Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict

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Many political scientists and policymakers argue that unmediated events—the successes and failures on the battlefield—determine whether the mass public will support military excursions. The public supports war, the story goes, if the benefits of action outweigh the costs of conflict. Other scholars contend that the balance of elite discourse influences public support for war. I draw upon survey evidence from World War II and the current war in Iraq to come to a common conclusion regarding public support for international interventions. I find little evidence that citizens make complex cost/benefit calculations when evaluating military action. Instead, I find that patterns of elite conflict shape opinion concerning war. When political elites disagree as to the wisdom of intervention, the public divides as well. But when elites come to a common interpretation of a political reality, the public gives them great latitude to wage war.

In recent years, a charitable view of the mass public has emerged in the public opinion and foreign policy literature. Increasingly, scholars have attributed "rationality" to public opinion concerning war. Many political scientists and policymakers argue that unmediated events—the successes and failures on the battlefield—determine whether the mass public will support military excursions. The public supports war, the story goes, if the benefits of action outweigh the costs of conflict and should therefore have a place at the policymaking table.

In this paper, I argue that military events may shape public opinion, but not in the straightforward manner posited by most scholars of public opinion and war. I draw upon and expand the work of scholars who contend that the balance of elite discourse influences levels of public support for war. Integrating research on heuristics and shortcuts with information-based theories of political choice, I demonstrate that patterns of conflict among partisan political actors shape mass opinion on war. It is not the direct influence of wartime events on individual citizens' decisions that determines public opinion, as "event response" theories of war support claim. Instead, consistent with the "elite cue" theory I advance in this paper, the nature of conflict among political elites concerning the salience and meaning of those events determines if the public will rally to war. To a significant degree citizens determine their positions on war by listening to trusted sources—those politicians who share their political predispositions.

I present evidence from World War II and the Second Iraq war, two cases that span 65 years of American history, to come to this common conclusion. In both wars, I find that significant segments of the mass public possessed little knowledge of the most basic facts of these conflicts. Thus, there is little evidence that citizens had the information needed to make cost/benefit calculations when deciding whether to support or oppose military action. Instead, I find that patterns of elite conflict shaped opinions both throughout the six years of World War II and during the Iraq conflict. When elites come to a common interpretation of a political reality, the public gives them great latitude to wage war. But when prominent political actors take divergent stands on the wisdom of intervention, the public divides as well. Furthermore, even in cases—such as the Iraq war—where prominent political actors on one side of the partisan divide stay silent, the presence of a prominent partisan cue giver can lead to divergence in opinion. In sum, while members of the mass public are not lemmings—they have agency to determine their own opinion and may even, in the aggregate, reasonably react to changing

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events—in the realm of war, any apparent rationality arises largely through the process of elite cue taking, not through a reasoned cost/benefit analysis. The mass public is rational only to the extent that prominent political actors provide a rational lead.

The Power of Events?

The conventional wisdom that has emerged over the last 30 years in the public opinion and foreign policy literature holds that the course of events in a given conflict directly determines public support for war. The most prominent line of argument in this vein is what Burk (1999) calls the "casualties hypothesis," the view that the American people will shirk from international involvement in the face of war deaths. This hypothesis grows out of Mueller's (1973) contention that public support for war is inversely related to the log of casualties. Some modifications have been made to this basic theory over time. Gartner and Segura (1998, 2000) have, for instance, demonstrated the importance of local casualty rates in determining support for the war (see also Karol and Miguel 2007 on the relationship between casualties and presidential elections). Even so, the basic story advanced by Mueller remains a dominant view among both academics and policymakers (Burk 1999; Klarevas 2002, although see Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Kull and Destler 1999).

Scholars have moved beyond simply investigating the impact of casualties to examine the effects of other events that affect the costs and benefits of military conflict. According to Larson (1996), the greater the perceived stakes, the clearer the objectives, and the higher the probability of success, the greater the level of public support for war.[1] Building on this argument, other authors contend that the ongoing success of a mission—whether the war will come to a victorious end—determines public support for conflict (Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005–2006; Kull and Ramsay 2001). These theories differ in their particulars, yet all share the belief that "events" directly determine public support for war by altering the balance of costs and benefits related to a particular conflict. Thus, even for scholars who consider factors beyond casualties, the basic logic underlying Mueller's argument remains the dominant position: the collective mass public is rational and will support war if, and only if, the events of war ensure that the costs of military action are outweighed by the perceived benefits of a successful outcome.

Though "event-response" theories of public support for war have made important contributions, they have several potentially serious conceptual problems. First, these theories presume that members of the mass public at least implicitly incorporate knowledge of political developments into their political judgments. However, there is a long line of research that finds great heterogeneity in levels of political knowledge among the mass public (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). While researchers have long known that, on average, Americans know little about politics, knowledge levels are even dimmer when the focus turns to specific factual information. For instance, Gilens (2001) found that the public's knowledge of specific policy-relevant information is low, even among those respondents who have high levels of general political knowledge.

Second, much research on the relationship between casualties and support for war has examined differences in collective public support for intervention across wars, not the differences among individuals within particular conflicts (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998; Klarevas 2002; Larson 1996; Mueller 1973). With some important exceptions (Baum 2002; Edwards and Swenson 1997; Gartner and Segura 2000; Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening 1997; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005–2006) analysis has proceeded at the aggregate level. Several existing theories therefore rest on untested notions of collective rationality. Larson, for instance, argues that the aggregate mass public will support war "if the aims are clear," but he does not describe the conditions under which individuals, much less the aggregate public, make such complex calculations. Thus, many existing theories of public support for military action fail to specify the mechanisms by which members of the mass public process information concerning the events of war and come to determine—both as individuals and collectives—either to support or oppose a given military operation.[2] This aggregate-level work is certainly

[1]Jentleson (1992) argues that the policy objective of a mission determines whether the costs of intervention weigh greatly in the public mind. Military interventions designed to stop foreign aggression against America and its allies engender greater support than missions designed to affect internal political change (see also Oneal, Lian, and Joyner 1996). Jentleson's theory is distinctive because it considers the overall justification that leads to war, not the continuing development of the war.

[2]For instance, take the principal independent variable of both Kull and Ramsay (2001) and Feaver and Gelpi (2004), "war success." At the aggregate level, "perception of success" may have a clear meaning: it could vary over time in reaction to the events on the battlefield. But it is not clear how one can give meaning to

valuable, but it must be supplemented by individual-level analysis that accounts for individual-level variation on relevant political dimensions.

This leads to the final and most important point. Almost all the work described above ignores the partisan nature of the American political process. Treating the mass public as an undifferentiated whole—innocent of political and partisan attachments—leaves no room for the effect of domestic politics. Many researchers who study public opinion and war—even those scholars who conduct individual-level analysis—often talk about "the public" as if it were a monolithic entity. But foreign policy is often as contentious and partisan as domestic politics. Theories of war and politics must account for the effects of the domestic political process (Baum and Groeling 2004; Schultz 2001).

Mediated Reality: The Primacy of Political Competition

In the early days of survey research, scholars argued that the public opinion concerning foreign policy was volatile and irrational—a fickle and changing "mood" in Almond's (1960) words (see also Converse 1964; Lippmann 1922; for a review, see Holsti 2004). However, the relative shortcoming of event-response theories does not mean that we must retreat to these dismal conclusions regarding public opinion and foreign policy. Event-response theories, after all, are not the only explanation for the dynamics of public support for war. Another possibility is to examine the influence of competition among political elites on public opinion.

the cross-sectional variation in individual perceptions of success. The literature on the effect of perceptions of the economy on vote choice is instructive on this point. Recent research has demonstrated that economic perceptions may be determined by vote choice, rather than the converse (Anderson, Mendes, and Tverdova 2004; Wlezien, Franklin, and Twiggs 1997). Thus, just as the observed correlation between vote choice and economic perceptions is a result of voters bringing their economic assessments in line with their political judgments, the causal arrow between perceived success and war support could run from the latter to the former, rather than vice versa, as Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2005–2006) argue (for further discussion, see Berinsky and Druckman 2007). Analysis of data from the Iraq War Casualty Survey (see below) suggests that, at an empirical level, perceived success is best characterized as another measure of support for war, itself influenced by partisan elite discourse. Specifically, the "success" question—like other measures of support for the war—exhibits the polarization pattern of opinion. As political information increases among Republicans, the estimates of perceived success also increase. Among Democrats, however, increasing political information decreases estimates of success (see Appendix A at http://journalofpolitics.org/articles.html).

The leading proponent of this theory in the context of foreign policy is Zaller (1992), who claims that elite discourse is the key to explaining war support (see also Brody 1991). Zaller argues that the balance of persuasive messages carried in the political media determines the balance of opinion on a given policy controversy. Individuals who are most politically knowledgeable are most likely to receive political messages and accept those messages that accord with their personal political predispositions. The greater the volume of elite discourse favoring a particular policy position from elites of a particular political stripe, the more likely it is that the members of the mass public who share the political predispositions of those elites will adopt that position.

Zaller makes his case in the context of the Vietnam War, arguing that the decline in the support for that war was driven by a change in the balance of elite discourse across the 1960s. In the early phase of the war, when political elites were almost uniform in their support for the U.S. policy in Vietnam, Zaller found a monotonic relationship between political awareness and support for the war; those most attentive to elite discourse were most supportive of the current policy, regardless of their individual predispositions. Zaller terms this phenomenon the "mainstream pattern" of political support. On the other hand, in the later phases of the Vietnam War, when the mainstream consensus dissolved into elite disagreement, a "polarization pattern" emerged. Here, the effect of political awareness on support for the war was conditional on an individual's political values. Citizens attentive to politics followed the path of those leaders who shared their political views. For the Vietnam War, greater awareness led to higher levels of support among hawks and higher levels of opposition among doves. Zaller's story is not particular to Vietnam. Belknap and Campbell (1951) found a similar pattern of opinion during the Korean War; differences between Republican and Democratic identifiers were greatest among those respondents with high levels of political information, mirroring the corresponding differences among political elites.[3]

The elite competition theory explicitly brings politics into the study of public opinion, allowing us to see how individuals with different political predilections react to different forms of elite discourse. At the

[3]I do not directly examine evidence from Vietnam or Korea in this paper. However, even though the management of conflict changed parties, from Democrat to Republican presidents during the wars, partisan cues played a sensible role in structuring opinion (see Berinsky 2007 for further discussion).

same time, Zaller's explanation is somewhat incomplete. Zaller claims that the dynamics of opinion are driven exclusively by the net balance of partisan messages gleaned by individuals through political discourse. However, it is not clear if these messages are the only path to elite influence. Certainly, there are cases where political actors on both sides of a controversy provide persuasive messages, leading to polarized opinions among the mass public. But even in the absence of a balanced flow of discourse, individuals might have the information they need to come to a judgment regarding the fit between the policy options on the table and their political predispositions. Here the literature on cue taking and heuristics is instructive. Several studies have demonstrated that poorly informed citizens can make decisions that emulate the behavior of well informed citizens by following the cues of politicians who share their political views (see Lupia 1994; Popkin 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). These studies suggest that even in the absence of specific policy messages, citizens can use the positions of elites to come to reasonable political decisions. We would therefore expect that citizens could use the position of a prominent elite as a reference point and decide whether to support or oppose a policy based on that position, even in the absence of explicitly contradictory messages. In effect, citizens delegate the difficult process of arriving at an opinion on a complicated policy matter to trusted political experts. Presidents can serve as such cue givers, especially in the realm of foreign policy (Meernik and Ault 2001). For instance, if I am a Democrat, I need only know that George Bush supports a policy initiative to recognize that I should oppose such a course of action.

