

The 2003 Iraqi war in the media: Politics, media, and public opinion in eight countries

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INTRODUCTION

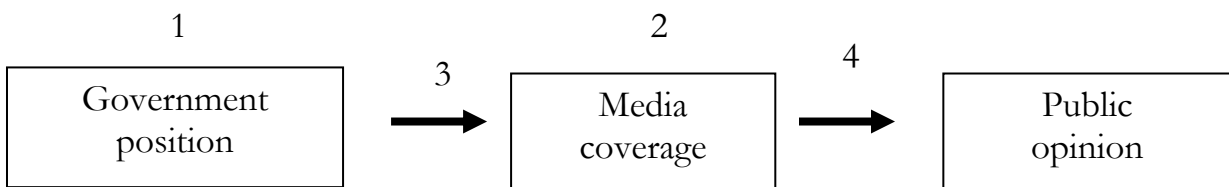
Media and war is a prominent topic among communications scholarship. In this exploratory contribution, we will present the first results of an ongoing project about the (second) Iraqi war and the media's role. This preliminary paper's first contribution is a systematic comparison of eight Western countries' media coverage of the Iraqi war. *Are there systematic differences in media coverage between countries?* War coverage and the role of the media regarding war have predominantly been studied in the US. This comes as no surprise, since, in recent decades, the US has engaged in many more wars than any country around the globe. Systematic comparisons of war coverage across countries are rare. Maybe the present state of the media and war literature only fits the American situation, and does not apply to other countries differing in so many aspects from the US? The study attempts to go beyond descriptives: it also wants to account for media coverage and tap its effects. A second contribution, we associate media coverage in the eight countries with government's stance vis-à-vis the Iraqi war in the same countries. Is government stance an antecedent of media coverage? Or more concretely, *did the media follow their respective government?* Third, we explore the effects of media coverage. We focus on the consequences of media coverage for public opinion. We associate war reporting with (largely passive) public opinion. *To what extent did the nations' media legitimize war and persuade public opinion?*

For the time being, as can be seen in Figure 1, we will consider the official governmental position towards war as the independent variable affecting media coverage. Public opinion is at the other end of the causal chain and is considered as dependent variable. The media act as intermediaries linking government stance with the public. As we will confine ourselves to merely comparing media coverage successively with each of the other factors in the eight countries we will not be able

to disentangle in depth the elusive mutual causal relationships between government, media, and public opinion.

Summarizing the present state of the media and war literature in one sentence - 'politics always comes first' - makes the 2003 Iraqi war an ideal case for comparing the interaction between politics (government stance about war) and media coverage (of the war). The major issue dominating world affairs for months in 2002-2003, all governments were forced to take a stance about the Iraqi crisis. Governments could take four different positions vis-à-vis the upcoming war: they could participate actively in the war by sending troops, they could support the Coalition of the Willing verbally, they could keep silent and remain vague about their precise preference, or they could oppose war explicitly. If politics, indeed, comes first, we would expect national differences in media coverage about the imminent war to reflect the underlying diverging government positions. As we will show below, the eight countries covered in the present study — US, UK, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and Belgium — took widely diverging positions. In some countries government initiated war (US, UK), other governments supported war strongly (Italy, Spain) or more tacitly (the Netherlands), while yet some other countries were unspoken (Switzerland) or strongly (Germany, Belgium) opposed to waging war with Saddam Hussein. Different government positions should produce diverging media coverage.

Figure 1: Analytical design



The paper's structure follows the figures in Figure 1. After briefly summarizing the literature on media and war and after introducing data and methods, the first analytical section scrutinizes the eight countries' position vis-à-vis war. The second section presents the media evidence. Sections three and four are devoted to comparing media coverage respectively with government position and public opinion. We close with a short discussion section.

MEDIA AND WAR

Especially the 1991 Gulf War received ample scholarly attention (Bennet and Paletz 1994; Taylor 1992; Wolfsfeld 1997). By and large, the argument of these studies is that the American government effectively succeeded in steering and manipulating the news flow to legitimize its military actions in the Gulf (Hachten and Hachten

2000). The more general idea is that political elites determine media coverage, be it completely and monolithically (Herman and Chomsky 1988), or only to a limited extent and pluralistically (Bennet 1990). Either way, the media tend to take cues from political elites and their independence is limited, especially in war times (Entman and Page 1994). Entman conceptualized this top-down process as 'cascading activation' (Entman 2003). The president's administration feeds other political elites, they affect the media and their news stories, which, in turn, affect public opinion. Entman acknowledges that a feedback mechanism exists, lower levels frames affecting higher levels, but this is not the rule.

The 2003 Iraqi conflict, once again, boosted attention for the interaction between media coverage and war. The difference with the 1991 Gulf war was, among others, that there were very few official war opposing voices to be heard in 1991. In 2003, in contrast, many national governments opposed war and tried to sell their point of view to national and world public opinion. A real battle of meaning was fought on the international media scene, with the UN's Security Council as primary battlefield. As a consequence, and corresponding with the elite-dominance hypothesis, we expect substantive differences in war coverage across nations in 2003; we anticipate that the national media would follow their governments.

A few 2003 Iraq war studies were recently published focussing on the American media (Calabrese 2005; Entman 2004; Lule 2004; Rutherford 2004). One study concluded that the American media, as expected, supported the bellicose president and hardly fostered any war opposing sources (Rendall and Broughel 2003). Again, except for some rare instances, comparative studies about the 2003 Iraqi war are rare (Berenger 2004). Hooghe and Stolle (2005) analysing one week of TV-news in the run-up to the war in nine nations found that, against their expectations, all by all, differences between countries were limited. Only the American TV-stations, and to a certain extent the French news, displayed a diverging, more war supporting, or war opposing, coverage; TV news in other war supporting nations (UK) was not different from coverage in war opposing countries (Germany, Belgium). The authors, hence, question the idea that TV news tends to follow government's position. Hooghe and Stolle's analysis, though, is confined to only one week's media evidence and to a limited amount of news items per country. Moreover, TV news might be much more main stream and homogeneous than newspaper coverage; differences between newspapers might be bigger than differences between TV stations.

At the other end of the causal chain, war coverage is widely considered to have a large impact on public opinion. The story of Vietnam and how pictures of bloody fights, American casualties, and killed Vietnamese civilians turned around American public opinion and, eventually, led to the withdrawal of American troops, has become a classic (Delli Carpentini 1990). More in general, media scholars agree that the media have most impact on public opinion when it comes to foreign (policy)

issues (Herman 1993; Livingston 1997; Mermin 1997). When people have no direct sources to gauge a fact or event themselves they rely entirely on the news media (Zaller 1994). Studies have documented the U.S. media's agenda-setting, priming and framing impact on mass opinion during the 1991 Gulf war (Iyengar and Simon 1994). With regard to the 2003 Iraqi war, Kull c.s. showed that a large segment of the American public, during and after the war, held misperceptions about the war (Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2004). These people thought weapons of mass destruction had actually been found in Iraq, that there was indisputable proof of the link between Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden, or that the majority of world public opinion supported the U.S intervention. Kull and his colleagues demonstrate that these misperceptions are strongly associated with media use. For example, Fox News viewers held more misperceptions than CNN viewers, regardless of their educational or professional background. Consequently, also on a macro country level, we would expect to find associations between public opinion - the way the public conceives of the conflict, its reasons and probable consequences - and media coverage.

