

**PUBLIC OPINION AND SUPPORT  
FOR U.S. PRESIDENTS' FOREIGN POLICIES**

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We develop a model of public evaluations of U.S. foreign policies that emphasizes the role of core values and informational cues as a means to explain how the public renders judgments on complex issues. We argue that the public will most fundamentally be concerned with presidential success in maintaining U.S. peace and security and will rely heavily on presidential activities and media coverage of foreign policy events.

**The literature analyzing public opinion** and U.S. foreign policy has undergone tremendous growth in the past 10 years. Most of this new research has “discovered” that the public is not the unconcerned and intemperate creature that many older studies portrayed. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s it was common to speak of public “moods,” “swings,” and lack of attitudinal consistency (Almond, 1950; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Converse, 1964; Kennan, 1951; Morgenthau, 1985; Rosenau, 1961), recent research has indicated that public opinion can hardly be considered capricious (Jordan & Page, 1992; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Shapiro & Page, 1988). It plays an important role in presidential elections and evaluations (Aldrich, Sullivan, & Borgida, 1989; Hurwitz, Peffley, & Raymond, 1989; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Nincic & Hinckley, 1991; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992), is “pretty prudent” (Jentleson, 1992, 1997; Jentleson & Britton, 1998; Oneal, Lian, & Joyner, 1996), and is hierarchically structured (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987a, 1987b; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992). In short, we now know that public opinion on foreign policy issues is essentially competent and consequential in the U.S. political system.

If we assume then that mass public attitudes are generally stable, may even be seen as rational, and are important in the political pro-

cess, we must next ask, How is it that such a citizenry judges the specific foreign policies of its leaders? Although researchers have examined the development of individual belief structures—general orientations that inform individual policy preferences (e.g., Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987a)—we have not yet investigated whether these general beliefs inform the public's evaluation of specific foreign policies. How do general beliefs, for example, provide consistency across a wide range of foreign policies? And, what other factors operate in this decision-making process? For if the public is as sophisticated and competent as so many have argued, can it judge its leaders' policies and ultimately hold them accountable?

We believe these are important questions, for researchers have demonstrated that the public at large is not always well informed on the great issues of the day; nonetheless, citizens are called on to evaluate leaders and policies. How is it that people make such judgments without an awareness of the basic facts of foreign policy? How can people be competent and pretty prudent without knowing foreign policy issues? It is vital that we understand how the U.S. public views the world and judges its leaders' policies, especially in an age when the barriers between domestic and international issues are crumbling at a breathtaking pace.

To investigate these issues, we develop a model of public evaluations of U.S. foreign policies that emphasizes the role of core values and information cues to explain how the public renders judgments on complex issues. In particular, we argue that the public will most fundamentally be concerned with presidential success in maintaining U.S. peace and security, and we will focus on these two values as a shortcut for evaluating presidents' policies. In addition, we argue that the public relies heavily on presidential activities and media coverage of foreign policy events to provide more current information about this complex policy domain. Our model is tested on a pooled time-series data set of public attitudes on presidents' foreign policies toward specific nations (e.g., Russia, Iraq) and geographic regions (e.g., the Middle East, Central America) from 1978 to 1994 by use of a random-effects regression model. The results support our hypotheses and demonstrate that it is possible to explain and predict how the public evaluates specific presidential foreign policies.

### **CORE VALUES, INFORMATION CUES, AND FOREIGN POLICY EVALUATIONS**

There is an underlying paradox in the recent research that concomitantly finds strong evidence of public sophistication and factual ignorance of foreign affairs (Aldrich et al., 1989; Holsti, 1996; Hurwitz et al., 1989; Jentleson, 1992; Oneal et al., 1996; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992). To understand how individuals create and sustain belief systems without the benefit of a great deal of information, Hurwitz and Peffley (1987a) developed an information-processing model that views individuals as possessing "very severe cognitive limitations," who make "extensive use of heuristics to render the environment interpretable and manageable" (p. 1103). They further write, "General beliefs permit economical judgments to be made under uncertainty because they provide interpretations for ambiguous stimuli, select information for storage or retrieval from memory and 'fill in' missing or ambiguous information with best guesses or default values" (p. 1104). If we can characterize attitudes toward general issues of foreign policy as structured and meaningful, will we find these traits in evidence when the public evaluates its leaders' diplomacy? Will we find that the public evaluates specific policies in what we might term a consistent manner? Or, are public evaluations a product of temporary passions and events? To help justify and complement our emerging conception of a more sophisticated public, we should also explore how the mass public evaluates the foreign policies of its leaders within an environment of uncertainty and limited information.