But to use this cue requires that citizens have knowledge of the positions of relevant political actors.[4] Here is where Zaller's information-based theory can be brought into accord with cue-taking theories. As an individual's level of political information increases, their awareness of the positions of particular elites—and the distinctiveness of that position relative to other political actors—increases. Thus a pattern of opinion polarization could occur even in the absence of vocal opposition, provided a strong cue giver takes a clear position on that policy. As I will show below, this alternative mechanism of elite influence—what I call the elite cue theory—can explain the pattern of opinion in World War II, where both FDR and his Republican opponents took distinct positions. Moreover, unlike Zaller's original formulation, this theory can also explain the polarized pattern of opinion concerning the war in Iraq, a situation where Bush and Republican party leaders took a strong pro-war position, but Democratic party leaders failed to express strong support or opposition.[5]

Expectations

Taken together, I have clear expectations regarding the relative role of events and elites in structuring opinion concerning war. Consistent with recent work on U.S. public opinion, but contrary to the expectations of scholars in the rationalist cost/benefit tradition, I expect that events will have little effect on the public's day-to-day judgments regarding the wisdom of war. This is not to say that events will never play a role in structuring opinion; certainly cataclysmic events, such as Pearl Harbor or the attacks of 9/11 can directly influence public opinion. But the events that many scholars of public opinion and war have examined—casualties and other mission indicators—play only a secondary role in determining public support for war. I therefore expect that knowledge of wartime events will not be widespread. Furthermore, correcting misperceptions of these events will have little effect on war support.

Conversely, I expect that patterns of elite discourse—the stated positions of leading Democrat and Republican politicians—will play a large role in determining public support for war. Individuals will use positions of prominent elites as a reference point, providing structure and guidance to opinions concerning war. Moreover, contrary to Zaller, I expect to find divergence without prominent elites speaking on both sides. The presence of prominent war-support cue givers can lead to a polarization of opinion as long as their political opponents do not also support war and vice versa. While citizens, in this view, do not rationally balance the costs and benefits of military

[4]This position was actually advanced in a somewhat different form by Mueller (1973). Mueller discusses the importance of partisan cues in structuring wartime opinion and argues that well-informed partisans are most likely to adopt the positions of the political leaders of their respective parties (see pages 120–121).

[5]While I do not directly test the elite-cue theory against Zaller's RAS theory in this paper, the elite cue theory seems to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the opinion formation process. The RAS model explains Republican support for the Iraq war, but it cannot explain the divergence of opinion on the Iraq war in the absence of clear anti-war messages from Democratic politicians in 2004. The elite cue theory, on the other hand, argues that the political rhetoric of Republicans elites causes opinion polarization for *both* Republican and Democratic identifiers. Clearly, further explanation of the relative power of the RAS theory and the elite cue theory is in order. Hopefully, this paper will spur further work on this topic.

action, neither do they blindly follow the messages disseminated by political elites. Rather they account for patterns of political leadership and partisan conflict to come to reasonable decisions that accord with their predispositions.

Indeterminate Tests

Event-response theories, such as the casualties hypothesis (and its extensions) and the elite cue theory, which places the primary mechanism in the hands of partisan political actors, provide very different explanations for the dynamics of public support for war. These theories also carry very different normative implications: whether partisan political actors lead or follow opinion concerning war is a question with profound consequences for the practice of democracy. However, it has been difficult to assess the relative validity of the two approaches because scholars have focused on the Cold War and post-Cold War American experiences, namely war failures and short-term military excursions (Larson 1996; Sobel 2001). Consider, for instance, the Korea and Vietnam wars. Both the elite cue theory and the event-response theory predict that public support would decline as the conflicts unfolded. In the first view, as divisions among elites widened over time during both Korea and Vietnam, public opinion became polarized, thereby decreasing overall support for war. At the same time, since most scholars have used cumulative casualties as a measure of the war's cost (Larson 1996; though see Gartner and Segura 1998; Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening 1997) and cumulative casualties—as Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening (1997) note—are collinear with time, the casualties hypothesis predicts a secular decline in support for war over time. Thus, for both theories of public support, time is correlated with the explanatory variables of interest: real world events and how those events are discussed by elites. To distinguish the accuracy of these two theories, we need to look to new evidence.

In the rest of this paper, I draw upon two cases to provide support for my elite cue theory. First, I present evidence from two surveys I conducted concerning the war in Iraq to reveal that citizens do not incorporate information about wartime events into their political judgments. I find instead that partisanship and attentiveness to politics can explain patterns of opinion polarization as my theory of elite cue taking implies. Second, I present evidence from World War II suggesting that explanations that look to battlefield events alone cannot explain public opinion during the war years. As time marched on, cumulative U.S. casualties increased, but support for the war did not falter. Moreover, explanations that attribute clear benefits to other wartime events do not stand up to the scrutiny of the data. The roots of public support for the war instead lie in part in the behavior of partisan political actors. Once the United States entered World War II, political elites remained unified behind the war effort and individual members of the mass public largely followed suit.

The War in Iraq

In March of 2003, the United States invaded Iraq, beginning a period of combat operations that continued through the 2006 election and beyond. Two facts about this war are particularly important for present purposes. First, dissemination of correct information about wartime events—especially the ongoing count of war dead—was prevalent in the media.[6] We can therefore surmise that any misreporting in levels of war deaths by citizens is the result of faulty perceptions of reports of war deaths on the part of citizens, not faulty reports of the number of deaths by the media. Second, the positions of prominent cue givers regarding support for war were clear. As Commander-in-Chief, President Bush was strongly associated with support for the conflict. For much of this period, Republican party elites followed his lead. The position of Democrats on this issue was less clear. A review of *Newsweek* articles on Iraq from February 2002 onward indicates that Democrats lacked a clear agenda for how to proceed on the Iraq question. For months after the initial invasion, there was limited dissent among Democrats. In the Presidential campaign the notable dissenters on Iraq—Howard Dean and Wesley Clark—were quickly pushed aside by John Kerry, a Senator who voted to authorize war in Iraq and, in line with other prominent Democrats, never took a clear position against the war. The question, then, is: given the prominence of relevant information in media, which factor best explains variation in support for the war: casualties, as the event-response theory would suggest, or elite positions concerning the wisdom of that conflict, as the elite cue theory contends?

[6]I used Lexis-Nexus to perform a search of AP articles that mentioned Iraq from June 23 to August 2, 2004 (a period covering the month before the survey described below). Of the 82 separate AP stories, 57 mentioned casualties and 10 gave cumulate casualty figures (all 10 counts were accurate).

To answer this question, I conducted an experimental survey in the summer of 2004. My Iraq War Casualty Survey, conducted from July 23 to August 2, 2004 by Knowledge Networks, asked a random portion of a nationally representative sample of respondents:

> Please give your best guess to this next question, even if you are not sure of the correct answer. As you know, the United States is currently involved in a war in Iraq. Do you happen to know how many soldiers of the U.S. military have been killed in Iraq since the fighting began in March 2003?[7]

At first glance, it appears that the public is informed about the level of troop deaths in Iraq. The mean estimate of deaths in the sample was 952 deaths, while the median response was 900 deaths.[8] Both of these figures are extraordinarily close to the true casualty count, which rose from 901 to 915 over the span of the survey. The accuracy of the median respondent, however, disregards large variation in the casualty estimates. Respondents gave answers ranging from 0 deaths to 130,000 deaths. Even setting aside the extreme responses (casualty guess under 10 and over 10,000) the standard deviation of the casualty estimate was 802.[9]

A simple tabulation of the estimates illuminates the pattern of responses to the casualty question. Underestimating the casualty level of the war is a qualitatively different response than overestimating casualties. Thus, simply predicting the casualty estimate, or the absolute error of the estimate, is not informative. Instead, I created a three-category casualty estimate scale. I scored those respondents who estimated the number of war deaths to be between 801 and 1,015 (the true estimate +/− 100 deaths) as "correct." Those who gave an estimate of 800 or lower were scored as "underestimators," while those who guessed higher than 1,015 are considered "overestimators."[10] The modal response (47%) is a correct answer. However, nearly as many respondents (42%) underestimated the number of war deaths (11% overestimated the number of deaths).[11] This pattern of knowledge of casualties found in this survey extends to knowledge of the rate of American deaths in Iraq from around the same time. The Pew Research Center conducted a survey in September 2004 that asked respondents "What's your impression about what's happened in Iraq over the past month? Has the number of American military casualties been higher, lower, or about the same as in other recent months?" Though a plurality of 46% gave the correct answer of "higher," a majority of respondents either gave an incorrect answer or were unable to provide an answer to the question. These knowledge levels certainly compare favorably to knowledge of other political facts, such as the percentage of budget devoted to foreign aid (Gilens 2001), but given the prominence of war deaths in the news, these studies demonstrate that even in a high salience environment, great variation exists in knowledge about events on the ground in Iraq.

More important for the purposes of this paper, this variation is not random; elite cues play a significant role in biasing the recall of knowledge. I examined the determinants of perceived level of casualties using measures of political engagement and partisan political leanings. I ran a multinomial logit (MNL) using the three-category casualty estimate scale (underestimator/correct/overestimator) as the dependent variable and the respondents' partisanship to account for the patterns of cue taking from partisan political actors.[12] I also included as independent variables the amount of attention the respondent pays to news about Iraq, how much the respondent watches Fox News (following Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2003–2004), and the respondent's general political information, education, and gender.[13] The result of this analysis is presented in Table 1. The coefficients in the second column are the effect of a given variable on the probability of underestimating the number of casualties versus correctly estimating the number of casual-

[7]This question is part of a 2X2 experimental design, where one-half of respondents were asked the casualty knowledge question (see online Appendix B for details of this treatment).

