscript{57} Nonetheless, the final handing over of military leadership from the US to the UN took place in early May, and the public viewed the successful amelioration of the famine and distribution of relief as sufficient marker of success as UNITAF ended and UNOSOM II began.

The table below shows the responses to polls taken over two weeks from the end of March to early April.


### Views on Success of UNITAF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you approve or disapprove of the job being done by the United Nations in Somalia? Would that be strongly or somewhat? [Americans Talk Issues, 4 April]</th>
<th>Strongly approve</th>
<th>Somewhat approve</th>
<th>Somewhat disapprove</th>
<th>Strongly disapprove</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The use of US military force in Somalia represents something new in our foreign policy. In the past, presidents have ordered military force to protect our vital military and economic interests. In Somalia we are using military force primarily for humanitarian reasons—to stop the widespread starvation there. Generally, do you approve or disapprove of the use of U.S. military force for primarily humanitarian reasons? [Americans Talk Issues, 4 April] | 56% | 28% | 7% | 8% | 1% |

#### Figure 57: Success of Operation Restore Hope

## Section 2: UNITAF transitions to UNOSOM II

4) When UNITAF transitioned to UNOSOM II at the end of March 1993, what was the public perception of the humanitarian mission’s outcome? Did President Clinton redefine the goals and reasons for US involvement in Somalia in association with UNOSOM II? Were there domestic responses to this participation?
Although the UN Department of Public Information’s description of UNOSOM I characterized Somalia as holding “a strategically important geopolitical position at the Horn of Africa,” from the perspectives of the states involved in the UN mission, this was not the case.\textsuperscript{60} Certainly from the US perspective, but in other participating nations as well, there was no particular strategic value in Somalia. In contrast to the oil hub of the Persian Gulf, site of the war barely two years earlier, “Somalia, on the contrary, with its 7 million nomadic

\textsuperscript{59} Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

\textsuperscript{60} “UNITED NATIONS OPERATION IN SOMALIA I” (http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unosomi.htm).
farmers and shepherds disseminated over an immense territory (637,000 square
kilometers, more than twice that of Italy) but largely a desert, is now a country without
strategic or geopolitical interest.” Thus, for the US as well as the other countries acting
under the UN mandate, the mission was exclusively humanitarian in nature.

However, after the transition to UNOSOM II, which saw the focus of the mission
shifting away from humanitarian provision to nation-building and capturing Aidid, public
approval went into decline. The public’s disapproval with this new mission goal was
compounded by repeated visible failures – the inability of US forces to capture Aidid and the
resurgence in clan-sponsored violence throughout Somalia. This disapproval of failure was
not, however, reflexive casualty aversion as is often claimed.

UNITAF → UNOSOM II

The first few months of President William Jefferson Clinton’s administration saw the
culmination of the UNITAF mission as analysts and observers concluded that the goals of
the mission – food and aid distribution to the vulnerable populations who needed it – had
been accomplished due to the military weight of US forces leading the endeavor.
Nonetheless, it was clear that the country was not yet stabilized, there was still danger to
the population and to aid workers due to violence between the clans, and there was no
governing body or social infrastructure that could appropriately govern the country. At this
time, the public should look to the success of the humanitarian relief goal of the mission,
and could look forward to prospective success of stabilization goal of mission. The need for
stabilization in addition to humanitarian needs was reinforced the American public’s

pastori nomadi disseminati su un territorio immenso (637.000 chilometri quadrati, più del doppio dell’Italia) ma
in gran parte desertico, è ormai un Paese privo di interesse strategico e geopolitico.”
knowledge of Somali expectations. Therefore, although UNITAF’s mission was viewed as successful, it was incomplete. Thus, in early March, both the United States and United Nations leadership decided that it was appropriate to end the UNITAF mandate and transition into the UN-led UNOSOM II. Notably, unlike the earlier UNOSOM I, UNOSOM II was endowed with Chapter VII enforcement powers pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 814(1993).

UNOSOM II’s mandate was “to take appropriate action, including enforcement measures, to establish throughout Somalia a secure environment for humanitarian assistance.” The mission also sought to rebuild Somali sociopolitical institutions and repatriate those who had fled the country as refugees so they could participate in the decision-making process. However, the violence of the warring factions continued to increase, largely under the leadership of Generals Mohammed Farah Aidid and Ali Mahdi Muhammed, producing a number of calculated, deliberate attacks against UNOSOM personnel in July 1993. In response, the Secretary-General re-emphasized that UNOSOM II was authorized to “take all necessary measures” to accomplish their mission and to hold accountable all those inciting, planning, and executing the attacks.

