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ORIGINS OF U.S. PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR DRONE STRIKES:
THE INTERSECTION OF ELITE RHETORIC, MEDIA COVERAGE, AND
AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION
2000-2015

By

Grant M. Cohen

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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May 2018
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

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the requirements for the degree of
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ORIGINS OF U.S. PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR DRONE STRIKES:
THE INTERSECTION OF ELITE RHETORIC, MEDIA COVERAGE, AND
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2000-2015

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Armed, unmanned aerial vehicles have been an increasingly important tool of US foreign policy since the George W. Bush era, and emerged as the Barack Obama administration’s weapon of choice. Some say drone strikes are necessary to reduce American casualties abroad and protect lives at home, while others argue they terrorize communities and violate the sovereignty of states throughout the world. Meanwhile, the American public has consistently supported this controversial tactic, while most of the world – including close US allies – oppose it. In this dissertation, I analyze congressional rhetoric, presidential rhetoric and mainstream TV news content regarding the use of drones from 2000 through 2015, and compare the results to nationally representative surveys that measure support and opposition for drone strikes. The findings show a significant relationship between the frequency and types of messages espoused by elites and media, and US public opinion. This result has important implications for the democratic process and the origins of Americans’ perception of the use of force, and shows support for both framing effects and indexing theory.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF GRAPHS ................................................................................................................................. v

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................................. vii

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE AND THEORY: THE MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS .... 14

2.1 The Marketplace of Ideas ............................................................................................................. 17

2.2 Public Opinion in Democratic Societies: Theoretical Debates and Milestones ............... 20

2.3. Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: The (Un)Informed Public? .......................... 26

2.4. Public Opinion and the Use of Force: Events-Outcomes versus Elite Cues ........ 30

2.5. Elites, Media, and Public Opinion: Agenda-Setting and Framing .............................. 35

2.6. Elite Cues and Official Sources ............................................................................................ 41

2.7. Indexing and Partisanship ........................................................................................................ 44

CHAPTER 3. DATA AND METHODS ................................................................................................. 48

3.1. Key Definitions ........................................................................................................................... 50

3.2. Analysis of TV News Coverage ............................................................................................ 52

3.3. Analysis of Presidential and Congressional Rhetoric ...................................................... 57

3.4. Coding Scheme ......................................................................................................................... 58

3.5. Public Opinion Data ................................................................................................................. 81

CHAPTER 4. WHAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE THINK ..................................................................... 85

4.1. US Public Opinion Regarding US Drone Strikes since 2010 ............................................ 85

4.2. Fear of Terrorism and Support for Drone Strikes ............................................................. 110
4.3. Americans are [sort of] Concerned about the Legality and Efficacy and Ethics of Drone Strikes

4.4. Bipartisanship? REALLY?

CHAPTER 5. ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE AND ELITE RHETORIC

MEDIA COVERAGE OF DRONES

5.1. Frequency, Salience and Agenda-Setting

5.2. Messaging and Framing

5.3. Sourcing

5.4. Elite Rhetoric: The US President and Members of Congress

CHAPTER 6. THE EXCEPTIONS: ISRAEL, INDIA AND KENYA

6.1. Israel

6.2. India

6.3. Kenya

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

7.1. Key Conclusions

7.2. Where’s the Partisanship?

7.3. Obstacles, Weaknesses and Further Research

7.4. Contributions and Recommendations

BIBLIOGRAPHY
LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph 1.1. Percent of Public Opposed to US Drone Strikes, 2014.................................5
Graph 1.2. Public Opposition to US Drone Strikes in NATO Member Countries, 2014......6
Graph 2.1. The Marketplace of Ideas..............................................................................20
Graph 3.1. Count of Vanderbilt TV Abstracts, by Network.............................................55
Graph 4.1. Support for Drone Strikes and Various Other Options, June 2014.................90
Graph 4.2. Approval versus Disapproval of US-led Drone Strikes..................................91
Graph 4.3. U.S. Public Support for Drone Strikes, Based on Location and Citizenship of Targets, March 2013.................................................................94
Graph 4.4. The Poll of Polls (Loess)................................................................................109
Graph 4.5. Americans’ Level of Worry that the U.S. will Experience another Major Terrorist Attack, 2001-2014.................................................................112
Graph 4.6. Level of Concern with Drone Strikes Endangering Civilians, 2013
    and 2015..............................................................................................................113
Graph 4.7. Level of Public Concern about Drone Strikes Leading to Retaliation by Extremists, 2013 and 2015.................................................................115
Graph 4.8. Level of Public Concern about Drone Strikes Damaging America’s Reputation around the World, 2013 and 2015..............................................116
Graph 4.9. Level of Concern about the Legality of Drone Strikes, 2013 and 2015........119
Graph 5.1. Frequency of Drone-Related TV News Stories, by Year (2000-2014)..........128
Graph 5.2. Quantity of Message-Level Categories in Mainstream Media Reports,
    2000-2015........................................................................................................132
Graph 5.3. Occurrence of Message-Level Categories in Mainstream Media Reports
Graph 5.4. Polarity of Primary Messages in Mainstream Media Reports, 2000-2015

Graph 5.5. Prominence of Sources in Mainstream Media Reports, 2000-2015

Graph 5.6. Presidential Mentions of the Term "Drone(s)," 2000-2015

Graph 5.7. Intensity of Congressional Mentions of Drones, by Party ID and Message-Type (2000-2015)