[8]The mean and median estimates were generated using poststratification weights.

[9]With the extreme responses included, the standard deviation was 3,012.

[10]I tried other methods of scoring a "correct" response—increasing and decreasing the band of acceptable answers incrementally from +/− 50 deaths to +/− 200 deaths—and found essentially the same results.

[11]Cobb (2007) examines a number of surveys that measure knowledge of cumulative casualty rates from 2003 to 2006 and finds similar patterns of misperception.

[12]In retrospect, I might have measured the respondent's approval of George Bush to more directly account for the process of cue-taking. I would expect the results reported here to be even stronger had I directly measured the degree to which respondents held a favorable view of Bush, but partisanship functions as an adequate proxy of judgments of Bush. I use MNL rather than an ordered estimation routine because, though the casualty estimate levels can be ordered, I expect that the independent variables will have nonlinear effects. For instance, political information should increase the probability of giving a correct answer, and decrease the probability of being both an under-estimator and an over-estimator.

[13]See online Appendix B for question wording.

TABLE 1 MNL Analysis of Determinants of Estimates of War Deaths

	Correct Answer vs. Underestimate	Correct Answer vs. Overestimate
Variable	**Coefficient (SE)**	**Coefficient (SE)**
Constant	1.67 (.45)*	−.08 (.70)
Information	−.94 (.31)*	−1.44 (.48)*
Education	.10 (.09)	.06 (.15)
Gender	.03 (.18)	−.02 (.29)
Follow Iraq News	−2.06 (.38)*	−1.33 (.61)*
Watch Fox News	−.14 (.53)	.42 (.85)
Party Identification (Strong Dem High)	−.51 (.26)*	.11 (.43)

N = 621.
LL = −544.58.
* = $p < .05$.

ties. In the third column, the estimates are the effect on the probability of being an "overestimator," as compared to giving the correct answer.

Since the MNL coefficients can be difficult to interpret directly, I generated predicted probabilities of choosing the different response categories for the extreme values of the partisanship for the "typical" member of the public.[14] These results are presented in Table 2. As expected, compared to strong Republicans, strong Democrats are less likely to underestimate and are slightly more likely to overestimate casualty levels. By way of comparison, the effect of partisanship on the probability of underestimating casualty levels is roughly equal to the effect of moving from low information to high information. This finding is consistent with the Pew data on casualty rates described above. Among independents, 47% correctly stated that casualty rates were higher in the current month than in the previous month.[15] Democrats were even more likely to say that casualties were higher—54% gave the correct answer—and Republicans were less likely to say that casualties were increasing—only 36% gave the correct answer.[16] In short, perceptions of war deaths are influenced not only by information and engagement with political news, but also by the individual's political predispositions.

Having demonstrated that the respondents' perceptions of events in the Iraq war are influenced by partisanship, I next move to the more important question of whether the casualty estimates had any influence on opinions concerning war.

Embedded in the Iraq war survey was an experiment in which one half of those respondents who were asked to estimate how many soldiers died in Iraq were then told, "Many people don't know the answer to this question, but according to the latest estimates, 901 soldiers have been killed in Iraq since the fighting began in March 2003."[17] In other words, one-half of the respondents who were asked to estimate the number of American deaths were given a "treatment" of correct information. This experimental design allows me to compare levels of support for the war between two comparable groups: (1) the respondents in the "estimate war deaths" condition who underestimate casualties but were not told the correct number of war deaths; and, (2) the respondents in the "corrected" condition who underestimate war deaths but were then told the number of U.S. soldiers who died.[18] I can make a similar comparison for respondents who overestimate casualties. This is a powerful comparison, because the "correct information" treatment was randomly assigned. The only difference between the "estimate" group and the "corrected" group is that respondents in the "corrected" condition were subsequently told the true casualty rates.[19] Thus, by com-

[14]The "typical" respondent is one whose characteristics are set at the mean (for continuous variables) and the mode (for discrete variables).

[15]From August 8 to September 13, 90 American soldiers were killed, as compared to 58 in the period from July 8 to August 7 and 45 in the period from June 8 to July 7 (source http://www.antiwar.com/casualties/list.php, which compiles American military death from May 1, 2003 to the present from the U.S. Department of Defense website).

[16]Consistent with the elite cue theory the effect of judgments of George Bush on casualty misperceptions are even stronger than that of partisanship (see Berinsky 2007 for details). In addition a Pew survey from August 2004 found a similar pattern of partisan misperception of casualty rates.

[17]This number was updated once on July 30th, moving the casualty figure to 908. In the analyses presented in the paper, I set the bound of acceptability from the low point (901) to the high point (915).

[18]I employed a between-subjects design rather than a within-subjects design (in which support for the war would be measured both before and after the treatment) because I was worried that respondents would try to maintain consistency in their answers to the war question, given the short time-span of the interview. As a result, the between-subjects design employed here is more likely to produce results supporting the casualties hypothesis than a within-subjects design. The lack of significant findings is therefore especially telling.

[19]Due to random assignment, these two groups should not differ systematically on their background characteristics, including their perceptions of benefits arising from the war. The experimental design therefore holds constant the benefit side of the cost/benefit equation.

Table 2 Predicted Probability of Causality Estimates

	Pr (Underestimate)	Pr (Correct Answer)	Pr (Overestimate)
Information			
Low Information	.51	.31	.18
High Information	.36	.56	.07
Difference	*–.15*	*+.25*	*–.11*
Partisanship			
Strong Republican	.48	.44	.08
Strong Democrat	.35	.54	.12
Difference	*–.13*	*+.10*	*+.04*

paring these two groups, I can assess the effect of introducing the correct information on support for war for individuals who are similarly misinformed about casualty rates.

I measured attitudes toward the Iraq war with two common measures of war support. The first question asked, "Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq?" The second question asked, "All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the current war with Iraq has been worth fighting, or not?" The results of these analyses are presented in Table 3.[20] There were no reliably significant differences between the respondents in the two conditions in either a substantive or a statistical sense.[21] Furthermore, the direction of the treatment effect is in the incorrect direction for both the "worth fighting" and the "right decision" questions—respondents who are told that the number of war deaths is larger than they had believed were *more* supportive of the war (though the difference is small and statistically insignificant by a wide margin).[22] Among overestimators, the effect of the treatment was in the expected direction for the "worth fighting" question only and is statistically insignificant.[23]

The Human and Monetary Costs of War

One of the best-known findings from the survey research literature is that seemingly minor alterations in the wording of particular questions can lead to large changes in the answers respondents give to surveys. Recent advances in theories of the survey response have helped researchers to predict when opinion changes might occur. As Zaller argues, "individuals do not typically possess 'true attitudes' on issues, as conventional theorizing assumes, but a series of partially independent and often inconsistent ones" (1992, 93; see also Feldman 1989; Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski

[20]I also determined that there were no statistically significant differences between the "estimated" condition and the "corrected" condition for those respondents who gave a correct casualty estimate. Using a 4-point scale that distinguishes strong and weak supporters of the war yields identical results.

[21]I also examined the possibility that information levels could moderate the effect of the casualty level treatment. I found that the effect of casualty treatment did not vary by information level. I also assessed the direct effect of casualty information by comparing the responses of (1) respondents who were not asked to estimate casualties but were provided with the correct casualty information to (2) those who were neither asked nor told casualty levels. Though support for war was lower in the "provide information" condition than the no information condition, this effect was substantively small—about three percentage points—and statically insignificant.

[22]I also ran this analysis broken down by the partisanship of the respondent. I found that, among over-estimators, the treatment had no effect for any group. Among under-estimators, the treatment had no effect for either independents or Republicans. However, the treatment *increased* the level of support for Democratic under-estimators (thereby driving the full sample result reported in Table 3). I do not believe that this result represents a systematic effect for several reasons. First, there is no theoretic reason to expect such a pattern of results. Second, given the small sample size of the subgroup analysis, it is difficult to have much faith in the reliability of these results given the non-findings in the other partisan subsamples. Finally, it appears that any treatment effect is a result of the peculiar nature of the Democrats in the "estimate war death condition." The level of support for the Iraq war among Democrats in this condition is much lower than among Democrats in the control condition. In fact the level of support for the war among Democrats in the "corrected" condition is equivalent to that of Democrats in the control condition. I also estimated the direct effect of casualty estimates on support for the war and found no relationship for either form of the dependent variable. This analysis is presented in online Appendix C.

[23]It has been suggested that these effects are small and in the incorrect direction because they aggregate together individuals who greatly under-estimate the casualty levels with those individuals who give casualty figures closer to the true levels. Though the small sample size makes such subgroup analysis difficult (especially among over-estimators), I performed the crosstabulation presented in Table 3 for only those respondents who underestimated casualty rates by 500 or more soldiers. I found that the effect of the information treatment among these respondents was almost identical to the effects in the full sample.

TABLE 3 Effect of Information Treatment on Support for War in Iraq

AMONG UNDERESTIMATORS	
Did The U.S. Make The Right Decision in Using Military Force against Iraq?	
	U.S. Made Right Decision
Estimate War Deaths Condition	52%
Corrected Information Condition	56%
N = 252; $\chi^2(1) = .40$ Pr = .53	
Has The Current War in Iraq Been Worth Fighting?	
	Worth Fighting
Estimate War Deaths Condition	42%
Corrected Information Condition	47%
N = 253; $\chi^2(1) = .71$ Pr = .40	
AMONG OVERESTIMATORS	
Did The U.S. Make The Right Decision in Using Military Force against Iraq?	
	U.S. Made Right Decision
Estimate War Deaths Condition	58%
Corrected Information Condition	58%
N = 57; $\chi^2(1) = .00$ Pr = .95	
Has The Current War in Iraq Been Worth Fighting?	
	Worth Fighting
Estimate War Deaths Condition	42%
Corrected Information Condition	48%
N = 57; $\chi^2(1) = .26$ Pr = .61	

2000; Zaller and Feldman 1992). Answers to survey questions are, therefore, in part determined by the balance of arguments made salient by survey questions. Bringing additional pieces of information—to use Zaller's terminology "considerations"—to mind alters the base of information that individuals use to come to particular decisions. From this point of view, highlighting negative information—such as the human and monetary costs of war—should cause individuals to focus on the downside of war. In the aggregate, questions that contain information about casualties and the costs of war should therefore yield lower levels of support for war than questions that omit such information.