Weight of Justifications

President Bill Clinton: Reasons for keeping US troops in Somalia as part of UNOSOM II and approving change in mission from humanitarian relief to finding and capturing Aidid:

Table 29: President Clinton’s Justifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>Continue enabling aid, assist stability; ensure previous efforts not undone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National interest</td>
<td>Allowing Somalia to descend back into chaos would be hurtful to US reputation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a presidential candidate, Bill Clinton had spoken out in favor of increasing US aid and commitment to Somalia during his campaign. This stance was initially influential in prompting the Bush administration to take clearer action in support of the ongoing UN endeavors, in an effort not to lose voters who agreed with Clinton’s call for action. Thus, when he acceded to the presidency in January 1993, President Bill Clinton was not stuck with a military commitment dropped into his lap that he neither wanted nor anticipated. On the contrary, his rhetoric during the campaign prompted public expectation that he both had a plan for Somalia and would successfully complete what President Bush had started. During the first few months of his presidency, Clinton held a steady course and did not suggest anything unusual or outside of established expectations. The transition from the United States-led UNITAF to the UNOSOM II mission took place as intended. In his “mission accomplished” speech on Operation Restore Hope, President Clinton declared:

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Although your mission was humanitarian and not combat, you nonetheless faced difficult and dangerous conditions. You sometimes were subjected to abuse and forced to dodge rocks and even bullets. You saw firsthand the horror of hunger, disease, and death. But you pressed on with what you set out to do, and you were successful. ...

You also leave behind a U.N. peacekeeping force with a significant American component. This force is a reflection of the new era we have entered, for it has Americans participating in new ways. Just hours ago, General Johnston turned over command to General Bir of Turkey as UNITAF became UNOSOM II. You set the stage and made it possible for that force to do its mission and for the Somalis to complete the work of rebuilding and creating a peaceful, self-sustaining, and democratic civil society.66

Thus, the expectation affirmed by this speech was that the extraordinary commitment of US soldiers over the past few months was at an end, that Operation Restore Hope had been successful, and that the reason for the UNOSOM II endeavor – and the reason for American troops to participate – was humanitarian reconstruction and civil stabilization.

However, soon it became apparent that the warlords had regrouped and were undeterred by UNOSOM II’s mandate, escalating the violence. As the deepening civil war raged on, the United Nations soldiers found it increasingly difficult to fulfill any of the goals of their mission, as humanitarian aid distribution became even more dangerous and disarming the volatile factions was nearly impossible. Within this context, the general civilian population of the area grew more angry and dissatisfied as they began to view the

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multinational forces as oppressive and incompetent outsiders, rather than protectors. As discontentment grew, the warlords found themselves able to successfully recruit large numbers of former civilians to actively fight against the UN forces. By calling for Somali nationalism (the disparate factions may have been from rival clans, but at least they were all Somalis, in contrast to the array of outsiders sent by the UN), the warlords were able to increase their numbers and firepower while making it even harder for UNOSOM II to succeed.

It was in response to these spiraling events that President Clinton saw the need to shift the expectations of the UNOSOM II mission. Although they were already authorized to use “whatever means necessary” pursuant to UN Charter Chapter VII, Clinton sought to incorporate adjusted additional aims for the mission. Namely, he became convinced of the growing instability, and concluded that the only way to impede the progress of the warlords’ recruiting and escalating violence was to remove General Aidid from the conflict.

In the aftermath of the 4 June ambush by Aidid’s forces that killed 26 Pakistani peacekeepers, the American public was supportive of targeting General Aidid and those who had killed the peacekeepers, with 65% approving of the US pursuing a strike against his forces. However, after more than two months of failure to capture the general, along with continuing attacks on peacekeeping forces, the American public no longer thought the situation was tenable. In September, not only did a majority believe that the US should stop this level of active military involvement in Somalia, but over half of those respondents wanted US forces to leave the region entirely. Furthermore, over half of respondents to an NBC poll believed that the US was too deeply involved, and that efforts were not under

67 See Figure 62, below. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
control. Additionally, a higher proportion now disapproved than approved of US troops in Somalia. By the end of September, almost 70% insisted that the US forces should only be delivering food, not disarming rival warlords.

**Figure 59: Approval - Somalia, Yugoslavia, Foreign Policy**

Both the increased levels of violence and the changing goals of the endeavor brought Somalia back onto the radar of the US media and the general public. However, the president did not make a major speech to the nation about Somalia again during the summer.
While it is difficult to show a proper time-series view of ratings of Clinton's handling of Somalia, since this question was simply not asked in any polls between his inauguration and late June 1993, the perceived failure of US troops to capture Aidid led to a downturn in public opinion that reached its lowest point so far in September, expressing strong disapproval for President Clinton's overall management of the situation in Somalia. The further change in US policy – suddenly declaring that it was no longer a priority to capture Aidid – also suggested lack of clarity regarding what the US was actually supposed to accomplish in the region. While the stated reasons for ending the manhunt were to focus on
the reconstruction process (which, if completed, would be a successful achievement), the problem with this reasoning was that the justification for hunting for Aidid in the first place was that it would not be possible to stabilize the country as long as he was at large, instigating attacks on peacekeeping forces. This lack of stability could be expected to further prolong US involvement on the ground in Somalia (as emphasized by Les Aspin in his speech at the end of August), which was a further disappointment to those who expected the mission to be completed more quickly.