DATA AND METHODS

We decided to concentrate our analysis on the three months period leading up to the break of war: from January 1st till March 20th, 2003. In that period the worldwide debate was most vivid; it focussed on the justification for the imminent war and on the potential approval of war by the UN's Security Council. This period is well fit to test our propositions, since, exactly in these few months, countries fought a bitter battle about the justification of war and most countries were forced to take a clear stance regarding the US-UK war plans. In other words: we expect maximum variation in media coverage in this period.

IMPORTANT NOTE: At the time when we were drafting this paper, the Swiss media data were not yet available. So, in fact, in terms of media analysis this only is a seven-country study. All Swiss media data will be added later.

For the **media** analysis we selected three (two) newspapers per country. In total we dispose of 3,580 news articles that have been encoded by trained encoders. We included 23 different newspapers. Newspapers' attention for the imminent war differed, but we dispose of enough war articles per paper to carry out reliable analyses for all 23 newspapers. Table 1 contains the descriptives.

Table 1: Countries, newspapers, type and leaning, and number of articles

		Left/Right/Popular	N (articles)
US	<i>New York Times</i>	R	214
	<i>Washington Post</i>	L	195
	<i>USA Today</i>	P (R)	43
UK	<i>The Times</i>	R	215
	<i>The Guardian</i>	L	234
	<i>The Sun</i>	P (L)	72
Spain	<i>El Mundo</i>	R	210
	<i>El Pais</i>	L	178
Italy	<i>Il Giornale</i>	R	299
	<i>La Repubblica</i>	L	259
	<i>La Stampa</i>	(C)	77
The Netherlands	<i>NRC Handelsblad</i>	R	96
	<i>De Volkskrant</i>	L	402
	<i>De Telegraaf</i>	P (R)	148
Switzerland			
Belgium	<i>De Standaard</i>	R	78
	<i>De Morgen</i>	L	155
	<i>Het Nieuwsblad</i>	P (R)	140
Germany	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine</i>	R	196
	<i>Frankfurter Rundschau</i>	L	202
	<i>Bild</i>	P (R)	167
TOTAL			3,580

The selection of three newspapers per country probably is the trickiest aspect of the research design. We always took the major left-leaning and the major right-leaning broadsheet newspaper; we added the most popular newspaper, often a tabloid. Are these three (two) newspapers representative for the written press in the eight countries? For some countries, we are rather confident that they are; for other countries, we are much less sure. Especially our US sample – with *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* - might be not entirely fortunate. It may be too liberal and left-leaning to represent the average American written press outlet. We contemplate adding another American (local) newspaper with a clear republican position. In Italy, we took *La Stampa* as third paper, not the most popular paper in the country and with a centrist position. For Spain and Switzerland we were not able to get electronic access to the most popular tabloid: *Blick* in Switzerland and *** in Spain. In this paper, we will consider the average of the three (two) newspapers of a country, to reflect the coverage of *the* written media in that country. Yet, in order not to let newspapers with a lot of war articles dominate their country’s newspaper coverage, newspapers are always weighed within their country (they all get an equal 1/3 (1/2) weight). *** more details about

the methods must be inserted here ***A final methodological remark concerning the media dataset relates to the actual coding of the media content. Our encoders actually read all article in their entirety and did not rely on electronic indexes provided by the news companies themselves. All newspapers were encoded by Belgian graduate students able to speak the language. Yet, because of the language problem – we encoded newspapers in five different languages - overlaps between encoders could not be easily organized and intercoder reliability measures could not systematically be calculated. To undercut possible problems, coders were briefed and trained extensively beforehand. Their work was thoroughly controlled and checked by the supervisor.

Public opinion data come from an extensive EOS-Gallup poll covering the seven European countries in our sample and carried out just before war broke. Between January 21st and 27th, 2003, in the middle of our research period, EOS Gallup Europe conducted a comparative opinion poll in 30 European countries, covering 15,080 people aged 15 years and older¹. The poll contains extensive evidence on European public opinion about the Iraqi crisis. The seven European countries in our sample are covered but, unfortunately, not the US.

A final remark concerns the complexity of the multi-level analyses undertaken below. Our comparative design confronts us with data on four different levels: countries, newspapers, articles, and individuals. Since the country-level has only eight cases which would lead to major analytical problems we decided to run all analyses on article level, and thus using the media database. Therefore, we ‘individualized’ all data to the article level. This implied that we attributed higher level variables (country scores) or lower level variables (individual protesters scores) to article records. The main advantage is that we can dispose of a large dataset of 3,580 records.

ELITE CONSENSUS OR DISSENSUS

“Saddam Hussein’s regime is despicable, he is developing weapons of mass destruction, and we cannot leave him doing so unchecked.” British PM Tony Blair, April 10, 2002 (BBC news).

“A peaceful alternative exists, and we fight to realize that. It cannot be wrong to engage in exceptionally large efforts for the smallest chance for peace... Iraq certainly does not dispose of a nuclear weapon, or of long range cruise missiles.” German PM Gerhard Schröder, February 13, 2003 (NRC Handelsblad).

¹ See: www.cosgallupeurope.com/int_survey/index.html.

Government positions regarding the war differed dramatically in the eight countries. Among them are the most war favouring countries like the US and the UK along with some of the most fierce war opposers Germany and Belgium. Yet, it is not only the incumbents' position that matters. The opposition's stance counts too: it may support government or fight it. In some countries, moreover, government was internally divided; in other countries the opposition parties were internally split. According to Bennet's indexing theory (1990) it is elite consensus or elite dissensus that determines media content. If elites are divided coverage will be more pluralist and diverse, less adjacent to official policy. Let us sketch more in detail the government-opposition configuration in the eight countries.

The most eminent war initiating country was, of course, the **United States**: framed within the 'war against terror' in the post-9/11 time, the US government was eager to invade Iraq with the threefold objective of (1) diminishing the threat posed by this country to engage in terrorist acts or acts of war in the region and dispossessing it of all war resources to do so; (2) bringing about a regime change, leading to better life conditions for the Iraqi people; and (3) effectuating the first step in the democratization of the Middle-East. The US government, presided by Republican President George W. Bush sided by a neo-conservative administration consisting of Vice-President Dick Cheney, defence Minister Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, was backed by almost all Republican congressmen. The Democrat opposition, conversely, was internally divided on the issue: on October 10, 2002, Congress approved a resolution authorizing the American president to '*... use the armed forces of the United states as he determines to be necessary and appropriate... against the continuing threat posed by Iraq*'. The resolution was backed by 296 Members of the House, and opposed by 133. Of the Democrats, 126 voted against. But the resolution was also supported by 81 Democrats (about 40%), whereas only 6 out of 212 Republicans voted against the bill. In the Senate, the pro-contra ratio was even more in favour of war: only one of the 49 Republican senators voted against, and 21 of the 50 Democrat senators supported the war resolution, among which later Democrat presidential candidate John Kerry. In short: government was firmly pro war and the opposition did not really challenge government.