Somewhat surprisingly, in two separate experiments, I did not find this predicted pattern of results. The design of the 2004 Iraq War Casualty Survey allowed me to directly test for the effect of introducing casualty information on support for war. The Iraq War Casualty Survey was a 2x2 experimental design. Only one-half of the respondents were asked to estimate the number of casualties, as described above. The other half of the sample permits a further experimental test. In the "control" condition of the survey, respondents were neither asked nor given any information concerning the casualty rates in Iraq; they were simply asked their levels of support for the conflict. In the "information only" condition, respondents were not asked to provide an estimate of war deaths, but they were told the correct casualty rates. I found no statistically significant difference in the answers to the war support questions between these two conditions. Making salient a negative consideration—the scope of the human cost of war—and providing specific information about that cost did not change the aggregate shape of opinion on the war.

In the fall of 2005, I collected additional data to assess the effects of event-specific information on opinions concerning the Iraq war. Respondents to an omnibus survey were randomly assigned to one of six conditions: a "baseline" condition, a "standard survey question" condition, or one of four information conditions.[24]

> *Form 1 (baseline)*: "All in all, do you think the war with Iraq was worth fighting, or not?"
> *Form 2: (standard survey)*: "All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war with Iraq was worth fighting, or not?"
> *Form 3*: "As you may know, since the war in Iraq began in March 2003, many American soldiers have

[24]This survey of 1,173 individuals was conducted from October 31, 2005 to November 10, 2005 by Polimetrix as part of the 2005 Public Opinion Research Training Lab survey. The Polimetrix sample is not, strictly speaking, a random sample. However, the sample is adequate for my purposes because it represents a diverse sample and the experimental treatment was randomly assigned. It is possible that the treatment would have different effects in a different sample, thereby threatening the external validity of the experiment (through the interaction of selection and the treatment, to use the language of Campbell and Stanley (1963)). However, even in that case, the experiment would be internally valid. In any case, the same pattern of results were found in the 2004 experiment, which has fewer concerns with external validity, thereby strengthening my confidence in the conclusions of the 2005 study. It should also be noted that the basic pattern of results are the same with and without the use of the Polimetrix weighting scheme (the weights are used in the analysis presented here).

been killed. All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war with Iraq was worth fighting, or not?"

Form 4: "As you may know, since the war in Iraq began in March 2003, almost 2,000 American soldiers have been killed. All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war with Iraq was worth fighting, or not?"

Form 5: "As you may know, since the war in Iraq began in March 2003, the United States has spent a large amount of money on operations in Iraq. All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war with Iraq was worth fighting, or not?"

Form 6: "As you may know, since the war in Iraq began in March 2003, the United States has spent almost 200 billion dollars on operations in Iraq. All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war with Iraq was worth fighting, or not?"

The first (baseline) condition presented a neutral stimulus; respondents were simply asked whether or not they support the war. In the second ("standard survey question") condition, respondents were explicitly asked to consider the costs and benefits of the Iraqi invasion, following the convention of poll questions asked by the Washington Post and Gallup. Respondents in the other four conditions were asked forms of the questions that highlighted specific information about the human and financial costs of the Iraq war, in either general (Forms 3 and 5) or specific (Forms 4 and 6) terms.

Given the vast amounts of research on question-wording effects, we would expect to find large differences across conditions based on the types of information presented in the question. But this is not the case. In fact, as Table 4 demonstrates, there are almost no differences on levels of support across conditions.[25]

Why, in the face of strong negative information, did these treatments have no effect? The lack of an effect is probably not because respondents had already incorporated the information into their judgments. As the 2004 Iraq War Survey demonstrates, many respondents did not know the correct casualty figures.[26] Instead, I did not find substantive difference among the conditions because respondents had already made up their minds on Iraq. Citizens discounted new information in favor of more important considerations—their attachments to particular political leaders.

Table 4 Effect of Information Treatment on Support for War in Iraq

Has The Current War in Iraq Been Worth Fighting?	
	U.S. Made Right Decision
Baseline	40%
Standard Survey	42
Many Soldiers Died	43
2,000 Soldiers Died	41
U.S. Spend a Lot of Money	40
U.S. Spend $200 Billion	37

N = 1,168; $\chi^2(10) = 9.48$ Pr = .49.

Elite Cues

Though event-response theories cannot explain differences in support for war, models that account for the influence of partisan cues strongly predict patterns of war support. Recall that the elite cue theory hypothesizes that members of the mass public will look to prominent political actors as guides for their positions on the war. In the context of Iraq, the Bush administration's clear stance on the war—and the general unity of the Republican Party for much of this time—provides such a guide. Even though Democratic leaders had not taken a consistent and strong antiwar stance at the time of the survey, both Republicans and Democrats who were attentive to politics could use the strong support of the war by George Bush and Republican party leaders as a cue to influence their position on the war.

As noted above, partisanship has a larger effect on support for the war than does casualty information. More tellingly, support for the Iraq conflict follows the polarization pattern, as the elite cue theory predicts. The "polarization pattern" of political support

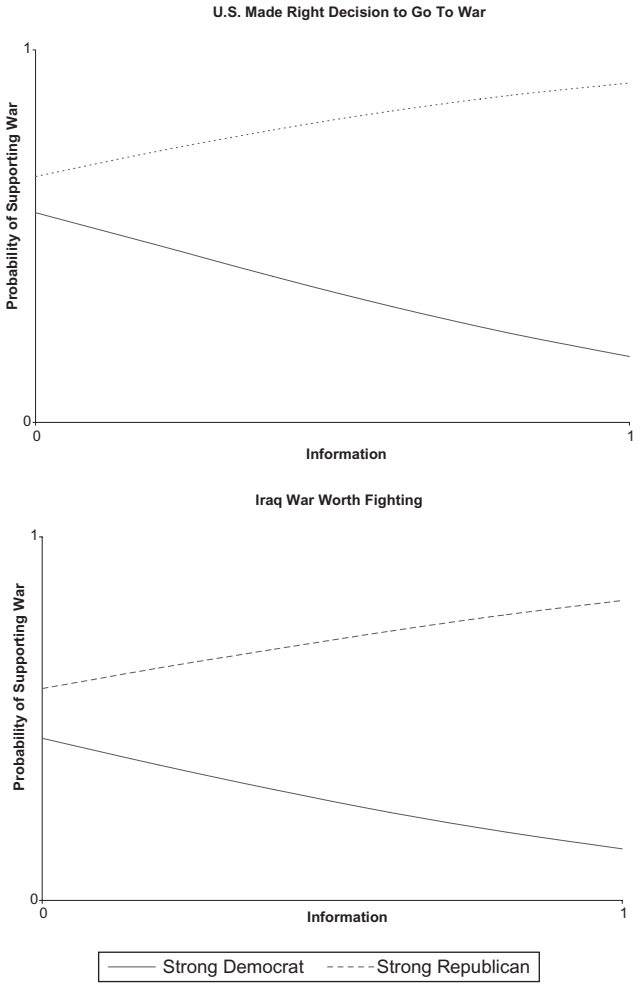
[25]The differences among conditions are statistically insignificant as well (χ^2 (10) = 9.48;Pr = .49). Moreover any differences that appear to exist—in particular, the level of support for war in the "200 billion dollars" condition relative to the other five conditions—are largely driven by the unequal distribution of "don't know" responses across the conditions, ranging from 1% in the "standard survey condition" to 5% in the "200 billion dollars" condition. If the don't know responses are excluded from the analysis, the difference between the conditions is completely insignificant (($\chi^2(5) = 1.26$; Pr = .94).

[26]During World War II, just as in the Iraq war, large segments of the mass public were ignorant of the human costs of the war, even though information concerning war deaths was available (see below).

emerges when prominent political actors take a clear position on the necessity of military action and their counterparts across the political aisle do not follow suit. Under these circumstances, citizens who are more informed will follow those political actors who share their views. If, on the other hand, elite discourse is unified in support of intervention, public opinion should be characterized by the "mainstream pattern;" more informed citizens should be more supportive of government policy, regardless of their political predispositions. To determine whether the mainstream pattern or the polarization pattern best characterizes public opinion, we need individual-level measures of three quantities: support for the war, political predispositions, and levels of political information (which, following Zaller, proxies attentiveness to elite discourse). The Iraq War Casualty Survey contains all of these quantities. Following Zaller (1992, 1994) I ran a probit of the measures of support for war on partisanship, information, the interaction between information and partisanship, and several control variables. The full regression results are presented in the online Appendix D. Figure 1 presents the results of an analysis of the effects of political information levels on support for the war.[27] As the figure demonstrates, as a modal respondent's attention to political discourse increases, he adopts diametrically opposed positions on the war, depending on whether he is a Democrat or a Republican. Although there is a gap between Democrats and Republicans at the lowest information levels, this gap grows as information levels increase, indicating that differences in elite positions are reflected in individuals' positions on war. An analysis of the 2005 Polimetrix survey, albeit with a slightly different information measure, indicates a similar pattern of polarization, though with an increased degree of difference between partisans at the lowest information levels (see online Appendix D).[28]

All told, these results provide support for elite-centered views of war support. Perceptions of war deaths are influenced by the respondent's partisan attachments. Furthermore, the perceptions of war deaths do not influence attitudes toward war, and correcting respondents' misperceptions has little effect on support for war.[29] Whatever inconsistent effects arise from presenting correct information pale in comparison to the effects of partisanship.

FIGURE 1 Patterns of Polarization in Iraq War Attitudes, August 2004



[27]The graphs present the predicted positions for a white male with some college education. I also ran the analysis separately for each experimental condition. The results were nearly identical.

[28]Analysis of the 2004 National Election Study yields a similar pattern of polarization (see Jacobson 2007 for comparable analysis).

[29]Admittedly, the difference in casualty figures here are on the smaller side. It could be that correcting the casualty figures has no effect of respondent's positions toward the war because that correction is not sufficiently large to change their views regarding the war. I am constrained in my ability to manipulate casualty figures because I am dealing here with an ongoing conflict. That said, the tethering of my study to reality is a strength; respondents have incomplete knowledge of ongoing events and correcting those misperceptions has no effect on support for this ongoing conflict. Perhaps the treatment has no effect because casualty levels simply do not affect support for the war, no matter how small or large the differences. From this standpoint, the small differences are not a fatal flaw. Indeed, other scholars have found that even small variations in casualty figures can influence individuals' assessments of the wisdom of war (McGraw and Mears 2004). Furthermore, the similarity of results from the World War II era—a case where a large number of casualties were incurred—bolsters the Iraq findings.

The Dynamics of Opinion

The identification of the Iraq war with the Bush administration has allowed partisans who pay attention to politics to ascertain their stance on that war. The evidence of increased polarization over time, even among those individuals who pay little attention to politics, may explain in part the sharp divergence in war support between Republicans and Democrats from the time of the war's immediate aftermath in May 2003 and the 2004 survey. As Iraq became portrayed as "Bush's war," increasingly, even the least politically engaged partisans could use the position of the President and the leaders of the Republican Party as a cue to find their own opinion on the war. This withdrawal of support among Democrats in large part resulted in the initial decline in support for the war (see Jacobson 2007).