Figure 61: President Clinton Handling His Job
Here we can see a decline in overall approval for how President Clinton was handling his job as president between March and October 1993, concomitant with increasing disapproval for the president’s handling of Somalia specifically. While approval levels remained above or around 50% through the beginning of May, disapproval levels climbed throughout that time. Although the percentage of those who approved of the job President Clinton was doing from September through November 1993, approval levels failed to again cross the fifty percent line.

Because overall approval levels of a president’s job include purely domestic factors such as the economy and other issues of national public policy, besides foreign policy matters, of even greater relevance to understanding the Somalia case are the polling results concerning the public view of Clinton’s handling of foreign affairs and foreign policy issues in general. It is notable that while approval of Clinton’s performance on foreign affairs remained slightly above fifty percent through the summer, it dropped significantly in October around the time of the Battle of Mogadishu. Thus, prior favorable opinion on the president’s ability to manage foreign policy was not sufficient to compensate for the impact of those events.

Although approval for President Clinton’s handling of foreign affairs stayed above fifty percent during March and April, it bounced back and forth several times through the early summer. There was a jump back up to fifty percent in late June immediately following the missile attacks on Baghdad, unrelated to the events in Somalia.

The summer of 1993 saw increasing numbers of attacks on UN forces by the factions of Aidid and Mahdi. This prompted President Clinton to encourage using US Marines to
engage in a manhunt for Aidid, under the theory that if he were captured or killed, his faction would no longer be capable of functioning without a leader, and that it would fall apart due to infighting and would no longer pose a threat to regional security.

**Section 3: Post-Black Hawk Down**

In early October, following the tragic outcome of the Battle of Mogadishu in which American soldiers were killed and footage of their bodies being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu aired on the national news. In analyzing this incident and its effect on support for the intervention, the conventional wisdom emphasizes media reports had on the trends in public opinion, both in terms of interest levels and approval ratings. Thomashausen also points to the “CNN factor” as instrumental in garnering the high levels of support for American military action. However, she argues, “Just as the media now propelled public opinion in overwhelming favour of a US intervention, media images of gloating warlords parading mutilated bodies of American troops several months later quickly reversed public support for such action.”

This position is quite naïve, however, given the public’s resilient response immediately following the bloody battle. After the tragedy of the Battle of Mogadishu, however, the public demonstrated a rally in support of capturing General Aidid, and of responding with a major military attack if US prisoners could not be freed through negotiations.

In his speech of 7 October, President Clinton described the process of escalation during the summer:

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Until June, things went well, with little violence. The United States reduced our troop presence from 28,000 down to less than 5,000, with other nations picking up where we left off. But then in June, the people who caused much of the problem in the beginning started attacking American, Pakistani, and other troops who were there just to keep the peace.

...

That knowledge has led us to continue our mission. It is not our job to rebuild Somalia’s society or even to create a political process that can allow Somalia’s clans to live and work in peace. The Somalis must do that for themselves. The United Nations and many African states are more than willing to help. But we, we in the United States must decide whether we will give them enough time to have a reasonable chance to succeed.69

Here, the president acknowledges that the success referred to in May was not sustained, and that the situation was in danger of reversing the previously-achieved advances if more effort was not committed at that time.

President Clinton pointed to the need to give the Somali people a “reasonable chance to succeed” in rebuilding their nation with a stable central government, saying “We started this mission for the right reasons, and we’re going to finish it in the right way.” He continued by outlining the new goals for US forces:

First, they are there to protect our troops and our bases. We did not go to Somalia with a military purpose. We never wanted to kill anyone. But those who attack our soldiers must know they will pay a very heavy price.

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Second, they are there to keep open and secure the roads, the port, and the lines of communication that are essential for the United Nations and the relief workers to keep the flow of food and supplies and people moving freely throughout the country so that starvation and anarchy do not return.

Third, they are there to keep the pressure on those who cut off relief supplies and attacked our people, not to personalize the conflict but to prevent a return to anarchy.

Fourth, through their pressure and their presence, our troops will help to make it possible for the Somali people, working with others, to reach agreements among themselves so that they can solve their problems and survive when we leave.

That is our mission.  

However, despite his seemingly determined words, President Clinton also declared a firm withdrawal date.