The US' most staunch ally and war defender, especially active in developing public arguments in favour of war, was the **United Kingdom** represented by its Labour Prime-Minister Tony Blair. The UK would remain the only West-European country endorsing the war with a left government. In this perspective Labour's struggle with the topic is far from surprising: on February 27, 2002, 121 out of 408 – almost nearly one in three - Labour MP's voted against war. This was the biggest revolt ever within a UK government party. The Tories supported Blair in his war waging policy but the smaller Liberal Democrats opposed war, with 52 out of 54 of their MP's rejecting it. UK government, hence, was painfully divided on the issue: war supporters found support among conservatives, whereas Labour party dissidents were backed by the Liberal Democrats.

Spain and **Italy** were the two most eye-catching war supporting countries. The Spanish government, in particular, seemed to be an especially fervent disciple of the US-UK line of policy. Spain sent (non-combat) troops, whereas Italy's support would be limited to the opening of bases and airspaces to the coalition (though not for direct military attacks). The Iraq policy of Spanish conservative Partido Popular Prime-Minister Aznar was challenged by an almost equally large left-wing opposition fiercely opposing war. The Italian case was very similar, with Prime-Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Forza Italia and his right-wing government coalition parties fully backing war plans, and with a strong and united left-wing opposition ferociously disapproving of it. In both Italy and Spain political polarization around the Iraqi issue was huge.

Prime-Minister Balkenende of **The Netherlands** and his right-wing government with christian democrats and liberals also supported the idea of war: the Dutch government agreed on sending (non-combat) troops to the region. The left-wing opposition of social democrats and greens resolutely opposed to this involvement. The situation in the Netherlands was a bit peculiar, however, since the Balkenende I-government had resigned from office. End January 2003, general elections were held, but the new government, which would be Balkenende II, was not yet formed in the research period (this would only happen on May 26). Government negotiations were just starting up. Due to this situation, the Dutch government was not as clearly situated in the pro-war camp as their Italian and Spanish counterparts.

In **Germany**, Chancellor and chairman of the German social democrats Gerhard Schröder had been openly opposed to an Iraqi war during his election campaign in the fall of 2002. This popular stance had helped him and his green coalition partner to ensure a new term in office. Later on, however, the Schröder government would become somewhat more temperate in its condemnation of war, granting the US troops clearance to use the German airspace for material and troop transport and not even ruling out a possible vote in favour of war in the UN Security Council. This slightly more flexible attitude led the newly elected leader of the green party Angelika Beer to condemn this clearance by arguing that it would be in breach with German constitution. Summarizing, German government was not really divided about potential participation in a possible war, there were, however, minor frictions on the degree of *non*-participation they should adopt. Both government parties agreed that Germany would not take part in any military action against Iraq, not even when this would be endorsed by the UN. Meanwhile, opposition party leader Angela Merkel (christian democrats) had also turned her party's stance from compliant to the US to an anti-war position. Thus, in Germany both government and opposition rejected an upcoming war.

In **Belgium**, simply all political parties agreed on government's anti-war stance. In Belgium, although lead by right-wing (liberal) Prime-Minister Guy Verhofstadt seconded by his right-wing (liberal) foreign minister Louis Michel, government was fiercely and loudly opposing war. The country even temporarily blocked a NATO-decision about potential support for Turkey would that country become engaged in the war. All opposition parties, from greens to christian-democrats, opposed war as well.

Finally, in **Switzerland** as well all parties rebuffed the possibility of war on Iraq. But in line with the country's long-standing neutrality tradition, Switzerland opposed war only silently. The only exception was the action of the green opposition party that wanted the Swiss government to breach its silent opposition and make a clear and manifest statement against war.

Table 2 summarizes the argument and rank-orders the countries on a single pro vs. contra war dimension (elite consensus-dissensus). The table shows that the number of different government-opposition configurations is limited. In officially war opposing countries Switzerland, Belgium and Germany (center-left) government as well as the challenging parties rejected war. Anti-war is a valence issue. In war supporting but not participating countries Spain, Italy and The Netherlands, right-wing government was in favour of war but the left-wing opposition vehemently opposed war; in these countries the conflict reflected the traditional government-opposition chasm. In initiating countries US and UK government was, of course, pro-war but the opposition was divided: US Democrats took no clear position while UK conservatives supported Blair and UK Liberals rejected war. The most complex configuration is doubtlessly the British one, with leading government party Labour, the only European left-wing party in power to support the war, bitterly divided on the issue. Taking all this into account, we rank-ordered the eight nations from most war seeking to most war opposing. Although superficially, for example, The Netherlands and Spain witnessed the same configuration, it is clear that the Spanish government went further in defending the war than the Dutch.

Table 2: Elite consensus-dissensus about war in eight countries

	War initiating countries		War supporting countries			War opposing countries		
	US	UK	Spain	Italy	Netherlands	Switzerland	Belgium	Germany
Government	PRO	PRO	PRO	PRO	PRO	CONTRA	CONTRA	CONTRA
Government parties	Right/cons	Centre Left	Right/cons	Right/cons	Right/cons	Centre left	Centre left/liberal	Centre left
	PRO	MIXED	PRO	PRO	PRO	CONTRA	CONTRA	CONTRA
Opposition parties	Centre left	Conserv (pro) Liberals (con)	Centre + far left	Centre + far left	Centre + far left	Left (greens)	Right/cons	Right/cons
	MIXED	MIXED	CONTRA	CONTRA	CONTRA	CONTRA	CONTRA	CONTRA

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE WAR ON IRAQ (2003) IN EIGHT COUNTRIES

The main aim of this paper is to check whether media coverage in the eight countries differed, whether we can account for these differences drawing upon the positions vis-à-vis war taken by domestic political elites, and whether these differences affected (passive) public opinion and activist protest against the war. In this section we tackle the first of these questions. Did war coverage differ in the eight countries at stake? Our principal interest in this section is the implicit or explicit position newspapers adopted regarding the Iraqi conflict. Did they support the war effort or opposed to it? To assess newspapers' preferences we first devised five aggregate scales each tapping another dimension of a newspaper's general position towards the war.