The analysis presented here suggests that patterns of elite conflict play a critical role in determining patterns of war support, as the elite cue theory predicts. What the future holds for Iraq remains to be seen. A study by Jacobson (2007) demonstrates that from April 2004 until the eve of the 2006 election, support for the war did not decline monotonically, but rather oscillated between 40 and 50%. The splintering of the Republican consensus on Iraq in the wake of the 2006 election may, however, provide another important demonstration of the power of elite rhetoric. The fading of unity on the wisdom of involvement among prominent Republican politicians should lead to the withdrawal of support among some Republican identifiers. Indeed, preliminary survey data collected by Jacobson (2007) suggests that Republican support for the war—which fluctuated between 75 and 85% from November 2003 to November 2006—dropped below 70% for the first time in the wake of the 2006 election. A reconsideration of the wisdom of the war by its most ardent supporters in government may, then, lead to a collapse in support for military action among the mass public as well.

World War II

Having demonstrated the power of the elite cue theory of support for war relative to the event-response theory in the context of the Iraq War, I turn now to examine data from World War II to demonstrate the influence of patterns of elite conflict on public opinion. Contrary to the expectations of the casualties hypothesis, over the almost four years of U.S. involvement in that War, support for the effort did not wane, even as war deaths mounted, in particular after the spring of 1944.[30] Campbell and Cain (1965) use a number of questions to measure support for the government's stated military aims and demonstrate that at no point did public support fall below 75%. More direct measures of support for the conflict, though confined to a limited time period, paint a similar picture. In February 1944, only 25% of those surveyed thought that "in the years to come, people will say it was a mistake for the U.S. to have entered this war" while only 14% responded affirmatively to the statement "Do you think that you, yourself, will feel it was a mistake for us to have entered this war?"[31] Similarly, in April 1944, only 21% thought that, 20 years from that point in time, "many people will look upon our going into the war against Germany as a mistake." Furthermore, just as in the Iraq war, large segments of the mass public were ignorant of the human costs of the war, even though information concerning war deaths was available.[32] An October 1945 Gallup survey asked, "How many American soldiers, sailors, and airmen were killed in the war—just your best guess?" The median response of 500,000 was higher than the correct number (approximately 300,000 soldiers died). Moreover, as with Iraq, there was wide variation in answers to the question. Twenty-five percent of respondents guessed that the war dead stood at over 1 million, and 15% guessed that fewer than 200,000 died.

Other explanations that find the roots of continued support of the American public in wartime events are also problematic. There is a broad sense in popular accounts and some academic treatments of World War II, that this conflict was the "good war" where the benefits of intervention were clear. According to this account, the United States, shaken by the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, quickly rallied to the cause of protecting democracy. Larson, for instance, writes:

[30]The Department of the Army recorded monthly casualties (though not war deaths) from December 7, 1941 to December 31, 1946. From December 1941 until December 1943, casualties only exceed 10,000 in one month. Over the course of 1944, however, monthly casualty rates increased greatly, reaching 55,000 in June and ranged from 50,000 to 80,000 until April, 1945 (Army Battle Casualties and Nonbattle Death in World War II, Final Report).

[31]The aggregate public opinion figures presented here were generated using a cell-weighting procedure (Berinsky 2006). White respondents were weighted by region, gender, and education (or professional status when education was not measured). Black respondents were weighted by gender only (because of the relatively small cell sizes).

[32]*The New York Times*, for instance, regularly published lists of war deaths from the Tri-State area.

> In the Second World War—"the good war"—the public had an excellent cause. Of course Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and Germany's declaration of war on the United States contributed greatly to support for U.S. entry into the war. But support also derived from the shared perception of important stakes and vast benefits of eliminating a grave threat to U.S. security and from optimism that the outcome would be a decisive victory and punishment of the Axis powers. . . . Further contributing to support for the war was a desire for punishment as a consequence of the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, such atrocities as the Bataan Death March, reports of the Japanese torture of U.S. prisoners of war, and Germany's holocaust. (1996, 14–15)

These explanations may seem plausible in retrospect, but public opinion data from the 1940s does not provide support for such accounts. Knowledge of the atrocities discussed by Larson, such as the Holocaust, was thin during the war. In January 1943, only 47% of the population thought that Germany was engaged in the mass destruction of Europe's Jewish population.[33] Even when a belief in the existence of concentration camps became widespread in late 1944—when 76% of the public believed that "the Germans have murdered many people in concentration camps"—only about a third of respondents thought that the toll at the camps would rise above 100,000. Furthermore, at several points in time, Gallup and Hadley Cantril's Office of Public Opinion Research (OPOR) asked the public if they had "a clear idea what the war is about." In March 1942, almost four months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, only 43% of Americans felt they had such an idea. By July, that figure rose to 62% but, for the rest of the war, the percentage of Americans who agreed with the statement largely fluctuated in the 65–70% range, rising to 75% in June 1944, but falling below 60% in March 1944. Thus, while a majority of Americans could identify a war aim, a sizeable minority could not. Certainly, the specific context of World War II helped engender high levels of support for the war. However, support for the U.S. effort at the time was not as self-evident as it was in retrospect. As Mueller aptly notes, "the major reasons for supporting [World War II] were largely unappreciated while it was going on" (1973, 65). Thus, the existing rationalist accounts that attribute continued public support to the benefits made clear by ongoing wartime events bear only a modest relationship with the data.

[33]The question read, "It is said that two million Jews have been killed in Europe since the war began. Do you think this is true, or just a rumor?"

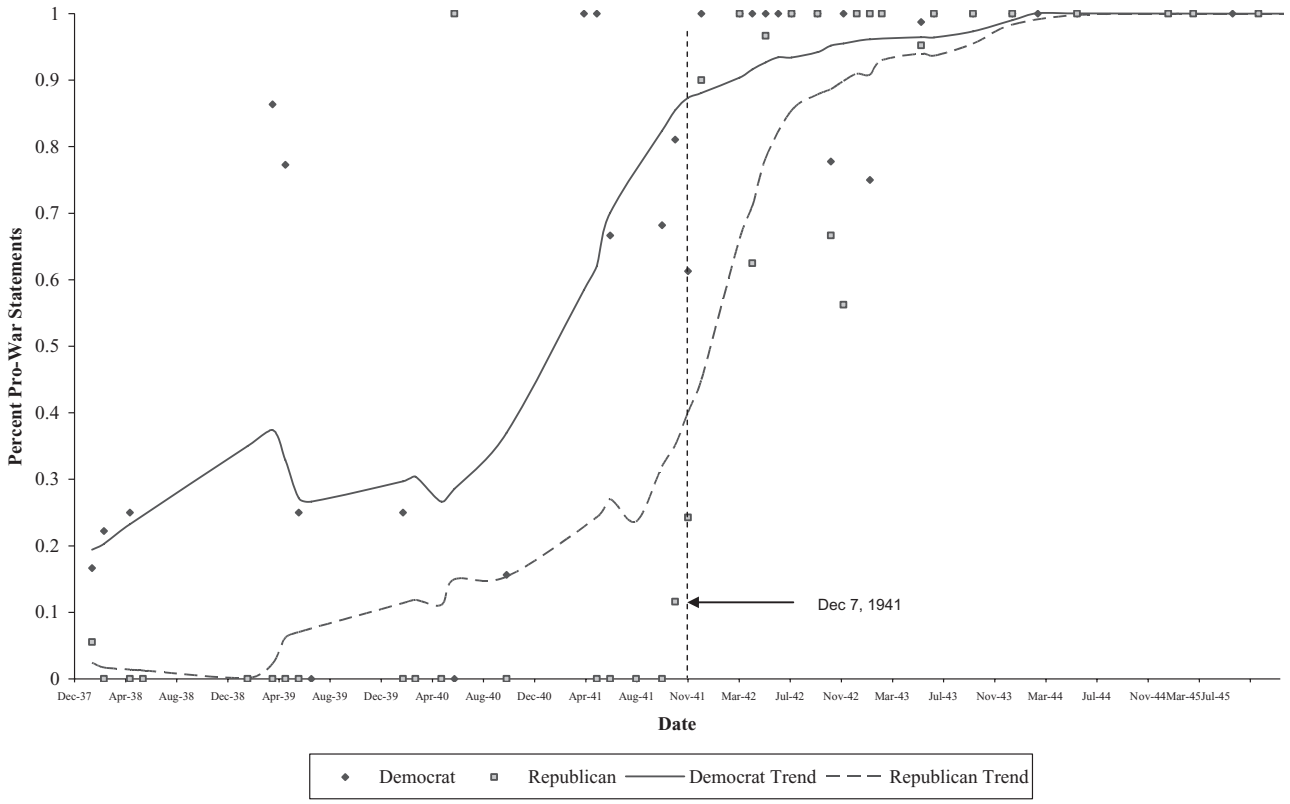
Polarization and Mainstream Effects

What, then, can explain continued public support for the war? As argued above, my contention is that it was not the direct influence of events that determined support for World War II, but rather the patterns of elite conflict during the 1930s and 1940s. Legro's (2000) study of political rhetoric in the 1930s and 1940s indicates that from 1938 through the end of 1941, support among elites for some form of U.S. involvement in World War II increased generally over time. However, the gap between FDR and his critics on the necessity and wisdom of U.S involvement in World War II remained large. For instance, Legro (2000) finds that FDR's critics—represented by the editorial page of the *Chicago Tribune*, a paper that can be seen as the mouthpiece of the isolationist wing of the Republican Party—moved in an internationalist direction through 1941. However, FDR's position consistently outpaced that of his critics. Beginning in 1939, FDR moved in a strongly internationalist direction, but it was not until 1942 that the Tribune expressed any support for military commitments abroad. Conversely, from 1942 on, "the collective orthodoxy embraced the necessity of international cooperation and multilateralism" (2000, 261).

Additional evidence for the nature of elite discourse comes from an analysis of the Congressional Record (see the online Appendix E for details of coding). Figure 2 presents the proportion of prowar to antiwar statements of members of Congress from 1938 to 1945, broken down by party. As the figure demonstrates, for the entire period, Democrats in Congress offered a message that was consistently more prowar in tone than that of their colleagues across the aisle. Moreover, among Democrats in the pre-Pearl Harbor period, the prowar stance reached a majority position by early 1941. Though Republicans softened their antiwar stance even before Pearl Harbor—reflecting the general internationalist trend in rhetoric found by Legro—they lagged behind Democrats. After Pearl Harbor, however, both parties expressed a strong prowar message.

