

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Wanted, Dead or Alive: Media Frames, Frame Adoption, and Support for the War in Afghanistan

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This paper attempts to measure the impact of naturally occurring media frames on public support for a policy. Content analysis of network nightly news during late October of 2001 reveals that U.S. media framed the events of September 11 in terms of both war and crime. A concurrent survey of 328 Tennesseans reveals that rather than adopting either a war frame or a crime frame, audiences combined elements of these media frames in various ways and that their subsequent understanding of the events of September 11 had an impact on their support for the war in Afghanistan. The results reveal the complexity of the framing phenomenon in natural environments and suggest the need for better measures of how audiences perceive media frames as well as further investigation into framing as a means of coalition building.

doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00332.x

In the weeks that followed the September 11 attacks in the United States, Americans turned to the news media to help them understand what was happening and what it meant. From moment to moment, they got different answers, for like most terrorist acts, the September 11 attacks were more than criminal but not exactly martial. Addressing the nation on September 20, President Bush said, "On September 11th, [the] enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country" (Bush, 2001, para. 12). But he also justified his focus on the Taliban leadership of Afghanistan by saying, "By aiding and abetting murder, the Taliban regime is committing murder" (Bush, 2001, para. 20). The FBI, the Justice Department, and various law enforcement agencies investigated the incident and attempted to beef up domestic security. They also worked to determine the origin of envelopes laced with anthrax that were being mailed to various government and media offices. Meanwhile, the Departments of State and Defense and the U.S. military responded to the attack's international dimensions as they might to an act of war. On October 7, with widespread American public support, the U.S. military launched air strikes against Afghanistan.

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Available theories of media/government relationships (e.g., Bennett, 1990) suggest that both the criminal and the militaristic aspects of September 11 were represented in the news media because each of these frames had important official sponsors. Second-level, or aspect, agenda setting would predict that whichever theme appears most frequently in the news media is also the most likely to be internalized by citizens. Yet, available research on framing offers few predictions about how audiences might have responded to such a media environment. To date, framing studies have considered *either* the construction of frames in naturally occurring media texts *or* the effects of experimenter-created frames on subjects. There is little nonexperimental work in the vein of what Scheufele (2000) calls frame setting, the process by which media frames affect audience frames—a process analogous in level, if not in mechanism, to that of agenda setting. Moreover, early studies of framing (e.g., Iyengar, 1987) explored the impacts of a single frame on audience opinion, whereas more recent studies (e.g., Druckman, 2004) have examined the impacts of carefully balanced opposing frames. September 11 coverage, in contrast, involved competing frames that were not necessarily oppositional. Thus, although the literature on framing effects has grown apace, it remains difficult to connect the theoretical findings to actual political discourse. In this paper, we attempt to bridge those gaps by examining how competing frames that are present in the media are adopted by audiences and how those frames, once adopted, influence public support for a policy. We first conduct a content analysis to document the extent to which the news media used a crime frame versus a war frame in their September 11 coverage in the weeks after the event. We then use survey data to explore how audiences adopted components of these competing frames. Finally, we examine the consequences of the frames adopted for public support of military action in Afghanistan. Our research design allows for the possibility that audiences adopt portions of media frames rather than adopting frames in their entirety, and thus that audiences combine framing elements in unexpected ways that impact their support for policies. The results offer a richer picture of how framing works in natural settings.

Theoretical distinctions between framing, agenda setting, and priming

There has been ongoing controversy about whether agenda setting, priming, and framing are distinct theoretical paradigms or simply linguistic distinctions without difference. The heart of the controversy is over whether the three phenomena share a common mechanism (Scheufele, 2000). It has been widely argued that agenda-setting and priming effects are produced by repetition (at the level of media texts) and accessibility (at the level of audience reception). In essence, agenda setting posits that the more the media cover an issue, the more top-of-mind and salient that issue is for the public, and the thoughts that easily come to mind are the ones that people sample in decision making (e.g., Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele). Priming can be considered a consequence of agenda setting: Once an issue has been primed, or made salient, it plays a larger role in evaluations of leaders and policies (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Some researchers have argued that framing is no more than aspect, or second-level, agenda setting. Where first-level agenda setting makes issues salient, second-level agenda setting makes aspects of the issue salient by the same mechanism (e.g., Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; McCombs, 1997; Zaller, 1992). McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar and Rey (1997) cite Entman's (1993, p. 52) salience-based definition of framing to support their argument that framing and second-level agenda setting are essentially the same: "To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text* [emphasis in original]."

Yet elsewhere in this essay, Entman (1993) suggests that frames work differently than agendas. His description of a frame suggests that salience is not produced by repetition but rather by the structure of narratives. Frames, he says,

define problems—determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnose causes—identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments—evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies—offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects. (p. 52)

Whereas agenda-setting and priming theories suggest that by repeating themes, media pass on their representations of salience to the audience, framing theory suggests that material that is incorporated into a narrative structure will be more salient to audiences than material that is not. Framing also suggests that the same information can be perceived differently depending upon the narrative in which it appears (e.g., Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). In later work, Entman (2003) contrasts repetition with "cultural resonance" as a mechanism for influencing audience reception of media texts.

This controversy over the relative explanatory powers of repetition and resonance is unresolvable in its current formulation in part because agenda-setting researchers and framing researchers measure different dependent variables. Agenda-setting research measures effects by seeing how closely the media agenda matches the public agenda. Framing research, on the other hand, measures frame adoption indirectly by observing how exposure to a media frame shifts public opinion on a relevant policy issue. In this study, we propose to measure the adoption of media frames directly. This approach allows us to shed some light on the relative power of repetition and resonance as explanations for media effects, although we cannot ascertain with precision the media content to which each of our survey respondents was exposed. Thus, we pose the research question:

RQ1: How does the frequency of different frames in the media correspond to the frequency of their adoption in the public?

We would expect the crime frame to be more culturally resonant than the war frame because previous acts of terrorism on American soil, such as the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, were investigated as crimes and punished in the context

of the American justice system. Which frame is most common is an empirical question.

Agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects

Second-level agenda-setting theory posits that media influence public opinion by altering the relative accessibility of considerations in people's minds. That is, *what* do people think about when they think about an issue? Framing theory, on the other hand, is less about the information called to mind than it is about efforts at making sense of an issue, or *how* people think about an issue. Iyengar (1987) grounded his earliest framing studies in attribution theory, the basic assumption of which is that people habitually ask themselves why something happened, why someone did something. Similarly, one of the seminal figures in framing theory, Goffman (1974, p. 8), wrote, "I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: 'What is it that's going on here?'" To answer these questions, they employ frames in order to organize experience and make sense of it. Framing theory also draws on work in prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), which shows that presenting precisely the same choice with different implicit frames of reference can profoundly affect people's decisions. As Scheufele puts it, "Framing influences how audiences think about issues, not by making aspects of the issue more salient, but by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information" (2000, p. 309).

Some work has addressed both the "what" and the "how" of public thinking. Scheufele (2000, p. 312), who ultimately rejects accessibility as a framing mechanism, nevertheless posits that "the frequency and hierarchy of issue frames" in media outlets used by individuals influences frame adoption. Price, Tewksbury, and Powers (1997) argue that media frames alter the mix of considerations that come to mind, but they also contend that people may suppress activated knowledge if they think it is irrelevant to the decision task. Priming studies that involve the phenomenon of spreading activation (e.g., Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Valentino, 1999) might also be said to occupy a middle ground between agenda setting and framing.

Yet here again, framing theory and second-level agenda-setting theory talk past one another because they measure different dependent variables. Aspect agenda-setting research measures the correlation between the content of the media and the considerations in people's heads (typically in a natural environment) and assumes that these considerations affect issue opinions in commonsense ways. Framing research manipulates messages (typically in the lab) and assumes that the subsequently measured changes in opinion are the product of changes in how people think. Direct measures of frame adoption are almost nonexistent in experimental studies of framing effects, although it is presumably frame adoption that leads to framing effects (Scheufele, 2000). Most framing studies lack a manipulation check that would provide likely measures of how audiences perceive frames. Shah, Watts, Domke, and Fan (2002) successfully examined citizens' reactions to naturally occurring media frames, demonstrating that the public responded to certain media frames in ways that defied the manifest content of the text.

However, even they used presidential approval as a dependent variable rather than directly tapping audiences' media-based perceptions of social reality.

Adequate direct measures of frame adoption will be necessary to move studies of framing from the laboratory to natural settings. Indirect measures of the effects of frames are effective when laboratory controls against confounding variables are in place such that the only explanation for opinion change is the effect of the frame. However, the natural world of framing dynamics has too many moving parts, from shifting media frames to varying degrees of audience attention, to get by without some kind of measure of the framing elements that influence a citizen's expressed preference. Our study takes a first cut at developing such measures. We directly measure frame adoption by asking respondents whether they thought about September 11 as a crime or as an act of war. We draw on Entman's conceptual definition of frame elements to ask about which parts of these frames the audience adopted. Entman (2003) identifies problem definitions and preferred remedies as the most critical elements of media frames. We also include a more traditional framing effects measure as our ultimate dependent variable: support for a policy relevant to the frame, the war in Afghanistan.

Second-level agenda-setting and framing theory make similar predictions about the impact of frame adoption on support for the war in Afghanistan. Those who adopt both elements of the war frame (that the dead were casualties and that the perpetrators should be killed on the battlefield) should be more supportive of the war, whereas those who consistently adopt a crime frame (that the dead were murder victims and that the perpetrators should be tried in a court of law) should be less supportive. With its emphasis on repetition and accessibility, second-level agenda setting suggests that these considerations are additive—the more prowar considerations a person adopts, the more prowar his or her opinions will be. Framing theory, with its emphasis on resonance and structure, would suggest that it is the consistency of problem definition, proposed solution, and policy that generates higher levels of support among war-frame adopters. Thus,

H1: Support for the war in Afghanistan will be greater among war-frame adopters than crime-frame adopters.

Because its basic mechanism might be described as "sense making," framing theory also lets us make a prediction about the point at which support for the war in Afghanistan will begin to flag. Crime and war frames posit different premises and goals for the war. To the extent that military action in Afghanistan was portrayed as a manhunt, it would be consistent to support that action if one thought the September 11 perpetrators committed murder and should be tried. But one's support would likely dwindle if the war resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties. That outcome might be reconciled with a war frame for September 11, but it would be more difficult for a crime-frame adopter.

H2: Under adverse conditions, support for the war in Afghanistan will decrease more for crime-frame adopters than for war-frame adopters.

Effects of multiple frames

Perhaps because from the beginning, agenda-setting studies were conducted in natural environments, agenda-setting theory in its various levels has always coped comfortably with the diversity of the media environment when it comes to either issues or considerations. Framing is a different story. First developed by theorists exploring media hegemony (e.g., Entman, 1991) and by experimental media effects researchers (e.g., Iyengar, 1987), framing theory in its first decade had little to say about the possible existence of multiple competing frames and the effects of frame competition on audiences.

More recently, there has been a great deal of movement in framing research to replicate in the lab what actually goes on in the “real world” of political discourse. Several studies have embedded their experimental designs in a survey research context that enhances their external validity because the subjects comprise a random sample of the public. Scholars also are exploring what happens when subjects are exposed to more than one frame for an issue. The evidence so far shows that the robust framing effects revealed in earlier research designs that exposed subjects to just one frame (e.g., Iyengar, 1987, 1991) are sharply attenuated by exposure to multiple, contrasting frames (e.g., Druckman, 2004; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004).

Druckman (2004) argues, based upon a between-groups comparison, that when exposed to opposing frames, respondents express what might be called “genuine” preferences, opinions apparently unaffected by the frames. As Druckman sees it, framing effects violate the tenets of rational choice. That is, people should base stable policy decisions on what best serves their own interests as determined by their social location, not on how an issue is described. He acknowledges that earlier single-message framing studies presented contexts under which rationality assumptions would not apply, but he offers his study as one in which rationality should obtain. If Druckman is correct, in a context like ours where there are competing frames, demographics and social location should account for all the explained variance in a policy attitude, and adopted frames would not explain any additional variance.