1. We asked our encoders to estimate whether an article displayed a **pro-war or an anti-war inclination**, if any. As we asked our encoders to underpin their estimation with a concrete and literal excerpt from the text, only clearly biased articles were coded. On a country level, this results in the evidence presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Pro-war or anti-war inclination of articles (in % of articles per country)

	US	UK	SP	IT	NL	SW	BE	GE	TO
Pro-war inclination	6.5	16.9	6.5	3.6	2.3		0.9	2.6	5.6
Anti-war inclination	3.1	4.2	13.7	10.5	7.8		8.9	6.2	7.8
Difference pro-anti	+3.4	+14.7	-7.7	-6.9	-5.3		-8.0	-3.6	-2.2
N	25	83	83	84	70		40	49	434

The table shows large differences in evaluation of the upcoming war. By and large, rather few articles take an explicit position towards the war (N=434). Among the ones that do, in general, anti-war articles seem to be slightly majoritarian. Variations across nations are considerable. The far strongest defender of the war effort was the British press (difference pro-anti of +14.7). In Britain, in particular the tabloid *The Sun* supported Tony Blair's war policy (38.9% pro-war articles) which tilted the British balance in the pro-war direction. Both *The Times* (10.2%) and especially *The Guardian* (1.7%) voiced pro-war sentiments much more moderately. The fiercest resistance against war was found in the Belgian Press (-8.0). Hardly any pro-war statements were found in the Belgian newspapers, across the board; all three Belgian newspapers (*De Standaard*, *De Morgen*, and *Het Nieuwsblad*) scored above average with anti-war articles. The Spanish press (both *El Mundo* and *El Pais* with more anti-war than pro-war articles), the Italian press (*Il Giornale* with pro-war articles and *La Stampa* and *La Repubblica* with plenty of anti-war articles), and the Dutch press (*De Telegraaf* with more pro-war, *De Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* with more anti-war articles) all tended to oppose war. The German press was more balanced but all three journals (*Bild*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, and *Frankfurter Rundschau*) published more anti-war than pro-war articles. Strikingly, the American press

seemed to have been the most balanced of them all. It displayed a slight overrepresentation of pro-war articles. *USA Today* was strongly in favour of war (+7.0); the coverage of the *New York Times* (+0.9) and the *Washington Post* (+2.1) was very balanced. On balance, the Italian, Spanish, and Dutch press was internally divided on the issue, corresponding with the sharp government-opposition rift about the war. The Belgian and German press was not divided in their (moderate) anti-war viewpoint and so were the US and the UK press in their (moderate) pro-war leaning.

2. A second scale of media preference draws upon the amount of **mentions of arguments in favour or against** war. We scrutinized all articles for the presence of 10 common arguments in favour of war and 21 common arguments against war². The more newspapers mention arguments in favour of war, even if they are formulated by news sources like war supporting government officials, the more the newspaper supports the war, and vice versa. We counted the average number of pro-war and anti-war arguments per article. Results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Average number of arguments pro-war or anti-war mentioned per article

	US	UK	SP	IT	NL	SW	BE	GE	TOT
Pro-war arguments	1.14	0.95	0.85	0.33	0.45		0.84	1.33	0.83
Anti-war arguments	0.81	0.74	0.91	0.47	0.48		1.01	1.35	0.82
Difference pro-anti	+0.38	+0.19	-0.06	-0.14	-0.03		-0.17	-0.02	+0.01
N	456	517	388	633	645		373	565	2,955

A large majority of articles (N=2,955) contained references to arguments about the imminent war. War justification was doubtlessly *the* major topic in the research period. An average article about the Iraqi conflict contained slightly less than one argument in favour of military intervention (0.83), and less than one argument against waging war (0.82). In total, 40% of the articles contained arguments in favour of war while 42% of the articles contained arguments against waging war.

² The pro-war arguments were the following: ‘The plausible existence of WMD’; ‘Violation of UN resolutions/non cooperation with inspectors’; ‘Sufficient multilateral support for the war’; ‘Cruelty of Iraqi regime/Iraqi human right violations/humanitarian reasons’; ‘War is part of war against terrorism’; ‘Democratization of Iraq/Middle East’; ‘Iraq is a threat for world peace/other countries’; ‘Failure of non-violent means/sanctions’; ‘Keep good alliance and relations with the US’; ‘Send message to other rogue nations’; ‘other reasons’. The anti-war arguments were the following: ‘War is waged because of religious reasons’; ‘Bush administration wants to finish the job of the first Gulf war’; ‘Economic interests/oil are the real reason’; ‘Cost of war is too high’; ‘No evidence for presence of WMD’; ‘No link between Iraq and Al Qaeda’; ‘Lack of UN mandate’; ‘Damage to UN/multilateral system’; ‘War is a dangerous precedent’; ‘Illegality of pre-emptive strike’; ‘Double standards/North Korea’; ‘War will destabilize the Middle East’; ‘War will fuel (religious) terrorism’; ‘Iraq is no threat to world peace’; ‘War is meant as distraction from bad domestic policy’; ‘Pacifism: war is no political tool’; ‘Future casualties of own troops’; ‘Iraqi people will suffer from war’; ‘UN weapon inspectors are doing a good job’; ‘Lack of after war strategy’; ‘No hope for achieving democratization goal’; ‘other reason’.

Hence, regarding arguments pro or contra war, by and large, news was rather balanced. This was even true on the article level: if articles mentioned arguments pro-war, they tended to present as well arguments contra-war, and vice versa (r .26). American, British, and German newspapers gave on average most war supportive arguments. In Germany, this pro-war argumentation was entirely compensated by an even larger number of negative arguments; That was not the case in the US and the UK. The Belgian press seems to have been most keen to undermine the arguments in favour of war. In terms of the national homogeneity of the press, all three American newspapers reported on average (slightly) more pro than contra arguments; both Spanish newspapers, in contrast, aired the anti-war arguments more frequently. In all other countries some newspapers preferred pro-war (e.g. *The Times*, *The Sun*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) while others preferred contra-war motives (e.g. *The Guardian*, *La Stampa*, *De Standaard*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*).

3. Another measure of the directional bias of newspaper coverage consists in counting the number of **mentions of opposition against the war**. The more a newspaper covers the fact that some people or groups oppose war, the more we may assume that this newspaper itself contests war. We recorded whether the article referred to opposition of other nations, of international organizations (EU, UN...), of social movements, and of celebrities/public figures. Table 5 contains the results.

Table 5: Average number of mentions of opposition against war per article (0-4)

	US	UK	SP	IT	NL	SW	BE	GE	TOT
War protest mentions	0.42	0.39	0.48	0.51	0.37		0.58	0.71	0.50
N	157	194	174	328	188		202	334	1,578

Many articles made reference to the existence of war opposition (N=1,578), even newspapers in war initiating or war-supporting countries did. Half (0.50) of *all* war articles mentioned the fact that countries, international organizations, social movements or public figures could not approve of war. Dutch, British and American newspapers covered the existence of war resistance least. The German and Belgian press devoted most attention to the fact that not everybody was happy with the upcoming war. The Spanish and the Italian press took an intermediate position. Again, differences between newspapers are substantial. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine* referred to war opposition in almost every war article (0.90), *De Volkskrant* only in one out of five articles (0.21). In all countries newspapers score above and below the average, only in The Netherlands all newspapers seem to neglect opposition against the war.