Key to this case is the fact that the American public had been strongly supportive of US involvement in Operation Restore Hope (UNITAF) launched in December 1992, and the earlier efforts (Operation Proved Relief), which focused on providing and distributing aid and food, and protecting the convoys of relief workers to ensure the supplies reached those in need. Notably, even after the tragic Black Hawk Down incident and the casualties endured at the Battle of Mogadishu, over 60% of the public still approved of delivering food to the people of Somalia. This disapproval of failure was not, however, reflexive casualty aversion as is often claimed. As Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler acerbically point out, “There was

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71 Poll from December 1993, cited in Figure 2.3 of Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler (2009), *Paying the Human Costs of War* (Princeton, Princeton University Press): 40.
one important audience that was deeply casualty phobic, reacting immediately and reflexively to the sight of bodies being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu: the president, his closest advisors, and members of Congress.”\cite{72}

![Diagram: Views on Manhunt for Aidid]

**Figure 62: Support for Hunting Aidid Increases After Troops Attacked**

In his ‘damage control strategy’ – which was actually more of a concession that the US could not achieve stated goals in Somalia after all – President Clinton expressed several distinct but interconnected reasons to stay in Somalia even in the face of American

casualties. First among them was the notion of “giving Somalis a chance.” He made an effort to differentiate between rebuilding and establishing a stable government in the country – something that would be the responsibility of the Somali people, not the United States – and securing the conditions to enable such progress to occur. In this humanitarian-based reason, he appealed to the desire for self-determination and democratic representation that resonates with the American people. Second, he argued that if US forces were to totally withdraw at this point, not only would we fail to secure those conditions, but also we would undo all the effort of the previous eleven months. Here, he was appealing to pragmatic sensibilities – the US had already invested significant resources and American lives in this cause. To follow up on that investment by leaving before the intended goals were realized would be tantamount to wasting those resources and lives. Third, he emphasized the reputational stakes in this case: withdrawing US troops without fully completing our promised objectives would signal to the rest of the world that the United States cannot be counted on to keep her commitments. He saw this last point as an especial danger for future engagements as it could cause allies to distance themselves while emboldening enemies who might conclude that United States soldiers could be attacked and killed without fear of retribution. Thus, this last reason appealed to a national interest in maintaining a reputation as a state that makes good on its commitments even when faced with difficulties.

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Public Opinion Data: Approval and Perceptions of Failure

In this case, the general public did not perceive either president’s justifications for sending or keeping troops in Somalia as deceptive. How much will the public care when it was not misled, but it views the mission as a failure? Of particular value for this task is the retrospective polling question asked by ABC News on 5 October 1993: “Do you approve or disapprove of President George Bush’s decision to send U.S. (United States) troops to Somalia last December (1992)?” Even after the horrific aftermath of the Battle of Mogadishu had been broadcast to the public, more than 50% of respondents still approved of that decision while fewer than 40% disapproved. Although this is a notable drop from the nearly 80% approval and less than 20% disapproval levels expressed near the end of President Bush’s term in January, this residual support for Bush’s action contrasts starkly with the less than 35% approval levels for Clinton’s handing of Somalia, polled that same day.74 This suggests that while the public still agreed with the initial justifications for committing troops to Somalia for Operation Restore Hope, they had become unconvinced that the continued American presence under UN command was effective, largely because of the failures mentioned in the previous section.

74 See ABC News polls, 13 January 1994 and 5 October 1993. Data provided by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.
Approval levels for Clinton’s handling of foreign policy and foreign affairs plummeted to their lowest while disapproval levels jumped by twenty percentage points in the days following the news of the American soldiers killed in the Battle of Mogadishu and the video footage of their bodies was broadcast on the news. However, by mid-December, approval ratings once more exceeded disapproval.
In judging failure, of particular interest are the remarks President Clinton made following the 3 October Black Hawk Down incident and Battle of Mogadishu. On 6 October, as the signing of the Hatch Act of 1993, the president had exhibited ambivalence regarding the next course of action he would pursue. At that time, he stated: “tomorrow I will be consulting with congressional leaders in both parties and with others, and then I will report to you and to the American people. ... I think the American people, and I hope the Congress will be satisfied that we have assessed our position accurately and that we have a good
policy to pursue. I will discuss that with them tomorrow, as I said, and then I will be back to
the American people and to the press as soon as that is done.”

In his address to the nation the following day, although the president emphasized
the initial humanitarian justification for intervening in Somalia, and expressed a desire to
withdraw US forces in a way that would not jeopardize prior successes, he made it clear that
withdrawal was the only course of action under consideration. By declaring 31 March as the
deadline for all American forces (aside from noncombat support personnel), President
Clinton made “a tacit admission of failure.” This decision, flying in the face of initial public
willingness to continue supporting the mission, which included pursuing and punishing
Aidid, communicated to the public that the president was not handling the mission well and
would be unable to bring about a successful outcome.