There is, however, a middle ground between the strong framing effects found in early research and the influences of social location that Druckman (2004) describes. Demographics and social location may influence frame adoption in much the way that they influence dominant or oppositional readings of the news (Hall, 1982; Morley, 1980). And to the extent that the frame that is adopted influences the interpretation of information that is encountered and the knowledge that is activated from memory, it may affect policy attitudes above and beyond the influence of demographics and social location themselves. If this is the case, the relationships between audience demographics, media frames, and policy support remain to be teased out. Thus,

H3: Demographics and social location will be related to frame adoption.

H4: Frame adoption will explain variance in support for the war in Afghanistan over and above variance explained by demographics and social location.

Although Druckman's work is pioneering, it remains limited in that it compares exactly opposing frames, following Tversky and Kahneman (1981), which are quite rare in nature. For many important public policy issues, frames are not so much opposed to one another as irrelevant to one another. Prolife and prochoice frames, for example, are not conceptual opposites. Prolife frames construct the abortion issue as one of saving or killing babies, whereas prochoice frames construct the same issue as one of granting women control over their own bodies or giving this control to the state. Because Druckman's frames are truly oppositional, his work, like much work in the experimental tradition of framing effects, invokes the assumption that frame adoption is an either/or proposition. Similarly, Nelson (2004) demonstrates that there are a variety of mechanisms by which a frame can influence public opinion, but in his experiments, the frame itself is always an undifferentiated unit. In contrast, scholars interested in frame construction have broken naturally occurring media frames into key elements (e.g., Entman, 1993, 2003; Stone, 1989), such as problem definition and policy solution. Moreover, media texts often contain only portions of a frame and rely on audiences to infer the rest based upon their existing cultural knowledge (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Where frames are competitive but not oppositional, it may be the case that audiences adopt only portions of a frame or even that they combine elements of the competing frames. Our measure of frame adoption allows for considerable flexibility with regard to which *components* of a media frame the public embraces. This combined with our use of competing frames poses new questions in framing research:

RQ2: How common is the adoption of mixed frames?

RQ3: How does the adoption of mixed frames affect support for the war in Afghanistan?

Our study cannot be considered a critical test of the relative explanatory value of framing and agenda setting as contrasting mechanisms of media influence. Indeed, it is not primarily a study of media influence. Instead, we conceptualize the mass media as making interpretive resources available to the public and ask how the public made use of those resources. The content analysis documents the perspectives that were available to audiences and gives us some indication of just how available these perspectives were. The subsequent surveys show us how these perspectives were adopted by citizens and used to evaluate the war in Afghanistan.

Method

Content analysis

In moving our study of framing from the laboratory to the real world, we lose the ability to reconstruct precisely what media content our audience has seen. Early agenda-setting studies resolved a similar challenge by documenting the content of local media in the areas where the studies were conducted. Our problem is somewhat more complex because our survey respondents lived all over Tennessee (a largely

rural state in the southeastern United States). This makes elite print media like the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* unlikely information sources for our audience. Indeed, our respondents probably shared almost no print media in common, for there are four larger cities in Tennessee (Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga) and many small municipalities, each with its own newspaper. Add to this the likelihood that people selectively exposed themselves to news sources, and the complexities of recreating citizens' media environment multiplies.

Rather than trying to reconstruct each survey respondent's specific media environment, we examined the one resource likely to be common to all of them: national broadcast network news.¹ Transcripts of nightly national news content from CBS, ABC, and NBC that mentioned the word "September" were coded from October 15 through November 2, 2001. By mid-October, the attacks in New York and Washington were consistently being referred to by the date they occurred, and we have several reasons to believe that this search term caught most of the relevant news. The alternative construction of the date, "9/11," turns up only 13 stories, 8 of which also contained the word September. Further, over 150 stories were retrieved, an average of three stories per network per day, heavy coverage in a 22-minute newscast. In contrast, a similar search for the phrase "World Trade Center" retrieved only 56 stories, suggesting that we successfully cast a wide net for representations of the terrorist attacks. We should note that our search term would not necessarily have returned all of the network news stories on the war in Afghanistan or about ongoing criminal investigations. However, our question involves how the events of September 11 were associated with war or crime. Like our survey questions, our content analysis interrogates representations of September 11 rather than representations of the war in Afghanistan or criminal investigations of terrorist acts more generally.

Content was coded at the level of the paragraph as fitting a war frame, a crime frame, a mixed crime and war frame, or as neither. Over 1,600 paragraphs appearing in 152 stories were coded. Intercoder reliability for the overall distribution of frames, based on double coding a systematic random sample of 10% of the stories, was .87 using Brennan and Prediger's kappa. Although it is regrettable that we were unable to obtain videotapes of the news content in order to include visuals in our coding, we are comforted by the fact that Graber (1990) found the majority of visual material in broadcast news complemented the verbal material and made the verbal content more memorable rather than adding additional information that would not be accounted for in the transcripts.

Because of the narrative style of television news, we did not place special emphasis on "lead" sentences or on information that appeared earlier in the story. The inverted pyramid of classic hard news in print is not a staple of broadcast news. We are interested in the narrative architecture of the story (the frame), so only paragraphs that specifically referenced elements of war or crime were coded. Although many paragraphs were coded neither war nor crime, "neither" is not the functional equivalent of "other" and so is not problematically large. Instead, paragraphs are coded as neither or "mixed" when there is no justification for assuming how they

might be read. Where paragraphs contain no direct cues or contain mixed cues with regard to the frames, we might expect the reading of these paragraphs to be highly contingent upon a combination of the specific framing cues that appear in the surrounding paragraphs and the frame that their receivers have adopted.

Only 9% of stories contained failed to contain any paragraphs that could be coded as war, crime, or mixed. Nearly half of these (6 of 14) considered the economic impacts of the September 11 attacks, which might be considered an alternative frame, but one which had a nebulous connection to public support for the war in Afghanistan. “Neither” codes also applied to paragraphs like this:

In fact, a congressional report finds the food supply extremely vulnerable, a possible answer to what’s next. Ohio’s Department of Agriculture sent this open letter to thousands of farmers, recommending new security plans including installation of alarm systems and perimeter security. (NBC Nightly News, 2001)

Such references to risk and security were common in the news, but the nature of the risk is not explicitly identified. It could be acts of war, it could be criminal acts, or it could be something else entirely (although no further alternatives emerged in our reading of the transcripts).