4. Fourth, we measured whether war was **represented as being unavoidable** by the newspapers³. The more war is depicted as inevitable, the more we can consider this newspaper to be pro-war. Table 6 presents the evidence.

Table 6: Representation of the war as being unavoidable (scale ranges from -1 to +3). Average of articles in all the newspapers per country.

	US	UK	SP	IT	NL	SW	BE	GE	TOT
War unavoidable scale	0.38	0.28	-0.01	0.35	0.32		0.35	0.31	0.31
N	185	181	140	242	152		157	241	1,330

One third of the articles mentioned war preparations and the (in)evitability of war: (N=1,330). A look at the average scores in the table shows that differences between countries are limited. Only one country really deviates from the others and that is Spain. The Spanish media excelled in (implicitly) stressing that war could still be avoided. In all other countries the positive scores show that the newspapers tended to consider war as inevitable and went along with the war logic. In all countries, again except for Spain, newspapers scored above and below the average. The *Washington Post* reported most about the imminent war as if it was really going to happen (0.65), *El Pais* the least (-0.08). As differences between countries are limited, we will *not* use this scale in the rest of this paper.

5. Finally, a newspaper's point of view considering war might also be assessed by tapping **the way public opinion is presented**. If dailies mainly refer to a supportive public opinion, this might indicate a pro-war stance; if dailies, in contrast, predominantly report disapproval of war among the public, this might indicate an anti-war stance. We recorded mentions of the opinion of four groups of publics: national public opinion, EU public opinion, world public opinion and other countries' public opinion. Table 7 contains the amount of articles in each country referring at least to one of these (negative or positive) public opinions.

Table 7: Amount of articles (in %) that mention public opinion (PO) pro- or contra-war

	US	UK	SP	IT	NL	SW	BE	GE	TOT
Mentions PO = pro war	0.9	1.2	7.5	5.4	3.4		0.8	0.0	2.7
Mentions PO = anti war	6.4	8.1	19.6	9.5	5.1		8.8	5.0	8.4
Difference pro-anti	-5.5	-6.9	-12.2	-4.1	-1.7		-8.0	-5.0	-6.3
N	32	48	105	94	55		35	28	399

Note: table is not yet weighed.

³ We constructed a simple additive scale based on the following four items. 'Does the article mention that war can still be prevented (reversed)?'; 'Does it mention that war is inevitable?'; 'Is there mention of war preparations?'; 'Is there mention of war tactics and scenarios?'. The higher the figure (-1 to +3), the more the article describes the war as being unavoidable.

Public opinion was very intensively covered in the newspapers. More than one out of ten articles discussed public opinion in relation to the war (N=399). By and large, more often the public was described as having a negative opinion about the war (-6.3). In *all* countries the amount of negative mentions outnumbered the positive mentions. This makes sense, as many polls showed that world public opinion was, indeed, largely opposed to war. Still, there are large differences between the countries. In The Netherlands newspapers reported almost as much about positive than about negative public opinion. At the other end of the spectrum, the Spanish newspapers exhausted themselves to convince their readers that public opinion in general, thus not in Spain, rejected war against Iraq. The public opinion debate was most intense in Spain as the Spanish press also mentioned supportive public opinions a lot. Remarkably, also in the war waging countries US and UK newspapers referred predominantly to public opinion as being opposed to war. The Belgian and German press are firmly situated at the critical public opinion side. Differences between newspapers within the countries are large. *USA Today*, *The Sun*, *El Pais*, *La Reppublica*, *NRC Handelsblad*, and *De Standaard* mentioned more than average supportive public opinions. *USA Today*, *The Times*, *EL Mundo*, *La Reppublica*, *NRC Handelsblad*, and *De Standaard* mentioned more than average negative public opinions. Note that some newspapers both often mention supportive and critical public opinions.

All five measures tapping the war stance of the newspapers pointed towards extensive differences across countries. Yet, maybe the type of newspaper matters too. We reran all scale calculations but this time collapsing together left- and right-wing newspapers and tabloids and broadsheets. We anticipated that left-leaning newspapers, because of ideological reasons, would be more opposed to war, and that right-leaning newspapers would be more supportive. We expected broadsheets to be more critical to war and tabloids, because of commercial reasons, to be keener on war. Evidence is presented in Table 8.

Table 8: War stance of left- versus right-leaning newspapers, and of broadsheets versus tabloids (N=3,580)

	Left	Right	Broadsheets	Tabloids
Pro-war inclination (%)	2.8	5.9	3.5	8.9
Anti-war inclination (%)	9.4	6.0	8.4	4.7
Difference pro-anti	-6.6	-0.1	-4.9	+4.2
Pro-war arguments (average #)	0.66	1.01	0.84	0.79
Anti-war arguments (average #)	0.72	0.92	0.85	0.65
Difference pro-anti	-0.06	+0.09	-0.01	+0.14
Mentions of war opposition (average #)	0.47	0.54	0.52	0.42
War is inevitable (average of scale)	0.29	0.33	0.31	0.32
Mention public opinion = pro-war (%)	3.3	2.3	2.9	1.9
Mention public opinion = anti-war (%)	7.4	9.5	9.0	5.4
Difference pro-anti	-4.1	-7.2	-6.1	-3.5

Note: table is not yet weighed.

Generally, our expectations are confirmed. Left-wing and broadsheet dailies disapprove of war; right-wing and tabloid papers endorse war. Surprisingly, the type of newspaper, at least for some variables (e.g. mentions of war opposition), seems to be stronger associated with war (dis)approval than the political leaning of the daily. We will use type and political leaning of the paper as control variables further in the study.

Wrapping up, we found differences in war coverage between nations. In many respects, countries' coverage differed in terms of the appreciation of the war. We are surprised, though, by the limited size of these differences. By and large, war coverage in the eight countries is roughly similar. It seems as if a global news agenda imposed itself on all newspapers in all countries. Most striking, though, is the fact that the US media, or at least the newspapers we selected, do not differ dramatically from the others. We expected the US media, due to the bellicose course its president had adopted and due to the weak domestic opposition to the war, to be situated at the pro-war extremes for all measures. Previous research, indeed, showed that when the US president goes to war the mass media tend to lend their support. This was not the case in the run-up to the 2003 Iraqi war, or at least not dramatically more than in other countries. Our analyses showed that the US media were always situated at the pro-war side in the scales but seldom did they adopt the most extreme position. Finally, not only countries make a difference, also the type and the political leaning of the newspaper matter. At first sight, newspaper features sometimes even mattered more than country and thus government stance. We will elaborate this further in the next section.

MEDIA COVERAGE AND GOVERNMENT POSITION

In the previous section we described in detail how media coverage of the war differed between countries, and between type and political leaning of the covered newspapers. Can we make sense of these differences? How come that newspapers in a country report more positively (or negatively) about the war than in other countries? In the first empirical section of this paper, we reviewed the literature claiming that elite consensus or elite dissensus determines media coverage. In Table 2 above, we devised a consensus-dissensus scale ranging from the most war prone country (US) to the most war opposing country (Germany). We attributed the same country rank-order score (1-8) to the individual countries' articles. Table 9 contains correlations of this country position scale with the media coverage variables.

