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Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, and Intervening Variables: Under What Conditions

Does the Public Influence Foreign Policy?

In November 2002, U.S. president George W. Bush declared that if Iraq does not follow the recommendations of the United Nations, the United States will lead the “coalition of the willing” and wage a war against Iraq (King 2002). Many European nations then joined the coalition. Germany and France were expected to join but they decided to stay out of the coalition. These two nations refused to join the multinational forces claiming a strong opposition against the war in their domestic publics. An interesting fact is though, that some nations that did join the coalition, such as the Czech Republic, also had a strong public opposition to the war.¹ Yet leaders in these nations ignored the public and joined the war coalition. Why did public opinion influence the foreign policy leaders in one case and not in the other? Even if we go beyond this anecdotal evidence and look at a more systematic research, we find that public opinion sometimes influences foreign policy and sometimes it does not (Foyle 1997). This puzzle inspired the research question for my review essay: Under what circumstances does public opinion influence foreign policy in democracies?

I answer this question by reviewing literature that explains the variation in public opinion’s influence on foreign policy. This literature identifies several variables that intervene in the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. In order to facilitate our understanding of these intervening variables, I divide them into three groups. Each group of

¹ In the Czech Republic, the support for war in Iraq was low throughout 2002 and as well as in early 2003. For example, in fall 2002, about 28% of citizens supported the war and 58% opposed it (CVVM 2003).

variables intervenes into the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy at a different level. Some variables intervene at the level of mass public. Other variables modify the relationship at the level of foreign policy decision makers. The third group of variables accesses the link between public opinion and foreign policy in the mid-space between the public and the foreign policy elites. These three levels then serve as a framework for this review.

Before I proceed with the discussion of the literature on public opinion's influence on foreign policy, I will first define what I mean by mass public opinion. Mass public opinion (or public opinion) is defined as the aggregate of individual citizens' opinions. Public opinion on foreign policy consists of an aggregate of citizens' opinions on issues regarding relations with other nations and with non-state actors operating in the international environment (such as terrorist groups). Public opinion is most commonly measured in public opinion polls. It can be, however, expressed through elections as well. By public opinion I do not mean interest groups or other intrastate actors who may exercise pressure on the government.

In this essay, I discuss the literature about public opinion in democratic states only. The reasons are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, democracies are expected to be responsive to public opinion. The literature on public opinion and foreign policy therefore focuses on democracies. There are practical reasons for this focus as well: Any research on public opinion requires public opinion data. Reliable data on citizens' attitudes about foreign policy of an authoritarian government are a rather difficult thing to obtain. My review therefore only deals with the influence of mass public opinion on foreign policy in democracies.

This review essay is structured as follows: First, I briefly describe the history of how the consensus about public opinion's influence on foreign policy has been evolving. Second, I discuss factors that intervene in the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. I

introduce three levels at which these factors can be found. Then I discuss each level and the impact of the factors found there. I conclude with a discussion of the overall state of the literature in which I argue that all three groups of variables provide some helpful explanations for the variation in public opinion's influence on foreign policy. I further argue, however, that what the literature lacks is a framework that would satisfactorily explain how media influence the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. I also suggest that our understanding of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy would improve if the literature explored more cases outside the United States and if it distinguished between crisis and non-crisis events.

Public opinion and its influence on foreign policy: from irrelevance to relevance

After the Second World War, literature in the field of international relations developed into a consensus that public opinion largely does not play any role in making of foreign policy (Holsti 1992, 2004). This view of the role of public opinion in foreign policy is sometimes called the Almond-Lippmann consensus after Gabriel Almond and Walter Lippmann, whose books are the foundational works for this view (Holsti 1992, 2004; Almond 1950; Lippmann 1922).

The Almond-Lippmann consensus is based on three theses:

- Public opinion is highly volatile and thus it provides very dubious foundations for a sound foreign policy.
- Public attitudes on foreign affairs are so lacking in structure and coherence that they might best be described as “non-attitudes”.
- At the end of the day, however, public opinion has a very limited impact on the conduct of foreign policy. (quoted from Holsti 1992,442)

Public opinion research of the 1960s in the United States supported the first two theses of the Almond-Lippmann consensus. This research found that large proportions of the public are,