Mixed coding was typically associated with words like “terrorism,” “attack,” and “hijack,” which make problems explicit but are terms that were themselves in transition. For example, prior to September 11, hijacking was simply a crime. Six weeks after the bombings, its character was far more complex. The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security had similarly mixed identities. Where paragraphs clearly linked these terms with war or crime, they were so coded, but some paragraphs do not explicitly characterize these terms one way or the other.

Respondents

Our respondents were 328 Tennessee residents who were part of a split-ballot, random-digit–dial telephone survey of 614 Tennesseans conducted from October 22 until November 2, 2001. The poll’s response rate was 34.57% using the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s (AAPOR) RR3 definition² (AAPOR, 2006).

About 58% of respondents were women and 83% were White, with 9.4% identifying as African American and another 7.1% belonging to other racial groups. The mean age was 42 years and the median family income category was \$35,001–\$40,000. About a third had completed at least a 4-year college degree. Politically, the sample was a bit right of center, with 37% identifying themselves as Republicans and 29% as Democrats.

Survey measures

Frame components

The survey measured how respondents framed September 11 on two basic dimensions of frames (Entman, 1993): problem definition and desired remedy. Each was

measured as a dichotomous variable. To identify problem definition, respondents were asked if the people who died on September 11 were murder victims (crime) or war casualties (war). To identify their desired remedy, respondents were asked what they wanted to happen to the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks: to be killed on the battlefield (war) or to be tried in court (crime). Dichotomous measures almost certainly fail to capture subtleties in the ways that respondents framed the events of September 11. However, faced with extraordinary time pressures for fielding the survey and lacking any guidance in the framing literature on how to measure frame adoption, we opted to take a direct approach that corresponded to the dichotomous structure of most framing experiments. The greatest risk to this approach would be if respondents adopted some other frame entirely. However, if this happened, the data would likely contain so much noise that we would not see significant relationships between the framing variables and policy attitudes. Moreover, we might point out that experimental studies of framing incur the same risk. In failing to measure frame adoption, they assume that respondents made the same sense out of the experimental stimulus that the research team did. If our relatively crude measures reveal relationships, they probably underestimate effect sizes and certainly suggest the need for further development of measures of frame adoption.

Support for military action

Three questions were asked regarding support for military action in Afghanistan under certain circumstances. The first question simply asked for the respondents' attitudes about military action in Afghanistan. The second asked how they would feel about a ground invasion of Afghanistan, and the third asked for attitudes toward a ground invasion with civilian casualties. Responses were given on a 4-point scale from *strongly oppose* to *strongly approve*. The three items were averaged to form a scale ($\alpha = .68$) that is our main measure of support for military action. We also use responses to the three items in a repeated-measures analysis; although levels of support for the war are extraordinarily high in the simplest formulation, support drops off sharply as potential negative outcomes are added to the questions.

Results

Content analysis of media frames

National broadcast television news reports reveal that two distinct frames were applied to the events of September 11 during late October of 2001. As the war in Afghanistan got underway, with the first air strikes occurring on October 7, reporters interpreted its significance in terms of the attacks of September 11. At the same time, they reported the ongoing criminal investigations into both the September 11 attacks and the envelopes of anthrax spores that had subsequently been sent to congressional offices, television network news organizations, and others. Table 1 reveals that the war frame appears more frequently than the crime frame by a ratio of about two to

Table 1 Distribution of Frames by Network

Source	War Frame	Crime Frame	Mixed	Neither	Total
All networks	15.9 (257)	9.5 (153)	12.1 (195)	62.5 (1,007)	100 (1,612)
ABC	11.9 (57)	10.2 (49)	8.8 (42)	69.2 (332)	100 (480)
NBC	17.1 (80)	10.3 (48)	16.1 (75)	56.5 (264)	100 (467)
CBS	18.1 (120)	8.4 (56)	11.7 (78)	61.8 (411)	100 (665)

Note: Each cell shows percentage of paragraphs in transcripts within each media outlet containing each type of frame, followed by the raw number in parentheses.

one. All three networks used both frames. ABC was the most balanced (11.9% war and 10.2% crime), whereas CBS (18.05% and 8.42%) and NBC (17.13% and 10.28%) more closely approximated the overall average. Each network also included a substantial number of paragraphs that contained both war and crime elements—nearly 12% of the total.

As Table 2 reveals, although the war in Afghanistan began just before the survey was fielded, there is no obvious pattern to suggest that one frame was becoming more common than the other as the war effort geared up. Indeed, even the immediate events of the day seem to have only a limited relationship to the proportion of war and crime frames in network news. When one looks at the coverage itself, the reasons for this become clearer. Often, coverage is driven not by the day's events but rather by reporting opportunities. So, for example, even if there is not much new to report from Afghanistan, there may be a good deal of war-framed coverage if a network's reporter was offered a ride in a fighter jet or was detailed to do a first-person story about troops preparing to deploy from an American base. Table 2 also reveals that it would be quite difficult to avoid either frame altogether. Both frames appear on all but 2 of the 19 days coded. This is the case at the level of the network as well. Had you tuned in to a network news program on any one day during this period, there was a 54% chance you would be exposed to both frames, an 18% chance that you would be exposed to crime frames only, and a 19% chance that you would be exposed to war frames only. There was a 9% chance that you would not see any stories that mentioned September 11.