We conceive of mass public opinion on foreign policy as the expression of a decision-making process under conditions of uncertainty. The number and complexity of factors associated with the foreign policy decision-making process impose significant burdens on citizens who must judge the effectiveness of a president's policies. A useful metaphor typically employed to describe decision making under these conditions envisions individuals as "cognitive misers," who make sense of international relations by using cognitive heuristics to make "information shortcuts" (Conover & Feldman, 1984; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987a; Taylor, 1981). According to the "cognitive miser model," the best and most reliable shortcut is the "old, generic information" already present in one's head (Conover &

Feldman, 1984; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Taylor, 1981). In other words, individuals facing severe cognitive limitations assess policies by using their preconceived beliefs (or core values) to make sense of new situations. Zaller (1992) referred to predispositions, or what we term core values, and maintained that “predispositions are at least in part a distillation of a person’s lifetime experiences, including childhood socialization and direct involvement with the raw ingredients of policy issues” (p. 23).

But which core values and beliefs do citizens use to evaluate the president’s handling of foreign affairs? Rather than attempting to gather and assess all information on a given policy, we believe individuals rely on their expectations concerning the president’s handling of the two most important foreign policy objectives: peace and security. As Edwards (1983) pointed out, “The public’s expectations of the president in the area of policy are substantial and include his insuring peace, prosperity, and security.”<sup>1</sup> The public holds presidents accountable for their successful realization because it believes presidents possess the necessary tools to achieve these goals (Edwards, 1983; Kernell, 1978; MacKuen, 1983; Ostrom & Simon, 1985, 1988). We believe these two expectations, or core values, to be driving concerns behind evaluations of presidents’ foreign policies because they represent fundamental, widely shared goals that the public believes to be within the president’s power to guarantee.

As Zaller (1991) wrote, “Every opinion is a marriage of information and values—information to generate a mental picture of what is at stake and values to make a judgment about it” (p. 1215). We incorporate information into our study by conceptualizing it as a set of cues that trigger and alert citizens to significant changes in their environment. Cognitive psychologists often note the role of cues, outside stimuli, or stressors that trigger or stimulate new decision choices (see, e.g., A. Beck & Weishaar, 1989). In conjunction with settled convictions, new information concerning a decision maker’s environment is absorbed or adapted into the decision-making process, thus resulting in a decision choice. But, in the case of the public’s presidential evaluations, where does this information come from, and how does it influence the evaluation process?

We emphasize the role of two important actors in the dissemination of foreign affairs information: the president and the media. According

to Hurwitz and Peffley (1987a), "citizens are forced to rely on the assessments of U.S. political elites and media commentators" (p. 1103) (see also Aldrich et al., 1989; Jordan & Page, 1992; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). Both actors alert the public to events, such as international crises, defense preparedness, and U.S. diplomacy, which have a direct bearing on the extent to which the president is successfully pursuing a peaceful and secure international environment. The president and the media also provide citizens with information and images that seek to sway public opinion (Mutz, 1992).

Presidents attempt to demonstrate their effectiveness as foreign policy leaders by engaging in a variety of public activities. Activities such as speeches and uses of military force provide the public with highly visible cues and trigger its awareness of the president's performance. The media, in particular television, is the second critical actor in the dissemination of information (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Page & Shapiro, 1992). Powlick and Katz (1996) explained that

in order to make stories more meaningful and understandable to audiences, the media usually supply contextual information with their stories that represent ready-made frames. The frames within which people conceptualize events have a significant effect on opinion (Iyengar, 1991), as well as the probability that people will undertake collective action in support of a specific position (Gamson, 1992). (p. 4)

Because of the president's use of activities and the media's emphasis on certain readily understandable images and words, the public is, to a large extent, freed from the burden of having to monitor a much more complicated set of cues to evaluate U.S. foreign policy.

We believe that the public, by mastering a few basic cues provided by the president and the media in conjunction with its core values, evaluates the policies of its presidents. Thus, a decision-making environment characterized by complexity and uncertainty is rendered manageable and, hence, explainable by reliance on a small number of pertinent and easily accessible decision inputs.