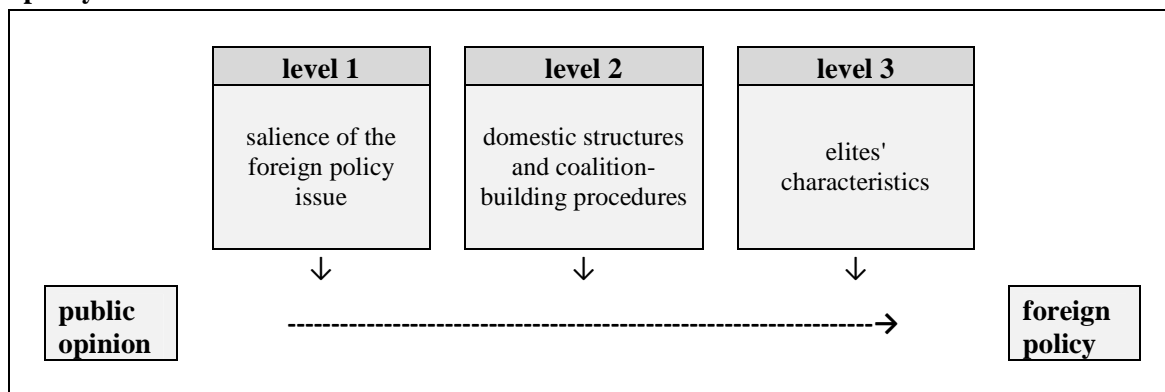
indeed, volatile in their political attitudes and that their opinions lack structure (Converse 1964). Furthermore, this research showed that both the volatility of individuals' attitudes and the lack of structure of individuals' opinions are especially pronounced in attitudes towards foreign policy. International relations scholars supplemented the public opinion research in support for the Almond-Lippmann consensus. For example, many studies of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy in the United States argued that the U.S. president can relatively easily manipulate the public into backing the president's foreign policy course (Lipset 1966; Paterson 1979; LaFeber 1977). In addition to that, Cohen (1973) in his survey of the literature on this topic found that researchers who claim that there *is* a relationship between public opinion and foreign policy often only assert the influence of public opinion on foreign policy but that they do not provide much evidence of a real existence of this influence.

The Almond-Lippmann consensus lasted for about two decades after WWII. In the 1970s, after the Vietnam War, researchers began to challenge all three propositions of the Almond-Lippmann consensus (Holsti 1992, 2004; Graham 1994). First, advancements in survey research methodology showed that at least part of the measured instability in citizens' opinions was a result of poor measurement techniques (Achen 1975; Sullivan et al. 1978; Sullivan et al. 1979; Krosnick and Berent 1993). Researchers also found that changes in aggregate public opinion are meaningful, rather than random as the Almond-Lippmann consensus argues (Mueller 1973; Chittick et al. 1990; Page and Shapiro 1992).

Second, in a challenge to the Almond-Lippmann consensus, multiple studies found that public opinion on foreign policy does have structure (Mandelbaum and Schneider 1979; Wittkopf 1990). Eugene Wittkopf (1990), for example, views foreign policy attitudes as structured along two dimensions: cooperative internationalism and militant internationalism.

Finally, the Almond-Lippmann consensus was challenged in its claim that public opinion does not matter in foreign policy. Case studies as well as large-N studies appeared showing that there is a link between public opinion and foreign policy (Aldrich et al. 1989; Page and Shapiro 1983). Although the field of international relations is far from a universal consensus over the influence of public opinion on foreign policy,² all the challenges to the Almond-Lippmann consensus facilitated the emergence of a new body of IR literature. The focus of this new body of literature is no longer on the question of *whether* public opinion matters for foreign policy but more on the question of *when* public opinion influences foreign policy.

Figure 1.
Strengthening and weakening factors in the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy.



This new body of literature identifies variables that intervene in the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. These intervening variables can be found at three levels within the relationship between mass public opinion and foreign policy: level 1 (mass public), level 2 (the space between the mass public and the leaders), and level 3 (foreign policy decision makers). Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of these three levels. At level 1 (mass public), the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy is influenced by the saliency the mass public ascribes to a given foreign policy issue. The more salient the issue, the more

² For example, Page and Jacobs (2005) argue that public opinion has very little influence on foreign policy.

influence the public has on decision makers (Page and Shapiro 1983; Shapiro 2011; Jones 1994; Soroka 2003). Level 2 factors include characteristics of the political system such as the polarization of society, strength of societal organizations, and centralization of foreign policy decision making (Risse-Kappen 1991). Level 3 includes leaders' characteristics that affect how much public opinion matters in leaders' decisions about foreign policy. These characteristics include leaders' culpability for wars (Croco 2011) as well as leaders' beliefs about the importance of public opinion in foreign policy making (Foyle 1997, 1999). The following discussion looks at these three levels of intervening variables in a greater detail. The next section explores level 1 (the public). It is then followed by discussion of factors located at level 2 (the mid-space between the public and the foreign policy leaders) and finally by discussion of level-3 variables (leaders).