Frame adoption

Aspect agenda-setting and other salience-based explanations for the framing phenomenon suggest that because the war frame is more dominant in the media, it should be more dominant in public opinion. We posed RQ1 to address this relationship. To test RQ1, a chi-square goodness-of-fit test was run comparing the observed frequencies of frame adoption (pure war, pure crime, and mixed) in the sample to the frequencies of such pure and mixed frames in the media. The result was significant ($\chi^2 = 86.00$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$), which indicates that the public's frame adoption looked nothing like the pattern that would be expected based on the frequency of these frames on the network news. Pure war was the most frequent media frame but

Table 2 Distribution of Frames Over Time

Date	% War	% Crime	% Mixed	% Neither	N	Timeline of Notable Events
October 15	0	26.6	4.7	68.8	64	Senator Daschle's office receives letter laced with anthrax.
October 16	22	7.3	17.1	53.7	82	Air strikes in Afghanistan intensify. First daylight raids. Anthrax found at ABC News.
October 17	1.2	3.5	14	81.4	86	Capitol Hill workers test positive for anthrax; anthrax found in NY governor's office; Israeli leader assassinated.
October 18	25	26.7	13.3	35	60	Cheney visits WTC site; bin Laden followers sentenced in African embassy bombings.
October 19	9.1	19.1	10.9	60.9	110	First ground troops deployed in Afghanistan.
October 20	22.6	9.4	9.4	58.5	53	Bush authorizes CIA to "go after" bin Laden.
October 21	29.1	3.9	22.3	44.7	103	Lawmakers first propose investigation into 9/11 intelligence failures.
October 22	12.8	4.3	10.6	72.3	47	U.S. attacks frontline Taliban troops. Two postal workers die of anthrax.
October 23	9.3	9.3	20.9	60.5	43	Anthrax found at White House mail facility.
October 24	9.6	6	15.7	68.7	83	
October 25	14.8	17.6	13.9	53.7	108	Patriot Act passes Congress.
October 26	6.8	25.7	13.5	54.1	74	Anthrax found at Supreme Court mail facility. Red Cross head resigns.
October 27	14.3		24.5	61.2	49	
October 28	24.7	8.2	1.2	65.9	85	Ground Zero memorial service. Taliban says U.S. attacks killing civilians.
October 29	27	2	6	65	100	First Homeland Security meeting.
October 30	28.7	6.9	12.6	51.7	87	Discussion of new legislation against buying or building biological weapons.
October 31	11.1	7.4	11.1	70.4	135	Heavy bombing raids in Afghanistan.
November 01	5.8	2.3	4.7	87.2	86	'70s terrorist pleads guilty in bombing trial.
November 02	2.3	3.2	10.8	65.6	157	Congressional debate on aviation security act stalls.
Total	15.9	9.5	12.1	62.5	1,612	

the least frequent audience frame, whereas pure crime was the most frequent audience frame, consistent with a resonance explanation.

RQ2 had asked how common it would be for people to adopt mixed frames. The rather surprising answer: Almost half (49%) adopted frame components that represented a mix of crime and war frames. Table 3 shows the frequencies with which our respondents adopted problem definitions and preferred remedies of war and crime frames. Initially, we had thought that problem definitions would be fairly consistent with preferred remedies so that a scale of war-frame endorsement could be created. As it turned out, however, respondents' problem definitions were not at all related to their preferred remedies ($\chi^2 = .038, p = .846, r = .01$).

This result suggested not a scale but rather a typology based on answers to our two framing questions. Some 35% of the respondents said they thought of the September 11 dead as murder victims and wanted to see the perpetrators tried (pure crime), whereas 16% said they thought of the September 11 dead as war casualties and wanted to see the perpetrators killed in battle (pure war). Of those subscribing to mixed frames, 33% said they saw the September 11 dead as murder victims and wanted to see the perpetrators killed in battle (vengeance) and 16% said they saw the September 11 dead as war casualties and wanted to see the perpetrators tried (war crime).³

Framing effects

Overall war support by frames

The first hypothesis predicted that support for the war would be greater among war-frame than crime-frame adopters, whereas RQ3 asked about how adoption of mixed frames would affect support for the war. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) finds that there are significant differences in support for military action in Afghanistan among the four categories of this typology, $F(3, 287) = 10.89, p < .001$. Those who employed a vengeance frame were the most supportive of the war in Afghanistan overall ($M = 3.29, SD = .55$), followed closely by those who embraced a pure war frame ($M = 3.24, SD = .66$). Those who applied a pure crime frame ($M = 2.99, SD = .52$) were less

Table 3 Typology of Frame Component Endorsement

Desired Remedy	Problem Definition		Total, % (n)
	Crime: 9/11 Dead Are Murder Victims, % (n)	War: 9/11 Dead Are War Casualties, % (n)	
Crime: Try perpetrators in court	Pure crime, 35.3 (103)	War crime, 16.1 (47)	51.4 (150)
War: Kill perpetrators in battle	Vengeance, 32.9 (96)	Pure war, 15.8 (46)	48.6, (142)
Total	68.2 (199)	31.8 (93)	100 (292)

Note: $\chi^2 = .038, p = .846$.

supportive of the war, and those adopting a war-crime frame ($M = 2.76, SD = .68$) were less supportive yet. The planned comparison between the pure war and pure crime frames was significant, $t(148) = 2.247, p < .05$, which supports H1. Post hoc tests using Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) indicated all means were significantly different at $p < .05$ except for the vengeance and pure war frames.

Conditional war support by frames

As mentioned before, support for military action was assessed with three questions that measured support for military action generally, then under less favorable conditions, first if there were a ground invasion, and then if there were a ground invasion with civilian casualties. H2 predicted that support would decline more for crime-frame than war-frame adopters. To test H2 and explore how the mixed frames would be affected by unfavorable conditions in the spirit of RQ3, we ran a repeated-measures ANOVA to see how support under differing conditions (within-subjects) varied under the four different combinations of frame components (between-subjects). Figure 1 displays the results. As in the previous ANOVA, the categories of the typology differed in support for military action, $F(3, 235) = 9.69, p < .001$. Levels of support dropped as conditions became more adverse, $F(2, 470) = 96.26, p < .001$. But this drop under the most adverse condition, civilian casualties, was somewhat less precipitous for those adopting the vengeance and pure war frames, as the interaction term suggests, $F(6, 470) = 1.82, p < .10$. Both of these groups continued to support military action in the event of civilian casualties, whereas the pure crime and war-crime groups no longer did. However, the difference between pure crime and