In sum, this analysis of elite discourse demonstrates that FDR took a strong prowar stance before Pearl Harbor. Over time, and even before Pearl Harbor, his position was increasingly backed by Democrats in Congress. Though FDR's critics—both in Congress and in the press—also moved in an internationalist direction from 1938 until 1941, the gap between these two parties remained large. Thus, with the notable exception of the 1940 presidential election discussed below, elite discourse split along the lines of

FIGURE 2 Congressional Record Content Analysis



support for FDR before Pearl Harbor, but presented a largely united front after the United States entered the war. This line of argument is not intended to minimize the importance of Pearl Harbor in shaping opinion on the war. However, given the ephemeral nature of rally effects (Brody 1991), it is clear that greater attention needs to be paid to how support for the war was sustained through the nearly four years of U.S. involvement. The elite cue theory suggests that the key is the nature of elite discourse from this time; we should see the polarization pattern of support before U.S. entry into the war, and—following the pattern of elite discourse—the mainstream pattern after that point.

To test these expectations, we must focus on the expressed preferences of supporters and opponents of the President. Though there are several predispositions relevant to the study of war, in this period support for FDR seems the most appropriate one, given FDR's role in pushing the United States to aid England and the prevalence of isolationist tendencies among his opponents in the Republican Party. From 1939 until 1941, we would expect that supporters of FDR who are attentive to politics should be more likely to adopt FDR's position than similar individuals who do not follow politics. Specifically, they should be more likely to state that the United States should be willing to risk war to aid the Allied countries, if not enter the war immediately. Opponents of FDR, on the other hand, should be no more likely to support aiding the Allies as their levels of attention to elite discourse increase (with the exception of the 1940 presidential campaign, discussed below). However, with U.S. entry into the war in December 1941, discourse unified behind the President's position; both Democratic and Republican politicians supported the war. The mainstream pattern of support for the war should therefore emerge during this time. Regardless of an individual's political predispositions, those citizens with higher levels of political information should express greater support for the administration's policies than citizens with less information.

Data and Analysis

I draw upon a series of polls conducted by Gallup, OPOR, and Roper from 1939 to 1944 to examine the dynamics of war support. The first set of these polls was conducted in the period before Pearl Harbor; the second set of polls was conducted in the period after

the United States entered the war.[34] In line with the elite cue theory, my expectation was that public opinion, measured in 1939 and 1941, would exhibit the polarization pattern, while opinion measured in the polls conducted after U.S. entry into the war would exhibit the mainstream pattern.[35] I also draw upon an AIPO poll from October 1940 which demonstrates that when elite rhetoric concerning the wisdom of intervention shifted, though briefly, during the 1940 Presidential campaign, the dynamics of public opinion shifted as well.

As noted in the Iraq analysis reported above, to determine whether the mainstream or polarization pattern best characterizes public opinion, we need individual-level measures of three quantities: support for the war, political predispositions, and levels of political information. The opinion polls collected by Gallup, Roper, and OPOR contain measures of all the necessary quantities, albeit inconsistently. First, consider the primary independent variables: predispositions and information. We have available several measures that tap support for the President. I use two of these measures: (1) who the respondent voted for in the last election; and, (2) whether she approves or disapproves of FDR.[36] Each of these measures has its strengths and weakness. The respondent's vote in the last election is an exogenous measure of their support for Roosevelt. However, it is possible that people who found FDR persuasive in the past—in particular during his landslide 1936 reelection campaign—would no longer support him at the time of the survey. The approval measure, on the other hand, captures precisely the contemporaneous support for the president I seek to tap, but introduces potential endogeneity concerns; respondents could express support for the President *because* of his position on the war. Thus, where possible, I use both measures in concert to create a predisposition measure that parses out the strong supporters of FDR from the strong opponents of FDR. I label those individuals who voted for FDR in the last election and currently support him as "pro-FDR." Respondents who voted against FDR and currently disapprove of his performance are "anti-FDR."[37] Measuring the second independent variable, political information, is clear cut. A number of polls from 1939 to 1945 asked questions concerning political leaders, geography, or knowledge of current events that are similar in form to measures of political information used today (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Zaller 1992).[38]

Finally, turning to the dependent variables—question of support for war—different strategies need to be adopted for different periods of the conflict. Before the United States entered World War II, pollsters often asked if the United States should become involved in the war and attempted to gauge the conditions under which the public would be willing to risk entry into war. However, measuring support for the war after Pearl Harbor is a less straightforward task. Unlike Vietnam, Korea, and the Gulf Wars, pollsters never regularly asked respondents if becoming involved in the military conflict was a "mistake." To tap into support for the war, it is necessary to measure war support in an indirect manner. There are a number of items appropriate to such an analytic strategy. Pollsters measured support for the U.S. diplomatic and military aims, both contemporaneously and in the future. These questions can be used to measure underlying support for the military and governmental objectives of the war effort. For instance, several organizations asked respondents if the United States should adopt an internationalist posture and take an active role in world affairs after the war, thereby embracing the dominant orthodoxy in foreign policy that emerged after Pearl Harbor (Legro 2000). Admittedly, these questions are not perfect measures of support for war. Fortunately, more direct measures of support for the war effort exist; several polls during this time asked if the United States should make peace with Germany

[34]The pre-war polls were conducted by Gallup in November 1939, June 1941, and August 1941, as well as a poll conducted by OPOR in January 1941. The second set of polls includes surveys conducted by Gallup in August 1943, OPOR in June 1942 and June 1944 and Roper in March 1943.

[35]It would be ideal to examine more directly the relationship among elite cues, wartime events, and public support for war. Unfortunately, the data from the era is rather thin and the polls with the necessary measures are limited to those presented here.

[36]I use a measure of support for FDR, the primary partisan cue-giver during this time in place of partisanship, which was not asked consistently during this period.

[37]In cases where I lack one of the two measures, I use the single measure—past vote choice or presidential approval—in my analyses. The specific measures used in the different analyses are presented in online Appendix F. In all cases, however it should be noted that the basic results presented below are robust to the specific predisposition measure used (approval, past vote choice, or the composite measure).

[38]Online Appendix F details the items used to construct the information measures. These measures vary in quality across different surveys, but in both time periods analyzed here—pre Pearl Harbor and post Pearl Harbor—some surveys with deep information scales exist. The consistency of the results across different surveys—those with slim measures and those with deep measures—in a given time period bolsters my case that there was a fundamental change in the dynamics of opinion after December 1941.

under current conditions. All told, then, the existing opinion poll data contains the measures necessary to conduct repeated individual-level analysis over time and trace out the individual-level processes of opinion formation and change.

For each poll, I followed the analytic strategy used in the Iraq analysis above and ran a multinomial logit where the dependent variable—various indicators of support for administration policy—is a function of: (1) pro/anti-FDR predisposition, (2) information levels,[39] (3) interactions between FDR predispositions and the information term, and (4) a series of demographic variables to control for biases arising from sampling concerns (see Berinsky 2006). Instead of presenting the coefficients from my analysis, I present graphs of the predicted effects of information and political predispositions on respondents' support for war (the full coefficients used to generate the figures are presented in the online Appendix G).

Figure 3 demonstrates that, as predicted by the elite cue theory, the polarization pattern characterizes opinion outside of the 1940 presidential campaign period through the middle of 1941. The first panel of that figure presents analysis of a question in November 1939 that asked whether respondents "approve the changes which Congress made in the Neutrality Act which permits nations at war to buy arms and airplanes in this country." The figure demonstrates that as information levels increase, opponents of FDR are much less likely to support changing the law. The difference between the high and low information opponents of FDR is significant.[40] High- and medium-information supporters of FDR, on the other hand, are more likely to support the change than are low-information FDR supporters. In the next panel, I present the results of a similar analysis using data from a January 1941 poll. As information levels increase, supporters of the president are more likely to endorse the administration's position that it is more important to help England than it is to stay out of the war. By contrast, opponents of FDR are equally likely to express an anti-administration position, regardless of their information levels. The polarization pattern of opinion continued through the middle of 1941. The next row of Figure 3 demonstrates this pattern on two questions relating to the war. The first asks whether the respondent would support a peace plan that would allow Germany to keep the land it had occupied through the spring of 1941. The second question more directly concerns U.S. involvement in the war, asking if "the U.S. Navy should be used to convoy ships carrying war materials to Britain." Though the polarization pattern is more pronounced on the question of the peace plan, opinion is still significantly polarized along lines of support for FDR in the case of the use of convoys. Furthermore, as the bottom panel demonstrates, this pattern of polarization continues to characterize opinion on the question of convoys one month later.