**TABLE 1**  
**List of Nations/Regions and Foreign Policy Goals**

<i>Nation/Region</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Foreign Policy Goal</i>
1. Afghanistan	1	0.9	Restraint
2. China	1	0.9	Mixed
3. Cuba	1	0.9	Mixed
4. Grenada	1	0.9	Mixed
5. Libya	1	0.9	Restraint
6. Panama	1	0.9	Internal political change
7. Poland	1	0.9	Mixed
8. Somalia	2	1.7	Internal political change
9. South Africa	2	1.7	Internal political change
10. El Salvador	3	2.6	Internal political change
11. Iraq	3	2.6	Restraint
12. Lebanon	3	2.6	Internal political change
13. Bosnia	4	3.4	Internal political change
14. Eastern Europe	4	3.4	Mixed
15. Haiti	4	3.4	Internal political change
16. Iran	5	4.3	Mixed
17. Nicaragua	6	5.2	Internal political change
18. Central America	10	8.6	Internal political change
19. Middle East	13	11.2	Mixed and restraint
20. Persian Gulf	20	17.2	Restraint
21. USSR	30	25.9	Mixed
Total	116		

### MEASURING SUPPORT FOR FOREIGN POLICIES

We have chosen to use Gallup poll measures of public support for various U.S. foreign policies as our unit of analysis. The Gallup organization periodically asks respondents whether they support a president's foreign policy in a particular region or toward a particular state. These questions are almost always phrased as, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way President \_\_\_\_\_ is handling U.S. foreign policy toward \_\_\_\_\_?" We include every Gallup poll of this type from 1978 to 1994 in our data as the dependent variable to create a pooled, cross-sectional time-series data set.<sup>2</sup> The data set contains 116 cases covering U.S. foreign policy toward 21 different regions and countries. The dependent variable is expressed as the percentage of the public approving of a president's foreign policy toward these areas. The nations/regions are listed in Table 1. The polls are available on request.<sup>3</sup>

## HYPOTHESES

### CORE VALUES: PEACE AND SECURITY

#### Foreign Policy Goals

U.S. foreign policy scholars have long discussed the difficulties of reconciling the American public's competing desires for peace and security. A similar dilemma confronts presidents who must take care that at the same time measures are taken diplomatically and militarily to safeguard U.S. interests, the nation's foreign policies do not embroil it in unpopular conflicts (Rockman, 1994). These conflicting demands on the president are most clearly seen in the frequent usage of two foreign policy analogies: the Munich syndrome and the Vietnam syndrome. The Munich syndrome or analogy is associated with the view that international aggression threatens American interests and demands a response so as not to encourage further bellicosity (May, 1973; Schell, 1976). The Vietnam syndrome concerns the costs and risks of engagement, especially in the internal affairs of other nations, and thus encourages a less active foreign policy (Jentleson, 1992, 1997; Jentleson & Britton, 1998).

Although the navigation between this foreign policy Scylla and Charybdis seems fraught with peril, as scholars (Jentleson, 1992, 1997; Jentleson & Britton, 1998; Oneal et al., 1996) have begun to point out, the public is fairly consistent in the manner in which it perceives foreign policies, and it can distinguish between those that seek to restrain external aggression and those that aim to impose internal political change (Jentleson, 1992, 1997; Jentleson & Britton, 1998; Schneider, 1983). Foreign policies that are dominated by the goal of restraining external aggression enjoy far more support as they more resemble valence issues, possess greater international legitimacy, are easier to implement, and are in keeping with the Munich syndrome. Foreign policies that are characterized by attempts to impose political change on another nation tend to enjoy less support because such policies involve "position" issues on which there is likely to be political disagreement, do not enjoy as much international legitimacy, are more difficult to effect, and conjure up images of protracted, unwinnable

conflicts like Vietnam (Jentleson, 1992, 1997; Jentleson & Britton, 1998; Schneider, 1983). Thus, in answer to the question, "Is the public more interested in peace or security," the answer must be that it generally expects presidents to take (in)action based on the type of threat to the United States. Taking action to restrain aggressive actors protects U.S. security. Taking action to meddle in another state's affairs jeopardizes peace.

To determine the nature of a president's foreign policy goals toward various nations and regions, we rely on Jentleson's (1992) categorization of foreign policy objectives. He distinguishes among those objectives that involve imposing internal political change in the affairs of another nation (e.g., the promotion of democracy, human rights, or resolution of civil war), foreign policy restraint of a target state's external behavior (e.g., acts of terrorism or war), or a mixed strategy involving elements of both. We rely on the same coding procedures described by Jentleson to create one variable for foreign policies where the primary objective is internal political change and another variable where the primary objective is foreign policy restraint.<sup>4</sup> The coding decisions are also given in Table 1. We hypothesize that external restraint foreign policies will obtain the highest level of support, whereas internal change policies will obtain the least amount of support.