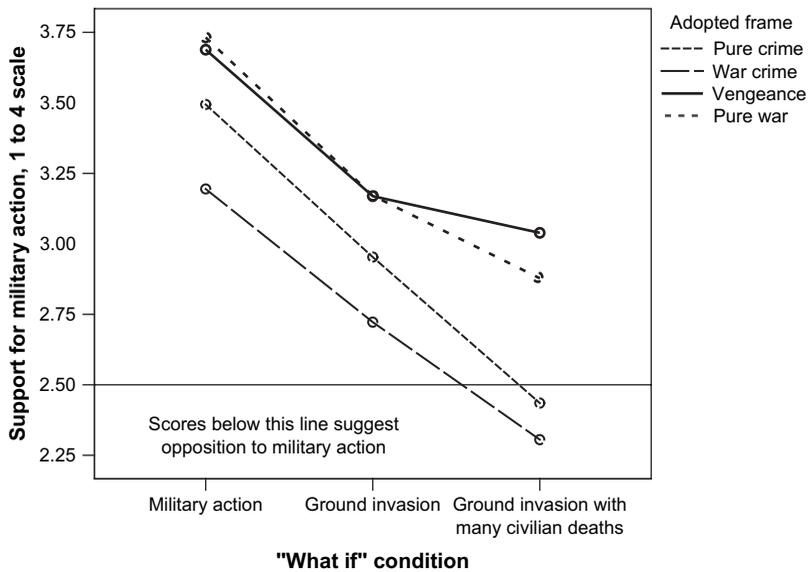


Figure 1 Conditional support for military action by adopted frame.

pure war adopters in total change in war support was not significant, $t(129) = .886$, *ns*, so H2 is not supported. Post hoc tests using Fisher's LSD on the change in war support indicate the difference between pure crime ($M = 1.05$, $SD = .96$) and vengeance adopters ($M = .63$, $SD = .87$) was significant.

Frame adoption by demographics and social location

H3 predicted that demographics and social location would be related to frame adoption. To examine this hypothesis, we ran a series of ANOVAs and post hoc tests with Fisher's LSD using the typology as the independent variable. Differences along racial lines fell short of significance, $F(3, 275) = 2.05$, $p = .107$, but those in the pure crime frame were more than twice as likely to belong to a racial minority (22.7%) as those subscribing to the vengeance frame (9.9%), as one might expect given the disproportionate number of minority soldiers who would be sent to fight a war. There were significant differences in income, $F(3, 228) = 3.31$, $p < .05$, such that those subscribing to the pure war and vengeance frames had higher incomes than those in the war-crime and pure crime frames. Once again, this makes sense given the fact that low-income people are overrepresented in the armed forces compared to the wealthy. Differences in gender approached significance, $F(3, 277) = 2.22$, $p < .10$; 71% of those in the war-crime group were women versus 48% of those in the vengeance group. If it is in fact the case that women are relatively less aggressive than men, this self-placement again suggests that social location plays an important role in frame adoption. Finally, those subscribing to different frames differed in their political ideology, $F(3, 250) = 2.75$, $p < .05$, such that those adopting pure war and war-crime frames were more conservative than those adopting the pure crime frame. Conservatives, and particularly Southern conservatives, are perhaps better known for their militarism than are more liberal citizens. H3 finds some support.

Frames as an explanation for variance in war support

H4 predicted that frame adoption would explain variance in support for the war in Afghanistan beyond that explained by demographics and social location. In order to explore how citizen characteristics and media exposure influenced adoption of problem definitions and preferred remedies, and how all these variables influenced support for the war in Afghanistan, we created a path model using AMOS. We discarded antecedents like gender and education that had no significant relationships and deleted several nonsignificant paths, although we retained self-reported media exposure because it offers additional insight on RQ1. We ended up with the model shown in Figure 2. This model had acceptable fit as indicated by the nonsignificant chi-square ($\chi^2 = 15.59$, $df = 20$, $p = .74$) and other fit indices (normal fit index = .994, relative fit index = .987, comparative fit index = 1.00, root mean square error of approximation = .000). This is not a true structural equation model because it uses only observed variables, a strategy made necessary by the single-item nature of most of the predictors.

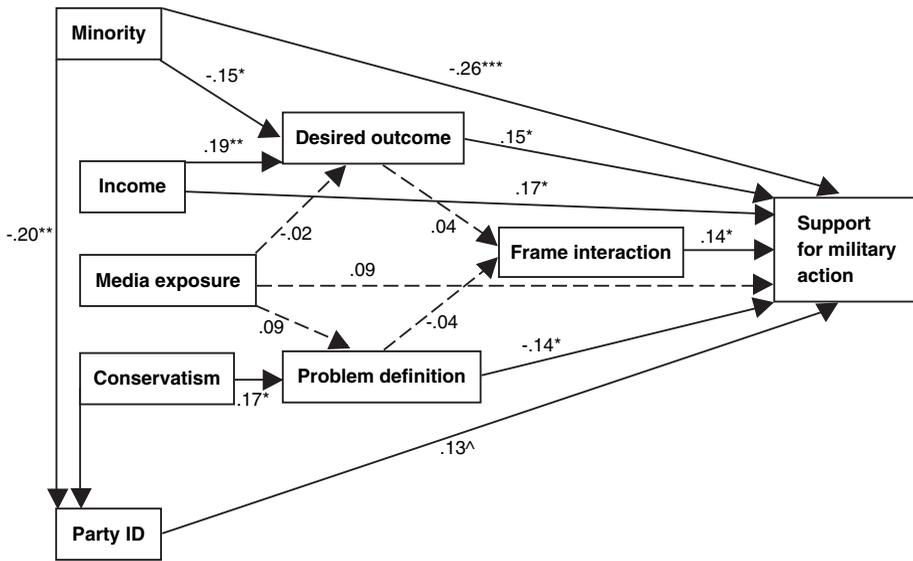


Figure 2 Path model of support for military action in Afghanistan

Note: $N = 191$ due to missing data for income and party ID. Higher values on desired outcome and problem definition are for responses consistent with a war frame. $R_2 = .22$. Paths with solid lines are significant at $^{***}p < .001$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^*p < .05$; $^\wedge p < .10$.