Table 9: Correlations of government stance (country)(independent) and media coverage in eight countries (dependent)(N=3,580)

Dependent variables (media)	Spearman's Rho	Significance (two-tailed)
Pro-war inclination	-.096	.000
Anti-war inclination	.036	.032
Mention reasons for war	-,016	.350
Mention reasons against war	,087	.000
Mention war opposition	,111	.000
Mention public opinion = pro-war	-.033	.047
Mention public opinion = anti-war	-.050	.003

Note: analysis based on not yet weighed data.

The data make it quite clear that country position *does* matter significantly for six of the seven dependent media variables. Signs of the coefficients are as expected. In countries where government does not support war and elites are not divided, newspaper articles about the war tend to be more negative and disapproving; less war supporting articles are published; more reasons against war are mentioned; and more mention is made of opposition against the war. All this makes perfectly sense. Considering the mentions of public opinion pro- or contra-war, something strange occurs. The more countries oppose war the less their newspapers mention public opinion *regardless* of the direction of public opinion (hence both negative signs for the coefficients). In countries that go to war or that support war, newspapers refer to public opinion more frequently than in war rejecting countries. Remarkably, in war seeking countries the newspapers not only mention supportive but also oppositional public opinion more often. Overall, the correlational analysis confirms the hypothesis that government position determines, at least to some extent, media coverage.

In the previous section we saw that also newspaper type (broadsheet vs. tabloid) and political leaning (left vs. right) are associated with war coverage direction. Maybe our country effect is spurious and caused by these underlying variables? In

other words: it might be our selection of newspaper in the eight countries that yield this outcome. To test for this, we conducted seven OLS regression analyses displayed in Table 10. Does governmental position affect war coverage regardless of paper type and political stance?

Table 10: OLS regression of war coverage (dependent) with government stance (country), newspaper type, and newspaper leaning (independent)(N=3,580)

Dependent variables (media)	Government stance		Newspaper type		Newspaper leaning	
	Beta	Sign.	Beta	Sign.	Beta	Sign.
1. Pro-war inclination	-.011	.000	.064	.000	.019	.007
2. Anti-war inclination	.005	.006	-.032	.016	-.028	.003
3. Mention reasons for war	.013	.187	-.255	.000	.410	.000
4. Mention reasons against war	.058	.000	-.416	.000	.269	.000
5. Mention war opposition	.040	.000	-.212	.000	.103	.000
6. Mention public opinion = pro-war	-.003	.029	-.003	.707	-.008	.207
7. Mention public opinion = anti-war	-.005	.015	-.043	.004	.036	.001

Note: analysis based on not yet weighed data.

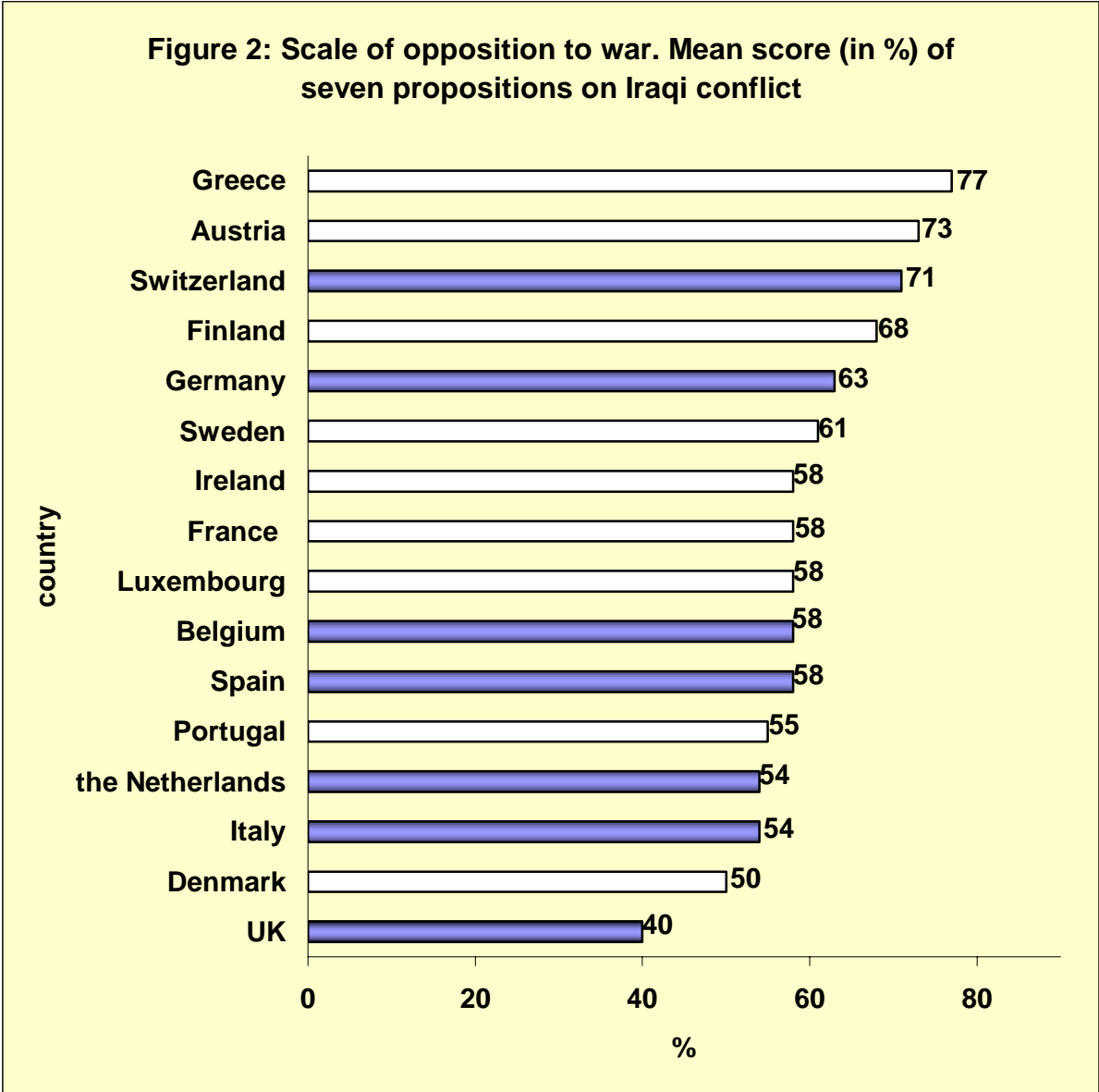
It does. The analysis clearly shows that government stance, indeed, has a net effect on war coverage even controlling for political leaning and type of newspaper. Although the effects are small and the effects of newspaper type and leaning are often larger, government position remains a significant predictor for the same six dependent variables. This strongly suggests that government position really affected the colouring of the Iraqi conflict reporting in the eight countries under study.