Level 1: Intervening variables at the level of mass public

The level of mass public features only one major factor that intervenes in the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy: the degree of salience the mass public ascribes to a foreign policy issue. The more salient the issue, the more influence the public has on the policy. This regularity holds for policy in general (Page and Shapiro 1983; Shapiro 2011) as well as for foreign policy issues specifically (Aldrich et al. 1989; Page and Shapiro 1983; Soroka 2003). For example, Page and Shapiro (1983) study congruence between changes in aggregate public opinion and policy change. They find that for both domestic and foreign policy issues the level of congruence is relatively high and that it gets higher if the issue is salient (Page and Shapiro 1983).

In addition to Page and Shapiro's work about general influence of public opinion, there are studies that focus specifically on the influence of issue salience on the relationship between public opinion and government's spending on defense (Jones 1994; Soroka 2003). Jones (1994) and Soroka (2003) both found that the level of salience of the issue, rather than the actual citizens' preferences on defense spending, predict the level of spending on defense. These findings, however, are not universally accepted. Wlezien (2005) challenges the methodology used by Jones (1994) and Soroka (2003).³ He argues that using a survey item that asks respondents about the "most important problem facing the country" is not a valid measurement of issue salience. Wlezien argues that this survey question directs respondents towards mentioning issues that are currently a "problem" for the country. An issue, however, may be salient to the respondents without being currently viewed as a problem. A re-examination of Jones's data then shows that a change in preferences (rather than a change in salience of the issue) explains the variation in defense spending. Despite Wlezien's challenge, however, the thesis that public opinion influences foreign policy more if the issue is salient is generally accepted.⁴

The prevailing consensus in the literature therefore is that the more salient the foreign policy issue is to a country's citizens, the more likely citizens' preferences are to be reflected in the actual foreign policy. This statement naturally leads to a follow-up question: What makes a foreign policy issue salient? Public opinion literature provides a clear answer to this question: policy issues are more salient the closer these issues are to citizens' daily lives. This creates a problem for foreign policy issues because they rarely are close to citizens' everyday lives.

³ Wlezien's (2005) article challenges Jones's book (1994) specifically but his criticism applies to Soroka (2003) as well.

⁴ Some studies that look at the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy even simply assume that public opinion matters more for foreign policy decisions if citizens perceive the issue as salient (Oppermann and Viehrig 2009; Knecht and Weatherford 2006; Powlick and Katz 1998).

Citizens therefore rely on media for information about foreign policy. This gives media a great power to influence how salient foreign policy issues are to citizens (Cohen 1963; Baum and Potter 2008; Soroka 2003; Powlick and Katz 1998; Baum 2002). The relationship between media coverage and foreign policy issue salience is so well established that some works use media coverage as a measurement of issue salience (Knecht and Weatherford 2006; Oppermann and Viehrig 2009).

The fact that media have such a strong impact on salience of foreign policy issues potentially has important implications for the direction of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. Some studies argue that because independent information about foreign policy is costly media rely on governmental officials for this information (Baum and Potter 2008). If issue salience makes public more influential and if media coverage determines salience, leaders (as the source of information) may potentially manipulate the level of issue salience in the public.

This complex nature of the relationship between the public, the media, and the decision makers has led to calls for a more holistic approach (Powlick and Katz 1998; Seaver 1998; Baum and Potter 2008; Bloch-Elkon 2007). These calls argue that we should view these relationships as a whole, instead of focusing on the individual causal paths in the media-public-elites triangle. Powlick and Katz's framework is an attempt to integrate the individual causal paths that exist between media, elites, and the public (Powlick and Katz 1998). Their framework identifies four variables that influence the fate of government's foreign policy – whether the government keeps the policy course or whether the course changes as a result of public demands. These four variables include:

- 1) *The level of public opposition to the foreign policy course* pursued by the government. A strong public opposition may directly lead to a change in the policy course.
- 2) *The level of media coverage*. In most cases, low level of media coverage will leave the public passive and acquiescent with regard to the government's foreign policy.
- 3) *The existence of elite consensus*. If elites agree, the public is not likely to challenge government's foreign policy. If elites are in dissensus, the public is more likely to challenge the government. The likelihood of this challenge is influenced by the fourth variable.
- 4) *The accessibility of frames the elite use to present their position*.⁵ If the frame presented by the opposition is accessible to the public, the public becomes activated and challenges the government's foreign policy (adapted from Powlick and Katz 1998, 32)

Powlick and Katz's framework addresses some of the complexity in the relationships between the public, the media, and foreign policy leaders. The main problem with this framework, however, is that it views the relationships in a static fashion. It fails to capture the fact that the relationships between the three actors change over time. Baum and Potter (2008) devise a framework that addresses this shortcoming. They use concepts borrowed from economics to portray the field in which the public, the media, and the elites interact. They view the field as a marketplace in which information is the main commodity being exchanged.

Baum and Potter's framework (2008) is based on an assumption that the public is generally uninformed about foreign policy and that it uses informational shortcuts (such as elite positions) to make reasoned opinions on foreign policy. Media play the role of a middleman who is providing information to the public based on the demand from the public. Typically, foreign policy leaders have more information about foreign policy than the public does (Baum and Potter

⁵ According to Powlick and Katz a frame "can be thought of as a conceptual tool that people rely upon to convey, interpret, and evaluate information" (Powlick and Katz 1998, 36). Frames are important because they allow communicators to "alter the beliefs and decision processes of recipients of information" (Powlick and Katz 1998, 36). Accessible frames are those frames that present the foreign policy issue by referring to concepts or ideas that are familiar to the public. If a leader uses an accessible frame, then his or her message resonates with the public.

2008). The informational advantage leaders have, however, changes over time. It is the largest in the early stage of a foreign policy event. This is because in the early stage of a foreign policy event, media take information about the event from the elites - including the frames used by the elites (Entman 2004). The media can get away with just presenting the elite message because the demand in the public is low. If the government and the opposition parties are in consensus about the event, it is even easier for the media to just report the elite message. Citizens take the consensus within the elite as cues that the government's message is trustworthy and they do not demand more information. As time goes on, however, factors such as "casualties, elite discord, or evidence that leaders have 'spun' the facts" cause the public to demand more information critical of the elite's version of the event (Baum and Potter 2008, 43). Media respond to the demand for more information and the information gap between the public and the elites narrows. A more informed public then is better equipped to challenge the policy direction regarding that event.

The phenomenon of the rally effect nicely illustrates Baum and Potter's (2008) theoretical framework. The so-called rally effect refers to a short-term surge in public support for the government in times of foreign policy crisis. According to Baum and Potter (2008), the changes in support for government during a rally effect are a result of changes in the size of the information gap that exists between the elites and the public. At the beginning of a rally event, the public has very limited information about the event. Citizens therefore use elite positions as cognitive shortcuts to form their own opinions. As time goes on, however, the trustworthiness of these shortcuts is undermined and citizens demand more independent information. As the information gap between the public and the elites narrows, the rally recedes. According to Baum and Potter (2008), this market-based view of the rally effect unifies most of the existing literature

on this topic. For example, the existing literature shows that rallies tend to be stronger if the elite is united in how to approach the foreign policy event (Baker and Oneal 2001). Rallies also tend to be bigger if there is international support for the government's policy (Chapman and Reiter 2004). Both these factors increase the trustworthiness of the cognitive shortcut that the public takes from the elite and they thus enhance the power of the informational advantage the elite has over the public.

Baum and Potter's framework deserves credit as an attempt to explain the differences between long term and short term effects of public opinion on foreign policy. There are, however, at least two problems with the framework. The first problem regards the concept of *demand for information*. Although demand for information is supposed to be the key causal force in this market-based framework, it is doubtful whether public demand for information really is *the* driving force behind the change in media's reporting. Take, for instance, the example of rally effect. A foreign policy event happens and the media report the government's message. The opposition usually supports the government's message in a crisis. The public then takes this message as its basis for high support of the government. Then, as time goes on, the media report on conflicting opinions within the political elite. This triggers a demand for more information in the public. It seems, therefore, that the causal force responsible for media's reporting of conflicting views is not the demand for information as such but rather the existence of conflicting views within the elite.