*Security.* Public attitudes on foreign policy are shaped not just by the exigencies of particular situations but also by the extent to which the president's policies are achieving peace and security in general. First, we believe the public is interested in American security—the extent to which the president is able to maintain U.S. sovereignty and influence in international affairs (Chittick, Billingsely, & Travis, 1995; Richman, Malone, & Nolle, 1997; Wittkopf, 1990). To measure this concern, we rely on data concerning public attitudes on military spending. We reason that there is a rough equivalence between the belief that the nation is not spending enough on defense and the belief that the United States is not secure enough or equipped to defend itself in the world. Therefore, the percentage of the public that believes the United States is spending too little on defense should indicate the degree to which the public believes the president has not done enough

to promote security. We hypothesize that as the percentage of the public that agrees with the statement "The United States is spending too little (or not enough) on defense" increases, support for presidents' foreign policies should decrease.<sup>5</sup>

*Peace.* Although the public expects presidents to maintain U.S. power and influence, it would prefer that the cost of hegemony not include loss of American life. In his groundbreaking study of the impact of public opinion on foreign policy, Mueller (1973) found that in both the Korean and Vietnam wars, popular support began at similar levels and fell off as casualties mounted. We argue that the public will evaluate a president's efforts to promote peace by the loss of life his policies bring about. Although it is possible that the loss of American lives in foreign conflicts may bring about a rally effect, we believe that given the public's antipathy toward such casualties, especially since the war in Vietnam, the effect will largely be negative. We hypothesize that the greater the number of American military deaths resulting from hostile actions in the state/region mentioned in the Gallup poll, the less support the public will give to presidents' foreign policies.<sup>6</sup>

#### INFORMATION CUES: PRESIDENTIAL ACTIVITIES

*Presidential addresses.* Although the president makes hundreds of speeches each year, this study focuses on one specific type of speechmaking—major addresses. Major addresses are defined as live, nationally televised speeches to the country that preempt all major network programming (Kernell, 1993; Ragsdale, 1996). On average, overall public support for the president increases 3 to 6 percentage points after a major address (Brace & Hinckley, 1992; Ragsdale, 1984). To meet the inclusion criteria, an address had to concern the specific region or country mentioned in a Gallup poll and had to have been made within 30 days prior to the poll. The variable is coded 1 for such addresses and 0 otherwise. We hypothesize that a major address to the nation will increase public support for the president's foreign policy toward that nation or region.<sup>7</sup>

*Foreign travel.* The second indicator of presidential activities is foreign travel. Although there are a number of reasons for traveling

abroad (e.g., meeting foreign leaders and visiting American troops), each shares the common goal of rallying public support around the leadership of the president (Kernell, 1993). By traveling to a foreign country, the president projects the image of a "single executive representing the entire nation before the world" (Ragsdale, 1996, p. 149). To assess the impact of presidential foreign travel on public evaluations, we included only those occasions in which a president visited the region or country associated with a Gallup poll within 30 days prior to the poll. We hypothesize that presidential travel to a foreign country increases public support for his policies toward that nation/region.<sup>8</sup>

*The use of military force.* The final indicator we employ is the political use of military force (Blechman & Kaplan, 1978). Although some research has found evidence of a rally-round-the-flag effect following the use of force (Edwards & Swenson, 1997; Lee, 1977; MacKuen, 1983; Marra, Ostrom, & Simon, 1990; Mueller, 1973), a recent and thorough analysis of the phenomenon shows that the average boost to a president's approval rating following a visible use of force is close to zero (Lian & Oneal, 1993). However, these scholars did not examine the effect that a use of force may have on public support for a president's foreign policy toward specific nations. Therefore, we hypothesize that uses of force will increase public support for presidents' foreign policies toward the target nation or region. To construct this dummy variable, we use only major uses of military force<sup>9</sup> that occurred within 30 days prior to a Gallup poll.<sup>10</sup>

#### INFORMATION CUES: THE MEDIA

The media serves as a potential mechanism of influence over the public's evaluation of the president (West, 1991) and his performance in the foreign policy arena (Jordan & Page, 1992). One object of this study is to examine the quantity and quality of coverage provided by the three major networks to determine if these patterns influence the public's evaluation of the president's handling of specific foreign policies. To that end, we use data from the Vanderbilt News Archives.<sup>11</sup>

