PUBLIC OPINION ON IRAQ

Gallup asks: Is the Iraq War worthwhile?

- December 2004: 63% Support War; 33% Oppose War
- February 2004: 49% Support War; 49% Oppose War

Why the Drop in Support?

External Events?

Christian Science Monitor (Feb 13th) lists 4 reasons
1. Rise in Casualties.
2. No evidence of WMD.
4. David Kay’s comments – Daniel Goure, Lexington Institute, Arlington, Va

But…

Letter from Tom Daschle and Nancy Pelosi: “One of the major questions that needs to be addressed is whether senior administration officials, including members of the Cabinet and senior White House officials, misled the Congress and the public about the nature of the threat from Iraq.”

Bill O’Reilly on WMD: “I think all Americans should be concerned about this … [I’m] much more skeptical about the Bush administration now.”
CASUALTIES, ELITE DISCOURSE AND WAR

1. What drives public opposition to war?

- Mueller: External events – *Casualties*
  i. As casualties rise, costs of war rise
  ii. Public will not tolerate high costs
  iii. Not explicitly political. Rests on notions of collective rationality
  iv. Has been modified to include costs and benefits – Larson (1996)

- Zaller: Elite discourse
  i. **Mainstream Pattern**: If elite discourse is unified, more informed citizens will be more supportive of war
  ii. **Polarization Pattern**: If elite discourse is split, more informed citizens will follow those leaders who share their political views
  iii. Role for political process and conflict

2. Different explanations with different mechanisms

3. In Korea and Vietnam, the mechanisms of both theories are collinear with time.
   - Over time, cumulative casualties increase
   - Over time, elite discourse splits

4. World War II is a critical test
   - Over time, cumulative casualties increase
   - Over time, elite discourse remains unified
CASUALTIES, ELITE DISCOURSE AND WAR: UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

1. What determines flow of elite discourse?
   - What are conditions under which elites remain unified?
   - Perhaps arguments that have been made about the mass public (aversion to casualties, cost/benefit analysis) can be applied to elites

2. Can we develop a unified theory of public opinion and war?

3. Implications for theories of Democracy at War

4. Applications for Policy
   - Peter Feaver: “The Beltway wisdom is that public support collapses in the face of casualties, and by casualties I mean fatalities”
   - Retired Marine Lt. Col. Gary D. Solis “We’ve never been as casualty-averse as either the politicians said or the military thought, but that can change in an instant.”
More Important to Help England than Stay out of War

Information Level vs. Probability

FDR Supporters

Willkie Supporters

More Important to Help England than Stay out of War

Information vs. Probability

Approve FDR

Disapprove FDR
OPOR January 1941: Evidence of Two-Sided Information Flows

More Important to Defeat Germany than Stay out of War

More Important to Defeat Germany than Stay out of War

Information

Probability

FDR Supporters

Wilkie Supporters

Approve FDR

Disapprove FDR
Don't Make Peace with Hitler

Don't Make Peace with the German Army

FDR
Willkie

FDR
Willkie
Send U.S. Army Abroad

Take Active Part in World Affairs After War is Over
ROPER MARCH 1943: EVIDENCE OF ONE-SIDED INFORMATION FLOWS

U.S. Should Play a Larger Role in World Affairs After the War

U.S. Should Take an Active Part in an International Organization after War
Support A Draft after The War

- Democrat
- Republican
Next Administration Should Work with Businessmen Over Taking Care of People