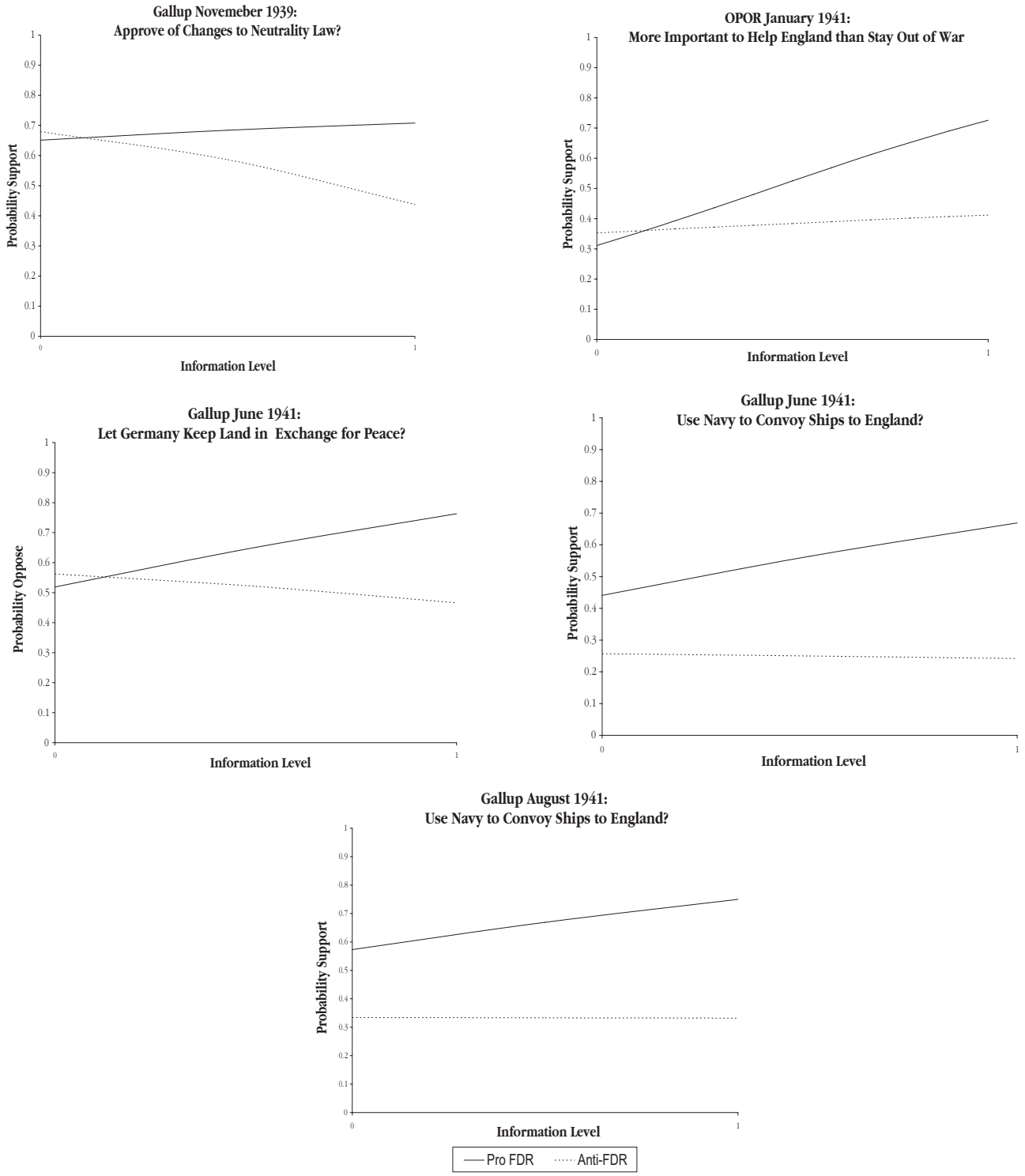
Consistent with expectation, the pattern of public support for military action changed greatly after the United States entered the war. The surveys used here cover various times during the war and encompass data from several survey organizations, but the result is the same. In line with the expectations of the elite cue theory, as discourse moved from a two-sided to a one-sided flow in 1941, the public followed suit. Measured in a variety of ways—whether the United States should send its army abroad, whether the United States should take an active role in world affairs after the War, and, most critically, whether the United States should make peace with Germany if Hitler were overthrown—individuals more attuned to elite discourse were more supportive of an active U.S. role, regardless of their predispositions regarding FDR (see Figure 4). To be precise, unlike the pre-1942 data analyzed above, the effect of information does not distinguish supporters and opponents of the president.[41]

[39]I also performed an initial set of analyses where I included information level squared (and interactions between the quadratic term and the FDR predisposition measures) to capture potential nonlinearities. If the quadratic terms were jointly significant—as they were in two cases—I used the results of the runs with the quadratic terms to generate figures similar to those presented below. In both of these cases, the figures were nearly identical. To preserve continuity across analyses, I used only the linear information specification.

[40]By "significant" I mean that the effect of information among supporters of FDR is significantly different from opponents of FDR in a statistical sense at the .10 level (and at the .05 level in most cases). I conducted these statistical tests in two ways. First, I conducted an F-test to see if the interaction term between FDR supporter and information was statically distinguishable from the interaction term between FDR opponent and information. I also used CLARIFY (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000) to compute predicted levels of war support for FDR supporters and opponents at different levels of information, and confidence intervals around those predicted levels. This analysis is presented with the coefficients used to generate the figures in online Appendix G. It should, however, be noted that these statistical tests are only suggestive because the data was collected using quota-sampling methods, not probability sampling as significance tests require (see online Appendix G for more detail).

[41]The shift in the dynamics of opinion is not simply a result of a change in general sentiment towards administration policies during wartime. On domestic issues, evidence of a two-sided flow remained (see Berinsky 2007).

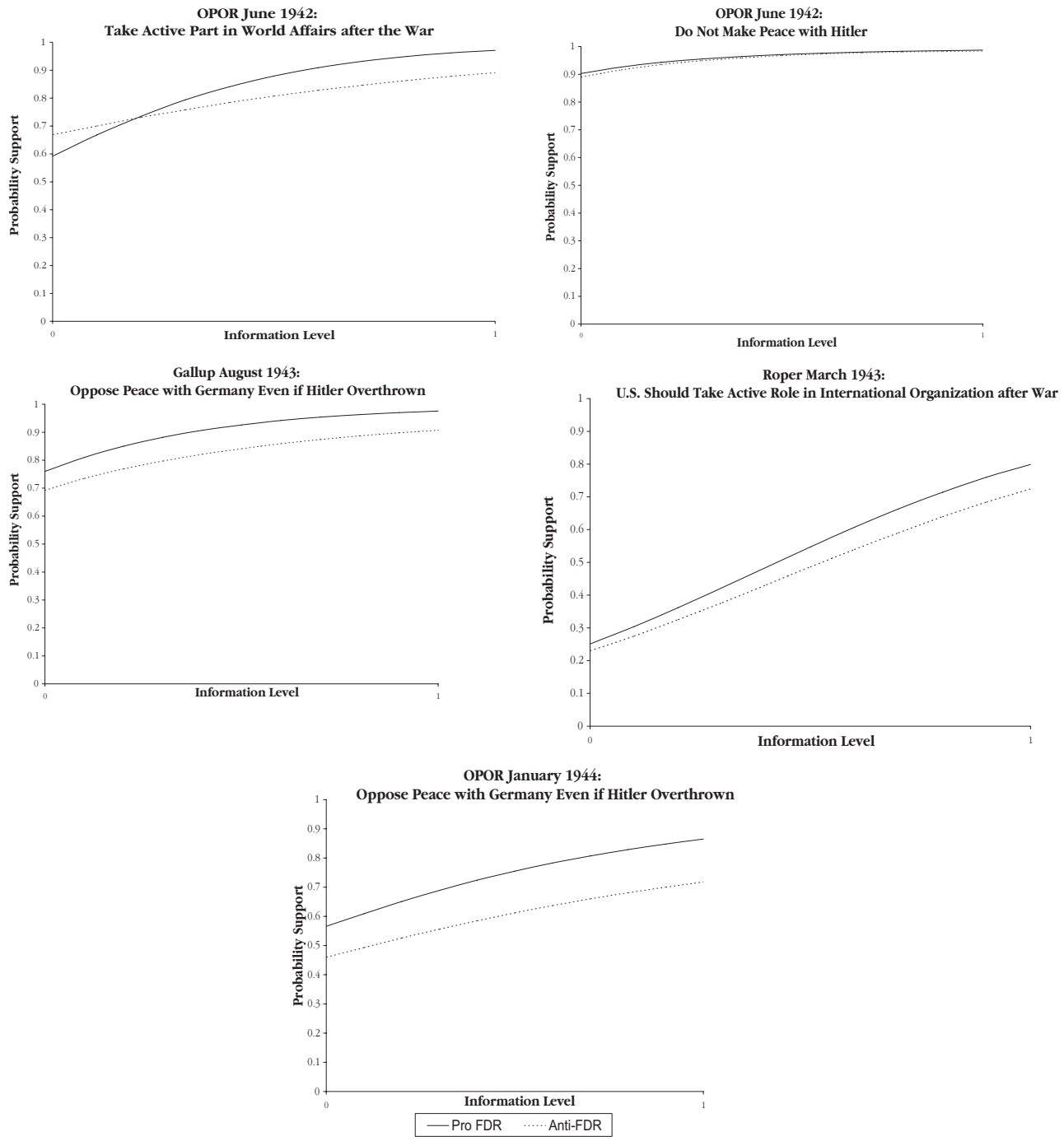
FIGURE 3 Evidence of Polarization Pattern



The Election of 1940

To this point, I have presented evidence that citizens who opposed FDR changed their behavior with the onset of the Second World War. I argue that this change is the direct result of a change in patterns of elite conflict. But it could be that individuals' behavior changed for other reasons. For instance, perhaps after 1941, the interests of FDR's opponents changed. More problematic for my position, it could be that events of late 1941 themselves directly changed how individuals processed information concerning the war—that is, it

FIGURE 4 Evidence of Mainstream Pattern



could be that Pearl Harbor changed beliefs about how effective isolationist positions were likely to be for U.S. interests. Under this view, those individuals who were most politically informed would be able to make the same calculations as partisan political actors, mirroring the opinions of those elites, but not taking their cue from elite positions. The observed mainstream pattern might therefore be the results of simultaneous movement in the interests of the opponents of FDR and not a result of elite influence.

Although I do not have direct evidence that changes in elite discourse led to changes in the dynamics of opinion in late 1941, I do have indirect evidence from a survey taken around the 1940 election. I find that when the messages of partisan political actors regarding the wisdom on intervention shifted—though briefly—the dynamics of public opinion shifted as well.

The 1940 election was somewhat surprising in that the foreign policy positions of the major party

candidates resembled a one-sided flow. In their convention that summer, the Republicans did not nominate an isolationist like Ohio's Robert Taft or Michigan's Arthur Vandenberg. Instead, in what Kennedy (1999) describes as an "astonishing surprise," the Republicans nominated an erstwhile Democrat, Wendell Willkie, for the ticket. On domestic issues, unlike the 1936 Presidential contest, there was not significant conflict between the two major-party candidates' positions; though Willkie had clashed with the Roosevelt administration over economic issues, he refrained from endorsing laissez-fair economic policy and gave his blessing to most of the New Deal social legislation (Kennedy 1999). The gap between FDR and his Republican opponent was, however, especially small on foreign policy. As Kennedy notes, "Willkie was an unshakable internationalist. He had publicly criticized Nazi aggression and had spoken out eloquently in favor of repealing the arms embargo and in support of aid to Britain" (1999, 456). Willkie went so far as to say that he was "in agreement with many of the basic international objectives of this administration at the present time" (Casey 2001, 27).[42] Thus, for most of the fall of 1940, there was a single message emanating from both campaigns regarding the wisdom of involvement in World War II.[43] Furthermore, surveys from the time suggest that the politically informed segment of the mass public recognized Willkie's divergence from the Republican orthodoxy of the time. In an October 1940 Roper Survey, nearly four times as many respondents thought that Willkie would favor selling naval vessels to Britain (42%) as compared to those who said that he would not (12%; Cantril and Strunk 1951, 982).[44]