As a framework, we employed the extensive coding procedures developed for gathering information on the major network news

reports (Jordan & Page, 1992; Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey, 1987; West, 1991). We selected one of the three major networks each night for each of the 30 days prior to each Gallup poll (Edwards, Mitchell, & Welch, 1995). For each night, we recorded the content and time (in seconds) of all reports concerning the nation or region mentioned in the Gallup poll. Individual reports were coded -1 for a negative report, 0 for a neutral report, or 1 for a positive report.<sup>12</sup> The total amount of time devoted to positive, neutral, and negative reports was summed up for the entire 30-day period prior to the poll question. Because we are interested in both the absolute and the relative amount of coverage devoted to foreign policies, we created interactive variables for positive and negative media coverage. First, we calculated the percentage of news coverage devoted to a foreign policy that was positive and the percentage of coverage that was negative.<sup>13</sup> Second, we developed a ranking of the overall level of coverage that distinguished between low (1), medium (2), and high (3) levels of the time spent on foreign policies.<sup>14</sup> Third, each percentage, ranging from 0 to 1, was multiplied by this ordinal variable. Thus, our final variables reflect both the relative and absolute levels of positive and negative media coverage of presidents' foreign policies. We hypothesize that positive news coverage will increase and negative news coverage will decrease public support for presidents' foreign policies.

### ANALYSIS

We use a cross-sectional data set of 116 polls across 21 different regions and nations. Such data may be afflicted with heteroscedasticity because it is possible that there will be greater or lesser variance in the error terms for some units or countries than others. These data are similar in many ways to cross-national data where there is reason to believe there are unique effects for each nation. Here, we might expect that policies toward different nations may be viewed similarly across time and differently than policies toward other nations, thereby creating variance problems. There are several alternatives one might employ depending on the degree of heteroscedasticity and the type of data one is using (N. Beck & Katz, 1995; Stimson, 1985). Given that we use an unbalanced data set where not

**TABLE 2**  
**Random-Effects Regression Estimates of**  
**Public Support for Presidents' Foreign Policies, 1978 to 1994**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficient</i>	<i>t Statistic</i>	<i>p Value</i>
Internal change	-13.216	-6.147	-3.405	.001
Restraint	2.052	0.872	0.491	.623
Peace	-0.154	-1.971	-2.071	.038
Security	0.037	0.949	1.099	.272
Speech	6.293	2.736	2.835	.005
Travel	4.643	1.032	1.466	.143
Force	1.126	1.934	1.720	.086
Positive news	5.373	2.853	3.129	.002
Negative news	-5.951	-3.782	-4.061	.000
Popularity	0.525	6.528	6.936	.000
Constant	26.812		4.769	.000

NOTE:  $N = 116$ ; adjusted  $R^2 = .754$ ;  $p$  value = one-tailed test.

all regions are equal in number, we use a one-factor, random-effects model (Greene, 1993, pp. 469-479).<sup>15</sup>

We must also consider the manner in which overall presidential approval influences foreign policy approval and vice versa. First, it is possible that the president's handling of foreign policy is simply one component of overall presidential support, along with domestic and social policies. Second, it is also plausible that public evaluations of specific policies reflect nothing more than the public's general sense of the incumbent's capability. To determine in which direction the causal arrow points, we conducted Granger causality tests (Charemza & Deadman, 1992; Granger, 1988). We found that at one and two lags, the overall approval measure Granger causes the specific foreign policy support measure. We also found that foreign policy approval does not Granger cause the overall approval measure. Therefore, we concluded that it was necessary to include a measure of overall approval and that it belongs on the right-hand side of our equation.<sup>16</sup>

The estimates in Table 2 provide solid support for the model introduced above. Foreign policy goals, security, presidential activities, and the media's reporting of international affairs all have a statistically significant impact on the public's evaluation of the president. Moreover, our model explains 75% (.754) of the total variance in public evaluations of the president's handling of foreign policies.<sup>17</sup>