Second, there are theories that challenge the role of the information gap in explaining the rally effect. Kam and Ramos (2008), for example, do not view rally effect as a result of the changing size of the informational disparity between the public and the elites. They view the

rally as a result of shifts in citizens' identity.⁶ Early in a rally event, there is a strong perception of threat – both in the elite and in the public. This perception of threat makes people switch from their partisan identities to a unifying national identity. In other words, in a time of foreign policy crisis, people think of themselves primarily as Americans, rather than as Democrats or Republicans. This feeling of patriotism explains why both the political elite and the public become unified behind the government. As the perception of threat recedes, people turn away from the unifying national identity and assume their particularistic identities. Elites begin to challenge the government and the rally declines.

The identity-based explanation of the rally effect constitutes a serious challenge to the market-based framework which is the latest and most developed attempt to unify research on media, the public, and foreign policy into one framework (Baum and Potter 2008). If the identity-based explanation is correct, then the changing ability of the public to influence decision makers is not explained by the lack of information in the public but rather by a unifying patriotic feeling. This means that even if the public and the decision makers were always equally well informed, the decision makers would still be protected from a challenge from the public in the early stage of a foreign policy crisis thanks to the rise of patriotism. Therefore, if the identity-based hypothesis is correct, the concept of informational disparity completely loses its explanatory power.

There is one more problem with the market-based framework (Baum and Potter 2008). Although the framework presents itself as covering all foreign policy decisions, in practice it only regards foreign policy crises. The authors do not explicitly acknowledge their focus on crises but they use the word crisis when referring to foreign policy events. In addition, the way

⁶ There are also other studies explain the rally effect as a rise of patriotism during international crises (for example Mueller 1973; Lee 1977).

information is distributed by the media in Baum and Potter's article (2008) corresponds to the flow of information during crises as described by Knecht and Weatherford (2006). As a result, the unifying market-based framework unifies the research on public opinion and foreign policy only with regard to foreign policy crises.

In sum, the paragraphs above describe how salience of foreign policy issues impacts the extent to which public opinion influences foreign policy. The literature mostly agrees that the more salient the issue, the more influence the public has on foreign policy. This section also explored the sources of salience of foreign policy issues. The literature on this topic shows that there is a tight connection between media coverage and the level of salience. This section further showed that the relationship between the media, the public, and foreign policy elites is complex and dynamic and that we do not have a satisfactory unifying framework portraying this relationship.

Between the public and the decision makers: intervening variables at level 2

There are not many studies that focus on causal factors at the mid-level between the public and the elites. This branch of scholarship is essentially represented by Thomas Risse-Kappen's influential article (Risse-Kappen 1991). This article focuses on four countries (United States, Germany, France, and Japan) and explains these countries' responses to changes in Soviet foreign policy from late 1970s to late 1980s. Risse-Kappen observes that despite the fact that all four countries were experiencing the same changes in Soviet foreign policy and that public opinion on foreign policy issues followed roughly the same pattern, national defense policies of these four countries differed. In some cases, foreign policy followed public opinion, in other

cases the policy went against the public. Risse-Kappen identifies *domestic structures* and *coalition-building procedures* as the explanations of this variation.

The first part of this explanation – domestic structures – has two components: the nature of the political institutions and the structure of society. The nature of the political institutions refers to the centralization of governmental power with regard to foreign policy. This includes the extent to which the parliament is involved in foreign policy decision making or the extent to which the government controls the bureaucracy. Countries with a more centralized state are expected to show less influence by the public on foreign policy. The structure of society constitutes the second component of domestic structures. The structure of society is characterized by society's polarization, by the strength of social organization, and by the degree to which societal pressure can be mobilized (Risse-Kappen 1991). Greater polarization of public opinion makes public opinion's influence on foreign policy weaker; and so do low mobilization and weak organization of societal actors.

The second part of Risse-Kappen's explanation – the coalition-building processes – is represented by three types of policy networks. The three policy networks differ from each other by the extent to which state prevails over society in the policymaking process. In *state-dominated networks*, the state has the upper hand and the public is therefore largely excluded from "policy relevant coalition-building" (Risse-Kappen 1991, 486). In countries with a *societal control* of policy networks public opinion plays a major role in coalition building. In policy networks characterized by *democratic corporatism*, the state and the society are about equally strong. Public opinion therefore has a moderate influence on foreign policy.