The 1940 election therefore provides an interlude where the normally two-sided discourse surrounding war became one-sided in a highly salient context. Though Willkie's nomination was not purely exogenous to the political environment, his candidacy introduced a significant change in the political rhetoric of FDR's most prominent opponent. We can therefore examine opinion data to see if it is best characterized by the polarization pattern, as it was in August 1939 and January 1941, or if the brief but powerful change in discourse among visible political actors led to a corresponding change in the dynamics of mass opinion along levels of political engagement. The October 1940 Gallup poll provides such an opportunity because it contains two questions relating to war: (1) Should we help England if the British would lose without our aid and (2) Should we send airplanes to England? These questions do not perfectly replicate the items examined in Figure 3, but they are highly similar in spirit to those questions. In addition—and unlike other polls from the election season—this poll contains the information measures necessary to conduct analysis parallel to that presented in Figures 3 and 4.[45] As Figure 5 demonstrates, opinion on these questions follows the mainstream

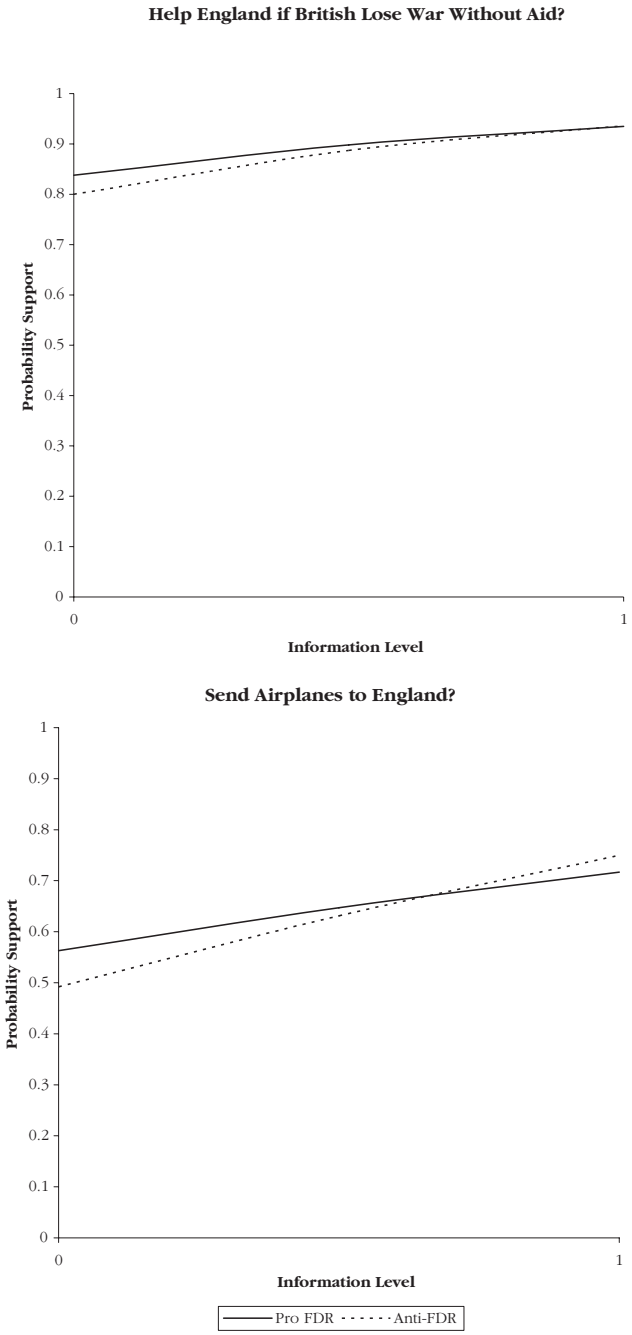
[42]Willkie also publicly supported the 1940 Selective Services Act, which passed in September 1940 and provided for the first peacetime draft in American history.

[43]Willkie's message did change in the closing days of the campaign. At the end of October, seeking to gain traction in the campaign by appealing to the Republican base, Willkie began to claim that FDR's aid to Britain policy would mire the U.S. in the European conflict. On October 23, for instance, Willkie said about FDR, "On the basis of his past performance with pledges to the people, if you reelect him, you may expect war in April 1941." Barnes claims that this shift in strategy was the work of party professionals who "sold him on the reverse technique of calling Roosevelt a war monger- . . . The continued gloomy reports from opinion polls and Willkie's gambling instinct led him to try it" (1952, 225). The Gallup poll I examine here was conducted on October 11–16th and captures the single-message dynamics that prevailed for the majority of the 1940 presidential campaign.

[44]The remaining 46% of respondents did not know where Willkie stood, indicating that there was a significant portion of the mass public that was unengaged with the change in the elite signal, a necessary condition for emergence of the mainstream patter demonstrated in Figure 5. The mainstream and polarization patterns, after all, are caused by differential behavior of informed segments of the mass public relative to the uniformed segments of that public. Unfortunately, the individual-level data is unavailable, so it is impossible to perform the weighting adjustments described in the online Appendix. Weighting of similar questions in other surveys suggests that the raw data presented here probably overstates the proportion of the population that was politically informed. However, there is no reason to believe that the ratio of correct to incorrect answers would be dramatically altered by weighting—in all likelihood the proportion of respondents who did not know where Willkie stood would increase relative to the other two categories.

[45]This Gallup poll was conducted using the same methodology and sampling frame as other Gallup polls from this time. However, unlike other polls presented here, Gallup only interviewed those respondents who said they would "be able to vote in the Presidential election this year." That said, any differences between this poll and the other polls I examine here should not change the over-time inferences I draw in this paper for two reasons. First, as discussed elsewhere (Berinsky 2006), Gallup's sampling procedure highly overrepresented the voting population. The 1940 post-election poll, for instance, reported a turnout rate of 89% among the entire sample. Less than 2% of the sample reported that they did not vote because they were ineligible to do so. The number of respondents excluded by Gallup's screen was therefore almost certainly quite small. Second, even in the unlikely event that the October 1940 survey greatly overrepresents voters relative to other surveys examined in this paper, it is unlikely that the over-time patterns of opinion polarization would change. The difference between the mainstream and the polarization pattern, after all, manifests among the most informed segment of the population. Considering the strong link between political participation and information, it is highly unlikely that excluding those ineligible to

FIGURE 5 Gallup October 1940: Evidence of Mainstream Pattern



pattern, therefore bolstering the position of the primacy of elite cues. Thus it is not simply that Pearl Harbor and Pearl Harbor alone changed the dynamics of opinion; with a salient shift in elite rhetoric occurring more than one year before the United States formally entered the war, the dynamics of opinion changed as well.

vote would change the composition of the highly informed segment of the sample enough to reverse the mainstream pattern found in Figure 5.

Conclusion

All told, the results presented in this paper challenge the view that the events on the battlefield are sufficient to explain the dynamics of public reaction to war and to suggest that patterns of elite agreement and disagreement play a critical role in shaping popular responses to war. In two seemingly diverse cases, the structure of opinion looks remarkably similar. The elite cue theory advanced here demonstrates how prominent cue givers can provide structure to the foreign policy opinions of the mass public. Certainly, additional work needs to be done to test the elite cue theory against Zaller's path-breaking RAS theory. But the evidence presented here provides a clear indictment not just of the casualties hypothesis—which has been criticized by other authors (Burk 1999; Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005–2006; Klarevas 2002; Kull and Ramsay 2001), but also more generally of event-response theories that posit that individuals make decisions regarding the wisdom of war through a cost/benefit calculation. As the discussion of the survey data from World War II demonstrates, even in a highly charged climate, a large proportion of citizens did not have a clear idea of what the war was about and were ignorant of the Nazi atrocities. Only in retrospect do these facts seem to justify the U.S. involvement. During times of war, individual-level knowledge of the most basic facts of war is weak; the power of elite cues is not.

This is not to say that wartime events are meaningless for the study of public opinion and war. The patterns of political consensus during World War II implicitly beg the question of why, unlike the case in other conflicts in American history, elite discourse did not shift during the course of the war, even in the face of mounting costs and the uncertain outcome of the military effort in 1942 and 1943. Here, perhaps, there is a role for the direct effects of military events. There is no evidence that the mass public makes the complex calculations described by Larson (1996) and other authors who posit that the collective public balances costs and benefits when deciding whether to lend support to military action. But it is reasonable to think that political leaders—those actors with the most at stake in a given controversy—would make such calculations. In this conception the events of war are important, but only acquire explanatory power indirectly.

Partisan political actors, not the mass public, decide whether to lend support to an administration's policy depending on the costs of the conflict and the perceived success of the intervention (Levy 1989). The public in the aggregate appears "rational" only because they take cues from elites who sensibly incorporate diplomatic actions and events on the battlefield into their decisions to support or oppose war. Thus the phenomenon seen as driven by the cognitive processes of the collective mass public can be recast as an elite-level phenomenon. Providing evidence for this view, Gartner, Segura, and Barratt (2004) find that variation in state-level casualties affected the positions of incumbent senators and their challengers during the Vietnam War. But as the World War II case indicates, casualties do not necessarily define the flow of elite discourse. By refocusing the discussion of the effects of events from the mass level to the elite level, we can better explain the causes and consequences of convergence and divergence in elite discourse.

Work in this vein has important implications for the study of international relations more generally. Reiter and Stam (2002) argue that democracies are hesitant to enter war and only become involved in wars they are likely to win. If a democracy is caught in a difficult and protracted war, it is likely to give in and accept a draw. Reiter and Stam attribute this process to the sensitivity of the democratic public to casualties. But if it is the dynamics of elite conflict, rather than mere casualties, that determine public support for war, then to properly understand the decision to go to and wage war, we need to understand how domestic politics and partisan divisions structure how ordinary citizens come to understand real-world events. To date, even the best work on public opinion concerning war has failed to account for the effects of partisan and other societal cleavages on levels of support for war. In these models, the public is an undifferentiated mass, reacting in a uniform manner to changes in the course of war. By allowing for heterogeneous responses to the tides of war and by explicitly allowing a role for the elite mediation of foreign events, we can better understand how citizens in democracies can guide and constrain the government's ability to wage war. Even if one does not agree with Page and Shapiro's (1992) contention that government affairs can "conceal or misrepresent reality without being challenged," surely political elites have the agency and flexibility to interpret the meaning of ambiguous wartime events. Students of international relations need to take seriously the mechanisms of domestic politics. It is not simply a direct reaction to casualties or victories on the battlefield that causes support for war to wax or wane. The analyses presented here indicate that it is how the war experience gets filtered through domestic politics that matters most. The experience with World War II demonstrates the central role that partisan political actors play in influencing the preferences of the mass public. The fact that World War II—unlike Vietnam and Korea—was ultimately successful should not obscure the potential hazards that could occur when patterns of political conflict among government actors structure the opinions of the mass public. Under similar circumstances of elite harmony perhaps different ends—a conflict with a costly and disastrous conclusion—could emerge from similar means.

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