Of particular importance in this study is whether the public distinguishes between different objectives of American foreign policy and rewards foreign policies depending on the types of goals it seeks to advance. The positive and significant coefficient on the internal variable strongly suggests that the public does in fact discriminate between the different objectives of American foreign policy. When foreign policy objectives involve changing the internal political environment of a particular country or region (i.e., conjuring up the Vietnam syndrome), public evaluations decrease, on average, by 13 percentage points. This variable also has the second largest standardized regression coefficient. The external variable, which indicates when foreign policies seek to restrain aggressive international actors, is statistically insignificant. We suspected that this variable might be correlated with either the force variable or the positive news variable, especially when successful actions are taken to contain aggression. In fact, it is the high correlation between positive news and the external variable that washes out its significance, so we should not conclude the American public is not supportive of external restraint policies. In the broader literature of public opinion and foreign policy, this distinction supports the idea of a prudent public (Jentleson, 1992; Jentleson & Britton, 1998; Oneal et al., 1996).

Related to the stated goals of America's foreign policy, we find that public attitudes on how well the president is maintaining U.S. security in general exhibit significant effects on evaluations of specific foreign policies (security). As hypothesized, the greater the number of people who agree America is not spending enough on defense, the less support a president receives for his policy. A 1-percentage-point drop here translates into a .15-percentage-point loss in approval.

The variable, peace, however, is not statistically significant. It would not appear that the public responds to casualties from limited military incursions in the same manner as when the United States is involved in protracted fighting (e.g., Vietnam). These results indicate that despite public displeasure over incidents like the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon and the 1993 operations in Somalia, across the broad swath of military operations, American casualties do not lead to an immediate loss of support for presidents' foreign policies. We also explored other possibilities for measuring public con-

cern for peace. Perhaps the most promising was a measure of public expectations regarding the probability of war. Although this measure proved to correlate with public support for foreign policies, questions on the subject were not asked consistently or with the same wording, and so the measure was not included in the final analysis.

Presidential activities also complement our portrait of the public's policy evaluations. The speech variable (speech) is statistically significant, properly signed, and tends, *ceteris paribus*, to boost public support for the president's policies by more than 6 percentage points. In this sense, a prime-time, major address provides an obvious cue for the public, thus affording the president an opportunity to maximize its positive political impact. As hypothesized, travel to a foreign country (travel) increases support, *ceteris paribus*, by approximately 4.6%, although it is not statistically significant.

Uses of force (force) also increase public support; the coefficient is statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction. Our findings suggest that uses of force matter but only when they are relevant to the policy in question. The limited utility of displays of military force suggests that the public does notice and respond to such events in the context of particular foreign policies. As indicated by previous research (Lian & Oneal, 1993), however, the impact of these actions apparently does not carry over into overall evaluations of the president where they may not be as salient and may be overwhelmed by other factors.

The influence of the media in shaping public evaluations of the president's policies is, as hypothesized, an important and significant factor. Both variables are properly signed, thus suggesting that positive and negative news coverage of events associated with a country or region strongly influences the public's evaluation of the president. When television networks devote more time proportionately and absolutely to news stories that portray the president and his policies in a positive light, public support of the president's policies increases. Conversely, the higher the relative and absolute level of time spent highlighting the failures of the president's foreign policies, the more public support will decrease. Interestingly, the absolute size of the coefficients for positive and negative news is roughly the same, indicating that the public may be evenhanded in its interpretation of media

coverage of foreign policy successes and failures. That is, presidents are accorded credit and blame equally when foreign policy events are reported.

The overall approval rating (popularity) of the president is a notable indicator in the evaluation process of the public. Not surprisingly, the variable is positive and statistically significant and possesses the largest standardized regression coefficient. Although these overall impressions often reflect a more comprehensive picture of presidential evaluations (e.g., involving factors such as the domestic economy and other social issues), our findings suggest that the public can discriminate between these comprehensive judgments and evaluations of the president's particular policies toward foreign countries. Given that the other variables in the model remain significant in the presence of overall popularity, the results suggest that the public's evaluations of the president's specific policies are still heavily influenced by foreign policy cues. To further investigate the importance of the popularity measure in our model, we reran the model without it. We discovered that the addition of this measure boosts the  $R^2$  by only 6 percentage points (from .696 to .754). For this reason, we do not believe this variable to be driving the results.

## CONCLUSIONS

The goals of this study have been to determine how the public is able to evaluate foreign policies without the benefit of a storehouse of knowledge and what factors influence that evaluation. Our core values/information cues model of public evaluations presents a comprehensive picture of how this process works. First, the empirical evidence marshaled strongly supports the notion that public opinion on foreign policy issues is influenced by the use of a limited number of environmental cues to determine when presidents are successfully maintaining the core values of peace and security. Second, the significance of the measures' corresponding to information cues convincingly shows that in addition to public concern for such broad foreign policy goals as peace and security, the public notices and makes use of presidential activities and media coverage to evaluate foreign policies.

