Could the Public be Calling the Shots in Iraq?
Insight on Public Opinion and Ideology in War-Related Media Coverage
Julia Tsai, Department of News, Mayborn School of Journalism & Honors College
Faculty Mentor: Susan Eve, Honors College

METHODOLOGY
I will perform a meta-analysis, entering the same search terms for each of several online databases, such as Academic Search Complete and FirstSearch, and individually selecting at random at least 20 studies to reduce selection bias. After each individual selection and before a study can be included in the meta-analysis, it must meet several requirements. Each should:

- concern public influence on war coverage;
- use political ideology as a test variable, preferably with inclusion of moderate and Independent views;
- address public attitudes in relation with elite cues;
- use the periods before and/or during the Gulf War and/or the Iraq War as the study timeframe; and
- focus within the United States.

My research requires a meta-analysis of past studies relevant to my topic, and thus, does not fall under NIH rules on live subjects. Random selection of studies should safeguard against potential conflicts of interest inherent in meta-analyses, thereby retaining objectivity. Proper citations would prevent plagiarism.

REFERENCES


Photographs:
http://www.acclaimimages.com
http://www.nationalsecuritywatch.com
http://upload.wikimedia.org

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Warren Burggren, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Vish Prasad, Vice President for Research and Economic Development
Gloria C. Cox, Dean, Honors College
Nann Goplerud, Interim Chair, Department of News, School of Journalism
Mitch Land, Interim Dean, School of Journalism
HNRS 1500 Classmates, and Instructor and Mentor
Susan Eve, Associate Dean, Honors College

Purpose
My purpose is to ascertain possible public involvement in the production of war coverage, which could reveal new insights into the media-public relationship. This study explores the public as an influential actor in the creation of news stories before and during wartime, whether this role contributed to the prevalence of elite cues in war coverage, and if the strength of this role depends on the state of elite opinion. I focus on the Gulf War and Iraq War and the period before each war as the timeframes for the study to serve as items of comparison.

Media & Elites
Media has shaped the public’s perception of U.S. military engagements, helping mobilize and even dissuade Americans during and prior to war. This seemingly wide-ranging influence has called into question the media’s role as a neutral mediator between the elitist political sphere and the public sphere in the portrayal of war-related policymaking decisions.

Despite criticisms, research indicated that the substantial inclusion of foreign views (Cortell, Eisinger, & Althaus, 2009) helped achieve the journalistic demand for a balanced array of viewpoints (Hayes & Guardino, 2010).

Media tends to rely overwhelmingly on official sources, be it domestic or foreign, and hence, elite cues would circulate among news stories (Aday, 2010; Hayes & Guardino, 2010).

Aday (2010) asserted the importance of elite cues on public attitudes, and amidst foreign policy debate, or elite dissensus, found that political predispositions rather than media coverage had greater influence on public opinion toward the Iraq War. The Gulf War, however, occurred during elite consensus, wherein little political debate existed on Capitol Hill, and attention to news held greater influence on public opinion.

Hayes and Guardino (2010) confirmed public framing of news based on political predispositions and found that people are more likely to trust those who share similar views or ideology as themselves. The second finding may help explain media reliance on elite voices, which the public views as having higher credibility.

United States & the Middle East
As you are looking to assess the Obama Administration policy in the region, what issue is most central to your assessment?

• Iraq
• Anti-israel conflict
• Attitudes toward Arab-Muslim world
• Human rights
• War in Afghanistan/Pakistan
• Democracy
• Economic consequences

Zogby/UMD Arab Public Opinion Poll Graph from Brookings Institution Report

Media-Public Relationship
Media organizations, especially newspapers, have reacted to waning public attention by amassing strategies to regain that attention and save themselves from financial destruction.

The public itself holds sway over press coverage through its collective viewership or readership upon which broadcast- and print-based news organizations depend for survival. Exploiting public attraction to the Internet, declines in ratings and sales, and shorter attention spans as a result of information overload have also forced news organizations to re-strategize (Biagi, 2010).

Advertisers flock to TV networks that have high viewership, or ratings, and similarly to print media, which also rely on sales at newsstands and supermarkets (Biagi, 2010).

It seems that print media incorporate ever more attention-grabbing leads and colorful, vivid photographs, and all media types drill the newsworthiness concept into their journalists. Many have even introduced the input of regular citizens in the news-making decision process for transparency reasons (Rich, 2010).