Additionally, the factor of elite dissensus plays a role. Even prior to Black Hawk
Down and the Battle of Mogadishu, support in Congress for the mission had been waning,
and there was a push to reduce funding for the mission. This was one of the contributing
factors in ending the manhunt and focusing again on reconstruction – if some
reconstruction could be successfully accomplished, that might be enough of a success to
allow Congress to insist on drawing down troops and reducing funding. Therefore, levels of
elite support, framing of the issue, and varying levels of perceived success are key to
explaining the disapproval.

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75 William Jefferson Clinton, President of the United States (6 October 1993), “Remarks on signing the Hatch Act
Reform Amendments of 1993” Quoted in John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project
76 Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler (2009), Paying the Human Costs of War (Princeton,
77 See ABC Poll, 5 October 1993 – 51% of respondents agreed that the United States should continue the mission
in Somalia.
In the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa Hearing on Future Prospects for Peace and Stability in Somalia in March 1994, the Representative Donald Payne made a statement admitting that the withdrawal of American forces from Somalia was occurring at an inopportune time, when objectives had not been fully met, and considered the role of casualty aversion in the American public's strong disapproval of maintaining a position in Somalia. He said,

In looking back at our own congressional process, we could also have done a better job of informing the American people that such operations could mean casualties as we should be prepared to make the sacrifice if we allow ourselves to become involved in that it will not be an operation that can be done absent casualties. ...

Possibly if we had prepared the American people better, there would have been the political will to stay the course for a more orderly withdrawal in Somalia.\(^\text{78}\) From this perspective, because the initial justifications for military action were so strongly approved by the American public, and because there was no perception of misleading by the government, then a counterfactual scenario suggests that with a clear outline of potential costs of humanitarian intervention, the public may have willingly continued their support in the aftermath of the Battle of Mogadishu, as they would not have been taken by surprise by the casualties suffered by United States forces. However, this view suggests an incomplete understanding of the American public’s expectations going into Somalia, given that they had affirmed it would be “worth the cost.”

Conclusion: The effect of failure

The United States intervention in Somalia provides a compelling case of how a military mission approved by the public, justified by humanitarian reasons, sanctioned by international law, and met with significant approval levels at its outset may be derailed in the public mindset when an instance of failure is perceived. While other cases in this dissertation support the arguments that perceived deception compounds the effect of failure, this case highlights the strong downturn in public opinion that may be sparked by a well-publicized setback. Additionally, the perception that developed among the public during the spring and summer of 1993 was that President Clinton did not have a particularly clear plan for Somalia. This hesitance regarding the president’s competence, especially in terms of this specific case, probably played a role in the strong disapproval for the president’s handling of the situation after the Battle of Mogadishu.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

Review of Findings

The overarching research question this dissertation has addressed is: How does the democratic public respond when it believes leaders have been deceptive about war justifications? This question was generated by a simple empirical observation: Although the audience costs literature focuses on prospective evaluations of leaders’ performance, in terms of success and consistency, a great deal of the rhetoric and public discussion of leaders’ decisions centers on retrospective, normative judgments of their behavior – in particular, their truthfulness. Therefore, I developed and tested a theory of normative audience costs, arguing that in addition to pragmatic desires for successful outcomes and partisan-driven predispositions, the public will react with disapproval when it perceives deception.

The experimental work served to differentiate among the effects of Outcome, Partisanship, and Truthiness on respondents’ approval levels for military actions ordered by the president, and elucidate the mechanisms by which disapproval decisions are reached. I found that deceptive justifications strongly elicit disapproval of the military actions (regardless of Outcome, and regardless of partisan cues). At the same time, perceived deception – in addition to Outcome and partisan cues – contributes to how respondents explain their reasons for disapproval and want the president to take responsibility for his actions.

Although I selected case studies according to a basic 2x2 design predicated upon perceptions of Truthiness and Outcome as suggested by popular conceptions of each case, it
turned out that each of the actual cases is far richer and more complex than the confines of its cell. The value of either or both of the independent variables of interest – perceptions of Truthiness and Outcome – may vary more than once within a single case. Therefore, I took a temporality-conscious approach in working through each case, looking for crucial points in each narrative at which to test my theory. The dependent variable of interest was public approval levels, as reported by national polls. While disapproval is admittedly an overdetermined outcome, the temporal approach makes it possible to examine which values the independent variables held prior to changes in approval levels.