According to Risse-Kappen (1991), neither domestic structures nor coalition-building processes alone explain the link between public opinion and foreign policy. It is the combination

of these two factors that accounts for the level of public opinion's influence on foreign policy. For example, Japan in the 1980s had an intermediate level of centralization of the state. This suggests that public opinion should have had a rather limited influence on foreign policy. Although the strength of the state had a constraining effect on effect on the public's role in foreign policy, there were factors strengthening the public's role that offset this constraining effect. The combination of a homogeneous public opinion and strong societal organizations helped the public prevail over the state. As a result, Japanese public opinion in 1980s exercised a significant influence on the national security policy.

Risse-Kappen's article (1991) is a major contribution to the literature on the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. It is one of the few articles that employ a comparative perspective. Although the author develops his argument using only four cases, the cases are diverse and they serve well in showing that domestic structures and coalition-building procedures may be the answer to the puzzle of varying influence of public opinion on foreign policy. It is interesting that although Risse-Kappen's article is widely cited (over four hundred citations in Google Scholar), the literature does not further test or develop this framework. Risse-Kappen's theory therefore offers opportunities for future research. Future works can test how helpful domestic structures and coalition-building procedures are in explaining other cases of foreign policy decisions.

Leaders' characteristics: Intervening variables at level 3

The literature features two scholars who use leaders' characteristics to explain variation in public opinion's influence on foreign policy. Douglas Foyle's theory (Foyle 1997, 1999) focuses on leaders' beliefs about the role of public opinion in foreign policy. Sarah Croco's

theory (Croco 2011) uses leaders' culpability for wars as an explanation for why only some leaders are willing to listen to the public and end unpopular wars. Douglas Foyle's work builds on research in psychology that finds connections between individuals' beliefs and their political behavior (George 1980; Larson 1985). He applies this psychological approach to the study of foreign policy elites. According to Foyle, elites' beliefs about public opinion's role in foreign policy making are structured along two dimensions: normative and practical. The normative dimension regards the desirability of public opinion's influence on foreign policy. The practical dimension, on the other hand, concerns the necessity of the public's input in foreign policy making. By combining these two dimensions into a matrix, Foyle identifies four types of decision makers: *Delegates* (for whom public opinion input is desirable and necessary for foreign policy making), *executors* (public opinion is desirable but not necessary), *pragmatists* (public opinion is not desirable but it is necessary), and *guardians* who consider public opinion neither desirable nor necessary (Foyle 1997, 145-7). The empirical plausibility of Foyle's framework has been tested on few cases of foreign policy decision of American presidents (Foyle 1999) and on the case of Australian foreign policy towards Asia in 1996-2007 (McDougall and Edney 2010).

In contrast to Douglas Foyle's framework, which is applicable to all types of foreign policy decisions, Sarah Croco's theory (2011) has a narrower scope. It focuses on leaders' decisions about war termination: Why do some leaders listen to public opinion and end an unpopular war while other democratic leaders ignore the public and continue an unpopular war? Croco's answer to this question lies with the concept of *culpability*. A culpable leader is "any leader who was in charge of the state when the war began or who was directly connected to the decision to involve the state in the conflict" (Croco 2011, 457). Culpable leaders therefore

include leaders who were in charge at the time when the conflict began (*first leaders*) as well as leaders coming from the same faction or coalition who succeeded the first leaders.

Culpable leaders face a so called “decider’s dilemma”:

Culpable leaders may want to back down, but their clear ties to the decision to involve the state in the war increase their risk of punishment if they settle for anything short of victory. Nonculpable leaders, in contrast, will not face this hard choice. Instead, because domestic audiences will be more forgiving of leaders whom they perceive to be unconnected to the choice to involve the state in the war, nonculpable leaders will be more willing to end the conflict, even if this means accepting a loss. (Croco 2011, 457-8)

As a result of the decider’s dilemma, only non-culpable leaders will respond to public opposition to war. Leaders’ culpability therefore mediates the impact of public opinion on leaders’ decision to end a war.

The concept of culpability is an innovative explanation that opens new paths for research. Future research can, for example, investigate how the concept of culpability works at other levels of analysis. Croco’s study shows that the concept of culpability has explanatory power at the macro level (when leaders in foreign policy events are the unit of analysis). Does it, however, retain this explanatory power at lower levels of analysis? Do citizens think in terms of this concept when they evaluate leaders? Do political parties use the concept of culpability in their campaigns? Do parties try to mitigate the effects of culpability when they do not favor them? Answering these questions would lead to a better understanding of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy.