More specifically, we find that the public rewards presidents who are pursuing foreign policies designed to defend against international aggression and who are devoting sufficient resources to promote U.S. security. The public does not evaluate highly those presidents whose policies, it is feared, will lead the nation into protracted conflict in the internal affairs of other states. In addition, presidential speeches, travel to foreign countries, uses of force, and positive media coverage all boost public support for specific policies. Even though research on the effect of presidential activities on overall support is inconclusive, these findings (when considered alongside other studies) suggest such activities are useful if they are relevant to the policy being evaluated and if presidents do not overuse them.

Ultimately, we look on this endeavor not so much as a final step but as a midway point in the development of the public opinion and foreign policy research agenda. Our understanding of the subject has advanced considerably in the past few years, but we believe a great deal more integration of research findings ought to take place along with theoretical and empirical advancement in particular areas not adequately explored. First, there is a need to extend our model to the analysis of individual-level data to determine if our set of explanatory factors helps determine on what basis individuals evaluate foreign policies so that other relevant factors such as internationalism/isolationism may be included. Second, we believe that a broader array of foreign policies ought to be analyzed to understand the determinants of both collective opinion and individual attitudes. Subjects such as humanitarian intervention, nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation, and other emerging concerns may not be as easily viewed through the peace-and-security framework and might require some elaboration of our model. Third, we should also study change in public attitudes at the individual and aggregate levels of analysis, as some have begun to do (Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992).

## NOTES

1. Prosperity generally refers to the management of the domestic economy.
2. Before 1978, such questions were rarely asked, with the important exceptions of items on Korea and Vietnam. These items were not included because there is such a long temporal gap

between the polls we use and the war polls and because the foreign policies we examine are conceptually different from those wars. We chose to begin our data with the 1st year for which the Gallup organization regularly began asking survey respondents such questions. We elected not to use other data sources, such as the Harris and Roper polls, because from our research we discovered that most did not ask such questions with the same frequency as the Gallup organization, and when foreign policy questions were asked, they generally referred to the same nations and regions covered in the Gallup poll. Thus, we felt the inclusion of such data would overrepresent some cases, underrepresent others, and potentially introduce model misspecification.

3. We must emphasize at the outset that the Gallup organization does not ask this type of question at regular intervals, nor does it consistently query the public about U.S. foreign policy toward particular nations (with the important exception of the Soviet Union/Russia). Thus, we cannot claim to have constructed a data set that conveys public attitudes toward a representative sample of all nations evenly distributed across time. Because the Gallup poll does not ask these policy-related questions at regular intervals, there may be a possible selection bias in the timing of the poll. That is, when a nation or region is salient and in the news, Gallup may be more inclined to ask questions about the public's evaluation of the president's handling of that particular policy. We conducted several preliminary tests for potential difficulties raised by selection bias. We first selected an arbitrary time unit (month) and then calculated the correlations between the occurrence of a poll and several indicators of nation/region saliency. The data set consisted of 204 time units (beginning in January 1978 and ending in December 1994). Then, using data on positive and negative international presidential events, which we consider an indicator of saliency, we calculated the correlations between the occurrence of a Gallup poll and the occurrence of an international presidential event. We used Ragsdale's data on positive and negative presidential international events (i.e., foreign events that required direct presidential involvement). These data were generously supplied by Lyn Ragsdale. Her coding criteria for such events are outlined in Ragsdale (1984). The correlation between these two indicators was .07, indicating an extremely low association between international events that require direct presidential involvement and the occurrence of a Gallup poll.