The case of the Vietnam War was initially chosen for the Less Truthful/Failure cell. Two key points in the case were the Fulbright hearings in 1966 and the hearings in 1968. During the first Fulbright hearings, televised in early 1966, members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations called into question President Johnson's constant use of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to justify every additional escalation. While the Gulf of Tonkin incident itself was not yet disputed, the doubts raised about the legitimacy of the Resolution to justify escalation meant that the president's justifications were perceived as spin. This contributed to an initial jump in disapproval levels in February and March – inexplicable by concerns about Outcome because the public approved of the bombing campaign and the rate of casualties had not yet increased. Another crucial point is in early 1968, coming on the heels of Johnson's progress campaign (which had made the case that success was imminent and garnered a brief upswing in approval). However, the public's doubt in Johnson's honesty also grew during 1967, so approval plummeted in early 1968 when the public perceived failure as the outcome of the Tet Offensive, and became more convinced of outright deception following the second set of Fulbright hearings in which the veracity of
the second Gulf of Tonkin incident was challenged by the Senators. At the first point, we see disapproval resulting from doubts about the legitimacy of the president’s justifications, while at the second we see the combined effects of deception and failure. Ultimately, public disapproval made Johnson’s reelection bid untenable and he withdrew from the race.

The case of the US invasion of Grenada in 1983 was initially chosen for the Less Truthful/Success cell, because President Reagan was accused of hypocrisy and concealment by some members of Congress and the news media. However, while some believed the president was lying about his justifications for intervention, and took to the streets in protest as a result – the mayor of Berkeley, CA called the invasion “pure propaganda to get Lebanon off the front page” – the majority of the public believed the president’s justifications for the intervention were truthful and valid, in particular, coming to the aid of Caribbean allies and rescuing American medical students. This belief in the president’s truthfulness in justifying the mission – prior to proof of success – contributed to strong initial approval for President Reagan’s actions, which later increased when the goals of the mission were successfully achieved.

The US involvement in the Persian Gulf War was selected as a case for the More Truthful/Success cell. In this case, the public was initially supportive of economic sanctions against Iraq, but did not rally in support of a military option for several months. The autumn months leading up to the UN deadline for Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait were notable because public opinion remained essentially the same – the public believed President Bush’s justifications for why the US should want Iraq to leave Kuwait, but did not see in them urgency that would require quick military involvement. Although some focused on the early justification of protecting oil flows in the Persian Gulf, and protested against any
military involvement (“no blood for oil”), and although many in Congress wanted to wait for sanctions to work, there was no unified movement casting doubt on the truth of any of the president’s justifications. Thus, when Congress voted to authorize military action if Iraq did not meet the UN deadline, the public responded to the president’s confidence that the endeavor would succeed, and rallied in support, expressing approval both for the president’s handling of the situation and in his job overall. Retrospective approval was also high, when US forces achieved a clear victory expelling Iraqi forces and restoring the Kuwaiti government.

The case of Somalia was selected as a case for the More Truthful/Failure cell. The first part of the case focuses on President Bush’s justifications for intervention and the success of the first part of the mission. Although there was some initial criticism suggesting that the decision to intervene in Somalia was made to avoid further commitment to Bosnia, this perception was not widespread and the public rallied in favor of Operation Restore Hope’s humanitarian objectives. In April 1993, leadership transferred from the US back to the UN, as planned, and the public agreed that the humanitarian efforts had met with success and continued to approve of that mission. However, the second part of the case discusses how the goals of the second UN-led mission shifted away from the humanitarian program to nation-building and stabilization, which turned into a manhunt for General Aidid after his forces killed 26 peacekeepers. Although the public supported retribution for this crime, they still believed that aid distribution should be the primary objective, and as US forces repeatedly failed to capture Aidid, the public saw this new goal meeting with failure. In the early autumn, Congress was already pushing to draw-down US forces in the region, so when 18 US Rangers were killed in October at the Battle of Mogadishu, President
Clinton believed there would be no way to sustain American involvement. Although the public responded to the casualties with a rally in favor of capturing and punishing Aidid, the president declared that all US forces would be removed by March, which confirmed public perceptions of failure and increased disapproval.