In sum, the literature discussed in this section identifies elite-level factors that mediate the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. Douglas Foyle’s theory based on leaders’ beliefs is theoretically interesting but the empirical studies testing this theory include only a relatively narrow set of foreign policy decisions (Foyle 1999; McDougall and Edney 2010).

More empirical testing is needed in order to make the claims about the generalizability of this theory persuasive. Sarah Croco's culpability theory provides a more empirically persuasive explanation but it only explains foreign policy decisions regarding war termination.

Conclusion

Why do foreign policy decisions in democracies follow public opinion in some cases while in other cases the public's will is ignored? Why did, for example, the Czech Republic join the war against Iraq and why did Germany stay out of the war coalition? This review shows that the existing literature identifies several variables that intervene in the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. Such interventions happen at three different levels within the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. These levels include the mass public, the leaders, and the mid-space between the leaders and the public.

First, there is relatively strong agreement in the literature that the salience of foreign policy issues affects the level of the public's influence on foreign policy. Most studies agree that if a foreign policy issue is salient, decision makers are more likely to take public opinion into account. Therefore, one possible explanation for why the outcomes in the Czech Republic and Germany differ is that the issue of the Iraq war was much more salient in Germany than in the Czech Republic. This seems to be supported by contemporaneous public opinion polls (Springford 2003). However, in order to provide a more certain answer to this puzzle, more research would be needed, including research that rules out other explanations.

The literature reviewed in this paper further shows that the salience of foreign policy issues is strongly influenced by the level of media coverage. The literature also suggests that the relationships between the media, the public, and the decision makers are complex and dynamic. Although there have been attempts to design a framework portraying this complex and dynamic set of relationships (Powlick and Katz 1998; Baum and Potter 2008), none of these attempts yields satisfactory results. We therefore still need a framework that would integrate our

knowledge of the relationships between the media, the public, and foreign policy elites. Second, the literature shows that leaders' characteristics affect the level of influence public opinion has on foreign policy (Foyle 1999). Decision makers' beliefs about the necessity and desirability of public opinion's influence affect how much leaders will take public opinion into account in their foreign policy decisions. We do not know, however, to what extent the theory based on leaders' beliefs is generalizable. So far the evidence is based on few cases from the United States and one case from Australia (Foyle 1999; McDougall and Edney 2010). We need more empirical work if this theory is to become a general theory. Third, the literature also shows that leaders' characteristics can be especially helpful in explaining why only some democratic leaders end unpopular wars. There is robust evidence that leaders who are culpable for a war are less likely to listen to the public and end an unpopular war than leaders who are not culpable (Croco 2011).

The literature further suggests that mid-level factors such as domestic structures and coalition-building procedures mediate the public's influence on foreign policy (Risse-Kappen 1991). Differences in domestic structures and coalition-building procedures help explain why public opinion's input in foreign policy differs across countries. The comparative character of Risse-Kappen's (1991) study points to one of the greatest weaknesses of the literature. Although there are some studies that have a comparative component (Risse-Kappen 1991; Soroka 2003; Oppermann and Viehrig 2009; Croco 2011; McDougall and Edney 2010), a large majority of studies in the literature look at the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy in the United States only. The well-developed sources of public opinion data in the United States are probably the main reason for this disparity. Other countries, however, also have public opinion data regarding foreign policy.⁷ Future research, therefore, should make use of this data and explore whether the conventional wisdom that has been developed on data from the United

⁷ See Oppermann and Viehrig (2009), for example.

States holds in other countries as well. Risse-Kappen's work shows that cross-national differences in domestic structures do lead to different levels of government's responsiveness to public opinion. Without looking at other democracies, our understanding of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy will remain limited.

The literature reviewed in this essay offers one more promising path for future research. Existing works are often fuzzy about whether the foreign policy events under study are crisis events, non-crisis events, or both. Only Foyle (1999), Oppermann and Viehrig (2009), and Seaver (1998) make an explicit distinction between these two types of events. Yet, there is evidence suggesting that the level of public opinion's influence on foreign policy may vary based on the type of foreign policy event (Knecht and Weatherford 2006). Distinguishing between different types of events as well as following the other avenues for future inquiry suggested in this review will thus bring us further in understanding public opinion's influence on foreign policy.

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