The model reveals that there is no significant relationship between self-reported media exposure and either problem definitions or desired remedies expressed by respondents. Media exposure’s relationship with support for military action also falls short of significance. Thus, although we can relatively safely assume that most of our sample of Tennesseans learned most of what they knew about the events of September 11 from the media, their own processing of this information was an important component of their propensity both to adopt a particular frame and to support the war in Afghanistan. Income, minority status, and party identification all have direct effects on support for the war. Minority status, income, and conservatism have impacts on frame-component adoption, as one might expect given the impacts of these variables on respondents’ self-placement in the typology. However, the demographic variables that predict how respondents will define the problem do not predict what their preferred remedy will be and vice versa. It is as though the two framing dimensions operate independently of one another.

Furthermore, the model reveals that although social location has direct effects on both support for the war and adoption of particular framing elements, the frames adopted by respondents exert a significant, independent effect on their support for the war above and beyond what social location can explain. Both preferred remedy (consistent with war) and problem definition (consistent with crime) have

significant effects on support for the war, as does an interaction term reflecting a unique contribution to explained variance from the combination of the two frame components. H4 also receives some support.

Discussion

We had hypothesized that consistent adoption of a war frame would be associated with support for military action in Afghanistan, but we soon found that adopting one component (e.g., problem definition) of a war frame was independent of adopting another such component (e.g., desired remedy). Taken as a whole, our analysis suggests the complexity of the framing phenomenon. Respondents seem not to have simply adopted the frames presented in the media. Confronted with competing frames, they appear to have cobbled them together to build stories of their own. We thus find it difficult to talk about war frames and crime frames *per se*, but we *can* talk about the consequences of the different frame components and the ways in which they were assembled.

Our findings suggest that the phenomenon represented in our data is framing rather than aspect-agenda setting. Although we have limited ability to capture the exact media resources our respondents used, cultural resonance seems a better explanation for the frame adoption revealed in this data than repetition, given the lack of fit between the frequency of frames presented in the media and those adopted by respondents. That frame-adoption patterns do not reliably scale is also more easily reconciled with framing than with aspect-agenda setting. If agenda setting were involved, we would expect the effects of considerations to be additive: The more war-consistent considerations respondents adopted, the more supportive of the war they would be. Because the mixed frames are actually associated with more extreme positions on the war, we are led to believe that these frame elements affected *how* people thought about September 11 and the Afghanistan war rather than *what* they thought about when these issues came to mind.

These findings also suggest that the framing phenomenon is much more complex than laboratory experiments have so far revealed. Druckman (2004) argues that presented with opposing frames, people express genuine opinions—that is, opinions that appear to be unaffected by their exposure to frames. In his study, respondents exposed to opposing frames revert to the opinions they expressed in the experimental pretest. Our data are not precisely comparable to his, but they suggest that something more complex may be going on. First, respondents' social location appears to affect which framing elements they adopt. Respondents who belong to groups that are more likely to be sent to fight a war, for example, are less likely to want to see the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks killed in battle. Second, *both* respondents' social location and the frames they adopt exert independent effects upon their support for the war in Afghanistan. In other words, the frames do not appear to "cancel each other out," leaving genuine opinion. Rather, the sense that respondents make of public issues seems to be influenced by their social location

(which may make their preferences appear genuine), but their sense of the situation has a unique impact on support for the policy over and above that explained by social location. All of this suggests that experimental framing studies to date may not have captured the complexity of what it is people are actually doing when they process political information.

Our findings also expand our understanding of the relationship between frames and the moral valence assigned to public issues (e.g., Chong, 1996; Entman, 1993; Nelson, 2004; Nelson & Oxley, 1999). Experiments on framing effects have manipulated the moral valence assigned to public events, and Entman's work argues that the frame-construction process assigns a moral valence to public events. Other work has suggested the likelihood of adopting a media frame is influenced by subjects' existing beliefs and values (Domke et al., 1998; Price et al., 1997). Our findings reveal the possibility that something else may be going on: Respondents may use their own moral compasses to evaluate and combine frame elements instead of deriving moral valences from the frames. We had expected that a crime-consistent problem definition—perceiving those who died on September 11 as murder victims—would be associated with lesser support for military action in Afghanistan. Instead, those who saw the dead as murder victims were more supportive. This may reflect public moral outrage over the attacks. Outrage is frequently a factor in mobilizing people (Gamson, 1992), and condemnation of the enemy and its actions is often part of the public justification for military action. “Murder victim” is a concept more fraught with moral outrage than “war casualty,” for it connotes that the dead cannot be blamed and that the attack was clearly intentional, unlawful and immoral. Defining those who died as war casualties, on the other hand, connotes that the attack took place in the context of a recognized bilateral conflict in which killing is not always morally wrong.

Indeed, each combination of problem definition and desired remedy suggests a different moral judgment about September 11. A “pure crime” perspective conceptualizes the events of September 11 as an attack on individuals by individuals, a moral judgment that suggests a need to redress private wrongs but that is also likely to find the expansion of punishment beyond those directly responsible morally unacceptable. In contrast, the “vengeance frame” makes the group responsible for attacks on individuals. Because the group is guilty, inflicting harm on group members who may have played no direct role in the attacks is morally acceptable. Indeed, there may be an “eye-for-an-eye” logic behind the relative willingness of those subscribing to this frame to inflict civilian casualties in Afghanistan. A “pure war” frame describes an attack on a group by a group, creating an “us-versus-them” evaluation that justifies military action on grounds of self-defense. However, the moral valence of such a posture is subtly different from that of pure crime or vengeance in that it invokes the idea of self-defense rather than seeking redress on behalf of others. A “war-crime frame” invokes its own unique moral judgment. Like the war frame, it defines its user as a member of a wronged group; however, it identifies not a general “enemy” but specific “criminals” responsible for the wrong.