**Avenues of Future Research**

Given the constraints inherent to a dissertation project, this early research program was limited to the four historic case studies within the United States and the survey-based experiment fielded to over 1000 US citizens. Some of the most interesting potential for future research comes out of the experiments. In particular, some of the initial findings regarding how respondents evaluate their reasons for disapproval could be further explored in another study, based on a similar treatment design. First of all, respondents who approve of the military actions ordered by the president would be asked a series of questions about why they approve – in the present study, respondents who approved of both military actions were not asked unique follow-up questions. Second, respondents who disapproved would be offered an expanded range of disapproval options and allowed to select and evaluate “all that apply,” whereas in the present study they were restricted to three reasons. Third, respondents would be offered more opportunities to explain their choices through free response options within the survey, as opposed to only at the end. Expanding the scope of this work beyond the United States, it will be useful to field similar studies in other democracies – are the trends discovered in this study unique to the American public, or do all democratic publics respond in similar fashion?
Additionally, implicit media effects suggested by both the experimental and case study findings can be further explored in subsequent work. In this first experiment, participants were asked to rate their levels of confidence in various institutions, including the White House, the news media, and Congress, as well as their general approval level of President Obama, before reading and responding to a speculative news article. A number of respondents volunteered anecdotal statements at the end of the experiment describing their feelings of mistrust or suspicion toward the news media. They indicated lower likelihood that they would respond immediately to perceived presidential deception with intent to punish, even if they would have disapproved of deception, because they did not necessarily trust the news media. Extending the experimental research to test media effects more explicitly will offer a way to quantify an additional factor in the leeway that exists for a president's truthfulness, as well as the likely engagement or apathy of the respondent public.

Finally, while this set of case studies exclusively focused on public perceptions and responses to the president’s war justifications, the logical next step for case study work in this research program is to study and more carefully theorize the presidential calculus in making justifications. The findings of this present work show that presidents ought to be worried about the risks they take in choosing deception, but do they?
Appendix 1

Comparison of 4-point Likert Scale Ordered Logit Models with Binary Logit Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Approval of Troop Increase (4 pt Likert)</th>
<th>Approval of Troop Increase (binary logit)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Democrat Party1</td>
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<td>-.611*** (.180)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent Party2</td>
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<td>-.902*** (.205)</td>
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<td>Other Party3</td>
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<td>-1.42*** (.390)</td>
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<td>-.524* (.252)</td>
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<td>Concealment Truthiness2</td>
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<td>-.503* (.248)</td>
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<td>Outcome</td>
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<td>.541* (.232)</td>
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<td>MatchingCritic</td>
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<td>-.062 (.271)</td>
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<td>-638.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>972</td>
<td>972</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ADEN (Reuters) – (future date) – Yesterday in the early morning hours, US troops clashed with suspected Al Qaeda militants at a compound just outside the port city of Aden. In the heavy firefight, 15 of the suspected Al Qaeda militants were killed, including cleric Waled al-Muhbar, while another 5 were taken into US custody. The raid came on the heels of President Obama’s speech last week, calling for increased US troop presence in Yemen, announcing that intelligence reports had identified a plot by Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen to blow up the US Embassy.
The US military reported that there were no US casualties and no civilians were affected by the operation. The military released photographs of a weapons cache, bomb-making components, and Al Qaeda literature recovered from the compound.

Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) was critical of the military action, saying that “fulfilling America’s commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq” should take priority.

**Treatment B:**

*(Concealment in Justification, Successful Event Cue, Republican Criticism)*

ADEN (Reuters) – *(future date)*– Yesterday in the early morning hours, US troops clashed with suspected Al Qaeda militants at a compound just outside the port city of Aden. In the heavy firefight, 15 of the suspected Al Qaeda militants were killed, including cleric Waled al-Muhbar, while another 5 were taken into US custody. The raid came on the heels of President Obama’s speech last week, calling for increased US troop presence in Yemen, announcing that intelligence reports had identified a plot by Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen to blow up the US Embassy.

The US military reported that there were no US casualties and no civilians were affected by the operation. Photos released by the military showed a small weapons cache.

Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) was critical of the military action, saying that “fulfilling America’s commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq” should take priority, stating that the cell in Yemen had not posed an immediate threat, as “no evidence had been recovered to link the cell to a bombing plot.” The senator also cited an unnamed Pentagon source, arguing that the main objective of the raid had been to kill Waled al-Muhbar, who had not been authorized for targeted killing.
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The US military reported that there were no US casualties and no civilians were affected by the operation. Photos released by the military showed a small weapons cache. No bomb-making materials or Al Qaeda literature were recovered from the compound.

Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) was critical of the military action, saying that “fulfilling America’s commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq” should take priority. He also criticized President Obama for “misleading the American public,” citing the US military findings that no ties to Al Qaeda could be identified. The senator claimed that this was “a senseless show of force,” pointing to earlier reports from Yemeni military intelligence that this compound housed Southern Yemeni separatists who were not linked to Al Qaeda.
Treatment D:

(True Justification, Failed Event Cue, Democratic Criticism)

ADEN (Reuters) – (future date)– Yesterday in the early morning hours, US troops clashed with suspected Al Qaeda militants at a compound just outside the port city of Aden. In the heavy firefight, 20 of the suspected Al Qaeda militants were reported to have escaped, while another 5 were killed; none were taken into US custody. The raid came on the heels of President Obama’s speech last week, calling for increased US troop presence in Yemen, announcing that intelligence reports had identified a plot by Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen to blow up the US Embassy.