MEDIA COVERAGE AND PUBLIC OPINION

The January 2003 EOS Gallup poll elicited people's opinion on several propositions regarding the Iraqi conflict. We combined seven statements about Iraq into one simple scale of war opposition⁴. Figure 2 not only contains the eight

⁴ The scale was simply the mean (in %) of the aggregation of the war opposing answers on the following statements: (1) Iraq represents a threat to World peace (disagree); (2) Oil is the main motivation for which the United States wants to intervene militarily in Iraq (agree); (3) The United States should intervene militarily in Iraq even if the United Nations does not give its formal agreement (disagree); (4) Do you consider that it would be absolutely justified, rather justified, rather unjustified or absolutely unjustified that our country participates in a military intervention in Iraq? (5) If the Iraqi regime does not cooperate with United Nations inspectors (unjustified); (6) If the United Nations inspectors discover weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (unjustified); (7) If the United States intervenes militarily in Iraq without a preliminary decision of the United Nations (unjustified).

European countries covered here, but also the other European countries' public opinions.



The eight countries of this study span the whole spectrum of European public opinion on the war. The UK population, clearly, is far least opposed to war. On average only 40% (dis)agreed with (anti)war propositions. Of all European countries, UK public opinion is most divided. In The Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Belgium a (large) majority opposes war. The most war rejecting populations are to be found in Germany and Switzerland. In Europe, only Greece and Austria beat the Swiss in anti-war feelings.

Unfortunately, the EOS Gallup poll is confined to Europe and contains no evidence on US public opinion. Where would the American public stand? Among the most devoted supporters of the war or among war resisters? American polling

evidence is widely available but not always comparable with European surveys (www.pollingreport.com/iraq.html). We choose to focus on a poll conducted by the same pollster around the same time as the European EOS Gallup poll⁵. At that time, 56% of the Americans would give the weapon inspectors more time to conduct their inspections, against 41% who believed that Iraq had already had enough time to prove that there were no such weapons. This led 39% of the surveyed to answer that the US should invade Iraq as soon as the Bush administration decided on it; 56% of the people could not favour an invasion without a new UN vote authorizing military action. This last figure is particularly relevant, since it can directly be compared with the European data. In Europe between 87% and 68% rejected war without UN, while this was ‘only’ 56% in the US. On the question: “*Which comes closer to your view? UN weapons inspectors alone can eliminate the threat Iraq poses to other nations. Or, military action is needed along with weapons inspections to eliminate the threat Iraq poses to other nations*”, 71% of the people agrees on this latter proposition. Evidence from other polls at that time largely underpins the far more war supportive attitude of the American people in the run-up to the war: approval rate for the way the Bush administration handled de Iraqi conflict was high, military action ‘to remove Saddam Hussein from power’ was favoured by a large majority, and more than 90% considered Iraq to be a threat to the US. By and large, it is safe to consider the American public opinion to be far most supportive of war of all publics in the eight countries under study. A majority of the US people believed in the need of a military intervention in Iraq. Of all war supporting countries, the Bush administration was doubtlessly most successful in convincing its people of the need for war. However, this does *not* mean that the American public was not divided about the issue. A considerable minority of American citizens opposed the war; the country was divided. Yet, since we do not dispose of systematically comparable data for the US we cannot incorporate the American media in the analyses below.

How does this public opinion evidence relate to media coverage? Is national public opinion vis-à-vis war determined by media coverage? Can we substantiate that war critical media coverage lead to a war critical public opinion?

⁵ It concerns a CNN/USA today/Gallup poll, asking a sample of 1,000 adults nationwide about their opinions on several Iraq-related propositions. The poll was conducted on 23-25 January, 2003. Evidence can be retrieved at www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm.

Table 11: Correlations of media coverage (independent) and public opinion (country)(dependent) in eight countries (N=3,580)

Independent variables (media)	Spearman's Rho	Significance (two-tailed)
Pro-war inclination	-.089	.000
Anti-war inclination	.023	.192
Mention reasons for war	.121	.000
Mention reasons against war	.203	.000
Mention war opposition	.164	.000
Mention public opinion = pro-war	.015	.403
Mention public opinion = anti-war	-.023	.198

Note: analysis based on not yet weighed data.

The correlational analysis reveals that, as expected, media coverage affects public opinion. Not all media variables are significant but quite some are. In general, if media in a country condemn war the public will follow that lead and consider war as unjustified. Less articles with pro-war inclination, more mentions of reason for war, more mentions of reasons against war, and more mentions of opposition to war produce a war opposing public opinion. There is one peculiar thing, though. Not only mentioning reasons against but also *in favour* of war seems to drive public opinion towards an *anti-war* stance. The reason is simple: mentions of positive and negative war reasons are related ($r .30$). Articles mentioning anti-war reasons tended to mention pro-war reasons as well. The fact that negative public opinion correlates stronger with anti-war reasons (.203) than with pro-war reasons (.164), strengthens confidence that media coverage pushed public opinion in the *same* direction as it covered the conflict.

Again we test these bivariate findings multivariately in an OLS regression controlling for newspaper type and newspaper leaning and incorporating all media coverage variables at the same time as independents. The results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: OLS regression of public opinion (country)(dependent) with media coverage, newspaper type, and newspaper leaning (independent)(N=3,580)

Independent variables	Public opinion	
	Beta	Sign.
Pro-war inclination	-4.638	.000
Anti-war inclination	.916	.052
Mention reasons for war	.012	.911
Mention reasons against war	.143	.188
Mention war opposition	1.490	.000
Mention public opinion = pro-war	.052	.902
Mention public opinion = anti-war	.803	.269
Newspaper type	1.861	.000
Newspaper leaning	1.655	.000

Note: analysis based on not yet weighed data.

The results confirm our conclusions so far. Media coverage of the imminent war affected public opinion in the countries at stake even taking into account type and leaning of the newspaper involved and controlling media content effects for all other media coverage variables. Two strong associations between media coverage and public opinion - they yield the most powerful coefficients in the model (see the standardized Betas not presented in the table) – prevail. The less newspaper articles endorse war and the more newspapers mention the existence of war opposition, the more the public of that country, in general, opposes war.

So far, we only compared *general* public opinion pro or contra war with general media coverage pro or contra war. Are the media able to impact the public's more *concrete* interpretations and frames regarding the war? In Table 13, we specify the precise content of public opinion in the eight nations. The EOS-Gallup poll contains 11 likert items that we can use. We adapted the direction of the answers so that a high percentage means that a large amount of people in that country oppose war (or share attitudes associated with a contra-war stance).