This assessment of the moral valence of the frames finds some support in an examination of the point at which those in each category of the typology cease to support the war. Those who wanted to see the perpetrators of September 11 killed in battle (the adopters of the pure war and vengeance frames) are the most supportive of the war, and they remain supportive of the war even in the face of civilian casualties. In contrast, those who want to see the offenders tried by a court (those adopting the pure crime and war-crime frames) typically oppose the war in Afghanistan if it means civilian casualties. This connection between desired remedy and support for the policy makes sense. Those who wished to see the perpetrators tried could logically support the war, but shooting innocent bystanders (civilians) in the process of capturing the “bad guys” may have seemed like going too far. Those who saw this purely as war may have been more accepting because such outcomes are often perceived as regrettable but necessary in war, whereas those who saw this as vengeance may have been willing to exact retribution for the wrong done to innocent Americans.

Exploring respondents’ understanding of September 11 in light of the multidimensional frames present in the news reveals that their support for the war in Afghanistan was much more complex than it first appears. On the surface, public support for the war in Afghanistan looks overwhelming. Moreover, such support was not “soft”: Large majorities of Americans remained committed to the war in Afghanistan in the face of ground invasion, and even in the event of civilian casualties, support hovered around 50%. Yet, the diversity of frame adoption revealed in this study suggests that different Americans supported the war for different reasons. These findings are remarkably different from those of most experimental framing studies, which typically represent framing in public discourse as a struggle between divergent groups over how a public issue should be understood and suggest that framing effects are a zero-sum game. Evidence from this study reveals that framing also can be a coalition-building phenomenon. Frames can be distinct from yet harmonious with other frames, and people can support the same policy for different reasons. Beneath the overwhelming support were several distinct understandings of what September 11 meant and how the war in Afghanistan related to that meaning.

Furthermore, our analysis suggests that coalitions are not split merely by divergence of interests, as rational choice and social movement theories suggest, but rather can also divide when they reach the limits of their shared understanding. Those who wanted to see the perpetrators of September 11 tried in court supported the war in Afghanistan but said they would oppose the war if it progressed to a ground invasion that produced civilian casualties. This line of reasoning is difficult to explain in terms of self-interest but makes sense given the way these respondents framed the September 11 attacks and the moral judgment that flowed from that framing. Thus, the kinds of stories that citizens develop to make sense of events may exert its own influence on attitudes and opinions.

Our study has several limitations, the most important of which are limitations in the field as well. The results for RQ1 cannot be considered a critical test of

accessibility or frame exposure frequency as a mechanism for frame setting. We cannot claim to have captured the entire media environment our respondents occupied. In addition, this study lacked the outlet-specific individual-level measures of exposure needed to weight an outlet's frequency of a given frame by individual reliance on the outlet (Scheufele, 2000). The goodness-of-fit test used here employed aggregate data for media framing and audience frame adoption that is reminiscent of that used in early agenda-setting studies. Still, the complete lack of correspondence between the frequencies of media and audience frames is suggestive.

On the other end, the questions used to measure frame adoption by respondents are less than optimal in many ways. They do not account for the possibility that respondents applied an entirely different problem definition or wanted some other type of remedy. As forced-choice measures, they do not capture nuances of belief or the strength with which respondents held their views. Moreover, they do not capture some elements of a frame that Entman (1993) and others (e.g., White, 1987) define as crucial, for they do not inquire into whom respondents held responsible for September 11 (although there would likely have been little variance on that measure because both crime and war frames blamed al Qaeda) or what sort of moral framework they applied to the events and their aftermath. Still, they do capture the broad outlines of the perspectives available in the media at the time of the survey. Even more importantly, they point up the need for development of more sophisticated measures of frame reception.

Notes

- 1 We focused on network news for several reasons. First, it is unclear what content to select for coding on 24-hour cable news networks, whereas the nightly news on the networks makes for an obvious coding target. Second, although cable news saw a huge ratings increase after September 11, the combined audiences of the top three cable news networks (CNN, FOX News, and MSNBC) still averaged less than 2% of American adults at their September peak (Althaus, 2002). The Center for Media and Public Affairs (n.d.) continues to conduct studies of the network nightly news, excluding cable news because "[t]hrough the cable news programs attract a lot of media attention, the highest-rated show on cable attracts one-tenth of the audience that Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, and Dan Rather do." Third, one study has found that FOX News and CNN framed the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks much the same way that the networks did and used criminal frames with almost identical frequency (Li, Lindsay, & Mogensen, 2002).
- 2 $RR3 = \text{complete interviews} / [(\text{complete interviews} + \text{partial interviews}) + (\text{refusals} + \text{noncontacts} + \text{other}) + e(\text{unknown if housing unit} + \text{unknown, other})]$, where e estimates the share of eligible households in the portion of the sample that remains unknown after exhaustion. The present study estimated e at .531, a figure arrived at by dividing the count of eligible numbers in the known portion of the sample by the count of all numbers in the known portion of the sample. Keeter, Miller, Kohut, Groves, and Presser (2000) demonstrated that this response rate is not associated with nonresponse bias.

- 3 The salience or resonance of such an option may have been enhanced by the then-recent Hague trial of Slobodan Milosovic for war crimes.
- 4 The interaction term is the product of the z scores of problem definition and desired outcome; as such, its higher values are for the pure frames. Its highest value is for pure war (1.51), followed by pure crime (.66), vengeance ($-.70$), and war crime (-1.42); the latter was the group expressing the least support for the war, and this probably accounts for the significance of the interaction. It would have been more intuitive for the highest values of the interaction term to reflect adoption of two war-frame components, intermediate values to reflect adoption of one war-frame component, and the lowest values to indicate that no such components had been adopted by the respondent. This was attempted in a regression equation: the interaction term had a high beta (.60, $p < .05$), but the coefficient for desired outcome turned negative and nonsignificant ($-.24$, $p > .20$) due to severe multicollinearity (tolerance = .054). The use of centered variables can avoid this multicollinearity in interaction terms, but at some cost to their intuitiveness.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Miglena Daradanova and Jill Duty for their able research assistance and Dhavan Shah for his advice. Funding for the survey came from Middle Tennessee State University's John Siegenthaler Chair of First Amendment Studies and its Office of Communication Research. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the APSA Political Communication Conference on International Communication and Conflict, Washington, DC, August 31, 2005.

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