The US military reported 15 US casualties and 10 civilian deaths, as nearby dwellings caught fire and burned to the ground. The military released photographs of a weapons cache, bomb-making components, and Al Qaeda literature recovered from the compound.

Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) was critical of the military action, saying that “fulfilling America’s commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq” should take priority.

Treatment E:

(Concealment in Justification, Failed Event Cue, Democratic Criticism)

ADEN (Reuters) – (future date)– Yesterday in the early morning hours, US troops clashed with suspected Al Qaeda militants at a compound just outside the port city of Aden. In the heavy firefight, 20 of the suspected Al Qaeda militants were reported to have escaped,
while another 5 were killed, including cleric Waled al-Muhbar; none were taken into US custody. The raid came on the heels of President Obama’s speech last week, calling for increased US troop presence in Yemen, announcing that intelligence reports had identified a plot by Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen to blow up the US Embassy.

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**Treatment F:**

*(Falsification in Justification, Failed Event Cue, Democratic Criticism)*

**ADEN (Reuters) – (future date)–** Yesterday in the early morning hours, US troops clashed with suspected Al Qaeda militants at a compound just outside the port city of Aden. In the heavy firefight, 20 of the suspected Al Qaeda militants were reported to have escaped, while another 5 were killed; none were taken into US custody.

The US military reported 15 US casualties and 10 civilian deaths, as nearby dwellings caught fire and burned to the ground. Photos released by the military showed a small weapons cache. No bomb-making materials or Al Qaeda literature were recovered from the compound.
Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) was critical of the military action, saying that "fulfilling America’s commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq” should take priority. He also criticized President Obama for “misleading the American public,” citing the US military findings that no ties to Al Qaeda could be identified. The senator claimed that the operation was “a senseless show of force,” pointing to earlier reports from Yemeni military intelligence that this compound housed Southern Yemeni separatists who were not linked to Al Qaeda.

**Treatment G:**

*(True Justification, Successful Event Cue, Democratic Criticism)*

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Treatment H:
(Concealment in Justification, Successful Event Cue, Democratic Criticism)

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**Treatment J:**

**(True Justification, Failed Event Cue, Republican Criticism)**

ADEN (Reuters) – *(future date)*– Yesterday in the early morning hours, US troops clashed with suspected Al Qaeda militants at a compound just outside the port city of Aden. In the heavy firefight, 20 of the suspected militants were reported to have escaped, while another 5 were killed; none were taken into US custody. The raid came on the heels of President Obama’s speech last week, calling for increased US troop presence in Yemen, announcing that intelligence reports had identified a plot by Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen to blow up the US Embassy.
The US military reported 15 US casualties and 10 civilian deaths, as nearby dwellings caught fire and burned to the ground. The military released photographs of a weapons cache, bomb-making components, and Al Qaeda literature recovered from the compound.

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arguing that the main objective of the raid had been to kill Waled al-Muhbar, who had not been authorized for targeted killing.

**Treatment L:**

*(Falsification in Justification, Failed Event Cue, Republican Criticism)*

ADEN (Reuters) – *(future date)*– Yesterday in the early morning hours, US troops clashed with suspected Al Qaeda militants at a compound just outside the port city of Aden. In the heavy firefight, 20 of the suspected militants were reported to have escaped, while another 5 were killed; none were taken into US custody.

The US military reported 15 US casualties and 10 civilian deaths, as nearby dwellings caught fire and burned to the ground. Photos released by the military showed a small weapons cache. No bomb-making materials or Al Qaeda literature were recovered from the compound.

Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) was critical of the military action, saying that “fulfilling America’s commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq” should take priority. He also criticized President Obama for “misleading the American public,” citing the US military findings that no ties to Al Qaeda could be identified. The senator claimed that the operation was “a senseless show of force,” pointing to earlier reports from Yemeni military intelligence that this compound housed Southern Yemeni separatists who were not linked to Al Qaeda.
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Biography

Amber Adela Díaz was born in California, USA, in 1983. She attended Arizona State University from 2000-2004, earning a Bachelor of Science degree, summa cum laude, in Political Science and a Bachelor of Arts degree, summa cum laude, in Spanish. She earned a Master of Arts degree in Political Science from Duke University in 2006. Fellowships and awards received during graduate school include: Kenan Graduate Fellow, Instructorship in Ethics recipient, Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University, Fall 2010-Spring 2011; Duke Bradley Fellow, Research Fellowship from the Bradley Foundation, Summer 2011, Summer 2010, Fall 2008-Summer 2009; Program for the Study of Democracy, Institutions and Political Economy Summer Research Award, Summer 2009; James B. Duke Fellowship, Fall 2004-Spring 2008; Duke Endowment Fellowship, Fall 2004-Summer 2008; Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship in Romanian, Fall 2005-Spring 2006.