Table 13: Public opinion on the war in seven European countries (in %)

	UK	SP	IT	NL	SW	BE	GE
1. US should intervene without resolution (disagree)	68	77	80	80	87	78	87
2. Own country participation in war justified with UN resolution (disagree)	15	43	33	29	66	40	52
3. Own country participation in war justified when Iraq does not collaborate with weapon inspectors (disagree)	32	56	49	47	73	55	64
4. Own country war participation justified when US intervenes without UN resolution (disagree)	68	78	81	80	86	84	89
5. Threat of terrorist attacks own country is high (disagree)	16	27	40	71	80	66	48
6. Al-Quaeda's terrorist network continues to present a major threat to World peace (disagree)	10	14	14	13	15	18	13
7. Own country participation in war justified when WMD's are found (disagree)	15	41	37	30	67	39	46
8. Own country war participation justified when Iraq threatens other countries in region (disagree)	20	44	46	29	67	37	36
9. Iraq threat for world peace (disagree)	23	35	28	33	43	37	34
10. Oil main motivation US invasion (agree)	60	79	73	74	75	72	72
11. People in Iraq support Hussein's regime (agree)	42	51	48	36	38	46	52

Source: EOS-Gallup Europe, 2003.

Most European populations agreed that Iraq was a threat for world peace (item 9); this diagnostic statement is not really causing much discord among Europeans. The same applies to their account of the US' motivation to invade Iraq: a large majority concurs with the statement that a self-interest driven search for oil is the main spur for the US (item 10). A large majority, as well, rejected the idea of a unilateral invasion of Iraq without UN backing, which is what happened in reality two months later (items 1 and 4). The real divisive issue is the justification of a potential invasion via the UN Security Council (item 2). Here, opinions differ strongly and people take totally different stances. In the UK, an overwhelming majority would approve war backed by such a resolution, while in Switzerland even a Security Council endorsement would not convince a majority of Swiss of war's justness. No wonder Blair's government did everything within its power to get UN backing. This second, divisive, statement goes to the heart of the debate about the war in Europe focussing on the unilateral and even illegal character of a possible Iraqi war.

For the first seven items in Table 13 we dispose of more or less matching media coverage variables. Items 1-4 are related to the role of the UN. We designed a scale of UN mentions in the newspapers⁶ and can associate both. We expect that frequent coverage of the UN would lead the public of that country to value the role of the UN in the Iraqi conflict more than other people living in countries where the media did not mention the UN as key player that often. Items 5-6 are related to

⁶ Scale constructed adding the variables 'Mention of UN' (no=0, yes=1); 'Mention of a lack of a UN war mandate' (no=0, yes=1) and 'Mention of damage to UN/multilateral system' (no=0, yes=1).

(the threat of) terrorism. In the newspapers as well we searched for mentions of terrorism and constructed a scale to capture this⁷. Item 7 is the only item that clearly refers to the presence (or absence) of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in Iraq. Our media coding scheme contained a variable grasping mentions of WMD in the newspapers. The four final items in the table (items 7-11) cannot be matched neatly to media coverage variables and we will not use them in the subsequent analyses. Hence, we end up with three possible ways of interpreting the Iraqi conflict: a UN frame, a terrorism frame and a WMD frame. Is there evidence that media in the different countries adopted those frames to a varying degree and that this impacted the public’s framing of the Iraqi crisis? Table 14 contains the correlations answering this question partially.

Table 14: Correlations of media coverage (independent) and public opinion (country)(dependent) in seven European countries (N=3,128)

Dependent variables (public opinion)		Media UN mentions	Media terrorism mentions	Media WMD mentions
UN	The US should not intervene in Iraq without UN resolution.	.066(**)	—	—
	Even with a UN resolution, our country’s participation in war is not justified.	.089 (**)	—	—
	Even when Iraq does not cooperate with the weapon inspectors, our country’s participation in war is not justified.	.071 (**)	—	—
	Our country’s participation in war is not justified when the US invade Iraq without a UN resolution	.063 (**)	—	—
Terrorism	The threat of terrorist attacks in our country is not high	—	-.078 (**)	—
	Al Qaeda no longer presents a major threat to world peace	—	-.008	—
WMD	Even when WMD are found in Iraq, our country’s participation in war is not justified	—	—	-.063 (**)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: analysis based on not yet weighed data.

The table demonstrates that the expected relationships do indeed show up, and most of them are significant. The more the media mention the UN in their Iraqi coverage the more the media consumers agree with the fact that the UN should play a major role. It appears that the press successfully managed to pass on the UN frame to their readers. The same applies to the terrorism and the WMD frames: correlations go in the expected direction and are mostly significant. Frames are

⁷ Scale constructed adding the following variables: ‘Mention of war as a part of the war against terrorism’ (no=0, yes=1); ‘Mention that a war would fuel (religious) terrorism/would be perceived as Western aggression against Islam’ (no=0, yes=1).

successfully transferred from the media to the public. Note that, however, correlations are modest. Many other factors seem to determine the way the public interprets the Iraqi conflict. We tested all these bivariate associations in separate OLS regressions controlling for newspaper type and political leaning; all media framing coefficients remained significant.

This section sought to find out whether media coverage of the Iraqi conflict affected public opinion. We had to exclude the US from our analysis as we did not have comparable US public opinion data. All analyses hinted to the same conclusion: media coverage matters for public opinion. If the media in a country report critical about the Iraqi conflict and tend to condemn a war solution, public opinion in that country embraces a war rejecting stance. Also the way media predominantly interpret the conflict affects the way the public at large perceives it. Correlations were weak but significant.

SHORT CONCLUSION

In this exploratory paper we explored, in eight countries, the 2003 newspaper coverage of the Iraqi conflict in the three months just before war broke. We expected that war coverage would differ between countries in function of the position the country took vis-à-vis the Iraqi crisis. Previous, predominantly American, research had showed that media coverage tends to follow government's position. Our expectations were confirmed. Although coverage did not extensively diverge - we were surprised by the seemingly homogeneity of it - differences in coverage went in the expected direction. In war-supporting and war-initiating countries, newspaper coverage of the Iraqi conflict was noticeable less critical: newspapers ran more pro-war stories and less anti-war stories; they mentioned less reasons against war; they did not spend as much attention to war opposition; and they mentioned public opinion less. All these associations remained significant when we controlled for the newspapers' political leaning and type (broadsheet vs. tabloid).

Newspaper coverage not only differed in eight countries, it also seemed to affect public opinion. Comparing general and specific newspaper coverage with general and specific public opinion about the (then) imminent war taught us that both were significantly associated. In countries with a critical press opposing war, public opinion tended to adopt the same position. More specifically, the way media predominantly framed the conflict impinged on the way the public perceived of the conflict. For example, if newspapers frequently stressed the role of UN the public in the same country was inclined to put the UN more center stage. Again, effects are small but significant.

Our paper suggests that, in times of international crisis, the media link politics and the public. Newspapers follow their government and this, in turn, impacts public opinion. Media (newspapers) function as a transmission belt between government and public opinion. The remaining question, of course, is the direction of the causality. In strict terms, our study was correlational and not causal. The available literature, though, suggests that politics comes first. The present study contains no findings that challenge that view.

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