4. To make these determinations, we considered presidential documents (*Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* [1978-1994]), media coverage (Vanderbilt Television News Archive), *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* [1973-1991], and Jentleson (1992). Each author independently coded the foreign policy goals for all cases. The correlation between the two measures was .89. We are aware that Jentleson and Britton (1998) have now developed a fourth category of foreign policy goals: humanitarian intervention. We did not include this as one of our goals because it would seem to apply only to the Somalia polls. Readers will note that in Table 1, U.S. foreign policy goals toward almost all countries/regions remain the same over time. In particular, some may wonder why U.S. foreign policy toward the USSR/Russia is always coded as "mixed," when it is possible that U.S. policy was mostly characterized by one of the other goals at particular times from 1978 to 1994. We chose to always code U.S. foreign policy toward the USSR/Russia as mixed because of all the nations in the world, U.S. relations with the USSR were the most complex. We believe it would be impossible to characterize U.S. relations at any point in time as dominated by one goal or to infer from a Gallup poll question what the appropriate policy or historical context was when the question was asked. In the case of the Middle East, another region that was almost always coded as mixed, we did make one exception. There were a few polls conducted concerning U.S. foreign policy toward that region during the Persian Gulf War when it was obvious that this conflict was the driving concern in the Middle East at the time. In these instances, we coded the foreign policy goal as "restraint."

5. We use Gallup data on these questions gathered closest and prior to, or simultaneous with, the polling data we use for our dependent variable. It is possible, however, that an individ-

ual may both see the need for increased defense spending and support a president's foreign policies, especially if that president is in favor of more funding for the Pentagon (e.g., Ronald Reagan). Because our data are aggregated, we cannot unravel these instances. It should be kept in mind that to the extent such individuals exist, they should serve to disconfirm our hypothesis, making our tests all the more conservative.

6. This information was obtained from the Department of Defense's Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, "U.S. Active Duty Military Deaths From Hostile Action." These tables were faxed to the authors by the Directorate. We count the number of casualties in the nation/region mentioned in the Gallup poll in the 30 days prior to the poll.

7. This information was taken from Ragsdale (1996).

8. This information was taken from the *New York Times Index* and *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (1978-1994).

9. Blechman and Kaplan (1978) defined the major force levels as including at least one of the following: (a) two or more aircraft carrier task groups, (b) more than one battalion ground unit, (c) one or more air combat wings. We include the initial phase of Operation Desert Shield, the major augmentation of U.S. forces in the Gulf region in November 1990, and Operation Desert Storm as individual, major uses of force.

10. Blechman and Kaplan (1978); Center for Naval Analyses: *The Use of Naval Forces in the Post-War Era: U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps Crisis Response Activity, 1946-1990*; *New York Times Index*; Zelikow (1984).

11. <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>

12. Positive stories were considered to be those that primarily emphasized (a) beneficial or salutary presidential involvement in successful international activities such as diplomacy, the use of force, and treaty signings; (b) international event outcomes that redounded to the president's benefit, such as the capture of Manuel Noriega; (c) comments by expert analysts and American and foreign politicians that portrayed the president's foreign policies in a positive light; and (d) stories noting public support for the president's policies. Negative stories were coded as the reverse of these criteria. However, we did not consider most statements made by foreign leaders, such as Saddam Hussein or Manuel Noriega, hostile to the United States. All stories that were not clearly positive or negative were considered neutral. Three coders were employed in the codings of these cases. The intercoder reliability on the quantity of the coverage averaged .92, whereas the reliability correlations on the quality of coverage averaged .75.

13. In other words, our calculation was 1: positive coverage/(positive + negative + neutral coverage) and 2: negative coverage/(positive + negative + neutral coverage).

14. These categories were determined by dividing the total amount of coverage at the 33rd and 66th percentiles.

15. A random-effects model assumes that the alpha are random variables and not fixed constants (Stimson, 1985). Random effects makes use of a two-stage estimation procedure in which estimates of the variance components are first generated using ordinary least squares analysis and then used in feasible, generalized least squares (Greene, 1993).

16. Recent research on the use of force (DeRouen, 1995) has indicated that simultaneity exists between the use of force and presidential popularity. We conducted a Hausman specification test (Pindyck & Rubinfeld, 1991) to check our results. The test came back insignificant ( $t = .965$ ), indicating that the use of force is not endogenous to foreign policy support and that simultaneity is statistically unlikely. The difference between our research and others' is probably due to the more limited set of uses of force we include (only major uses of force related to particular geographic regions). Additionally, we checked to determine if there was any evidence of serial correlation and found none ( $DW = 1.79$ ).

17. We individually separated out the Soviet Union, Persian Gulf, and all Middle East cases to determine if our estimates were overly biased by their inclusion. The estimates did not change very much, and when we dropped out the Soviet Union, the overall fit actually improved. Thus, we have no reason to believe that any particular region is biasing our estimates. We also determined if particular presidents enjoyed greater or lesser levels of support across their foreign policies. The only noticeable difference we found was that Ronald Reagan's policies were less likely to be supported than the other presidents' policies were.

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