Graph 7.1. Percentage of Americans who “favor... the US using unmanned aircraft or 'drones' to carry out bombing attacks against suspected terrorists in foreign countries” (February 2013 – June 2014)
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1. Percent of Public opposition to US Drone Strikes, Annually 2012-2014..........4
Table 3.1. Number of Full Transcripts Analyzed, by Network...........................................56
Table 4.1. US Public Approval and Opposition regarding Drone Strike Operations
(in percentages)..................................................................................................................87
Table 4.2. Approval versus Disapproval............................................................................89
Table 5.1. Quantity of TV News Segments about Drones, Irrespective of Network.........126
Table 5.2. Quantity of TV News Coverage about Drones, by Network............................127
Table 5.3. Message Level Categories, 2000-2014..............................................................131
Table 5.4. Relationship between Types of Messages and Types of Sources, 2000-2015...138
Table 5.5. Mentions of “Drones” during Congressional Floor Debates, 2000-2015........148
Table 6.1. Israeli Public Opinion Regarding the Problem of Terrorism........................157
Table 6.2. Terrorist Attacks with Casualties in Israel, 2000-2016.....................................158
Table 6.3. Terrorist Attacks in US since 2000, Not Including Most Far-Right or Far-Left
Domestic Terror Acts.........................................................................................................159
Table 6.4. Israeli Public Support for the US-led Efforts to Fight Terrorism.....................162
Table 6.5. Covert US Operations, Somalia 2001-2016.....................................................171
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Armed, unmanned aerial vehicles have been an increasingly important tool of US foreign policy since the George W. Bush era and ultimately emerged as the weapon of choice under the Barack Obama administration. While some say that drones are an inevitable technological development that reduces American casualties abroad and saves American lives at home, others argue that drones are more appropriately described as death robots engineered to terrorize communities from the skies above sovereign countries throughout the world.

Proponents of the US drone program point out, among other things, that suspected terrorists fear Predator and Reaper drones due to the numerous national security threats that have already been eliminated by successful strikes. They also point out that the amount of civilian casualties have been reduced in recent years and that traditional air strikes raise many of the same questions as drone strikes.\(^1\) Opponents such as human rights groups, NGOs, and foreign government officials are adamant that drone strikes violate international legal norms and human rights standards. Many say drone strikes inflame anti-American sentiments due to the covert and unilateral nature of such operations, and more importantly, the killing of civilians.\(^2\)

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\(^2\) The US drone program and drone strikes in particular have been critiqued by organizations such as the Columbia Law School’s Human Rights Clinic, the Center for Civilians in Conflict, Amnesty International, the International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (Stanford), and the US Government
The general public in countries around the globe are broadly opposed to US-led drone strikes. Indeed, the evidence shows that nations of all shapes and sizes – even American allies, NATO members, and states impacted by foreign terror attacks far more than the US – stand together in opposition. Simply put, most non-Americans are against drone strikes. And they always have been. The American public, on the other hand, predominantly and consistently supports the tactic. While some cross-country variation is to be expected, the vast disparity between US opinion and most other countries in the world stands out as quite a conundrum. This combination of widespread international opposition and broad American support is what raises the central research question in this paper: what factors drive American public support for the US drone program, and relatedly, for drone strikes against foreign militants?

This is an important question, first and foremost, because in democratic societies, public preferences should determine policy outcomes. Of course, this isn’t always the case, but it’s unquestionably true that elected officials are constrained by public opinion if they seek to maintain power. The public, then, plays an incredibly important role in policymaking in democracies. This begs questions, such as: how does the public formulate opinions about policies, especially the use of force? What factors determine the issues that the public thinks about, and the way it thinks about them? Do the people react and revise their opinions based on new information from authoritative sources such as elites and the


3 This fact is based on international public opinion surveys conducted since at least 2010 and the data is presented in the following pages and chapters.
media? Or, do citizens prioritize their partisan allegiances, tribal affiliations, or some other form of identification?

Given widespread agreement among modern political theorists that the public should be the primary determinant of policies in democratic societies, a paramount goal must be to understand the processes and variables that cause the public to think the way it does about important sociopolitical issues. This project is an example of such an endeavor, as the primary aim is to isolate the factors that cause Americans to support a controversial policy that’s opposed by most other countries, including US allies and fellow NATO members.

A Pew global attitudes survey in mid-2014 asked people in various countries about their support or opposition for US drone strikes. In 39 of 44 countries surveyed, majorities or pluralities “oppose US drone strikes targeting extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.” Opposition to drone attacks had increased in many of these nations since the exact same Pew global attitudes survey was conducted one year prior. In many countries where the public was already strongly opposed to drone strikes, there has been no significant change in attitudes since 2012, when Pew first asked about opposition to the tactic. This includes Greece, Lebanon, Poland, China, Egypt, Turkey and Jordan. Other countries have seen an increase in opposition to US-led drone strikes, primarily European nations such as Spain, France, Germany and Italy. The results are shown in Table 1.1.

---

4 Importantly, with respect to survey design, the main question was phrased exactly the same way as a majority of the survey items used to measure US public opinion.
Notably, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Brazil and Japan are all NATO members and key US allies in their respective regions.

Table 1.1. Percent of Public opposition to US Drone Strikes, Annually 2012-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Brazil</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>Tunisia</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Elaborated by the author based on the data from Pew Research Center, Global Attitudes Surveys

Graph 1.1, below, shows the level of public opposition to US drone strikes on a country-by-country basis. Notice that only 7 of the 44 countries surveyed predominantly approve of drone strikes, including the US, as where the vast majority of countries surveyed express extreme disapproval. Numerous US and NATO allies are opposed to drone strikes. This list includes Spain (86%), Turkey (83%), France (72%), Germany (67%) and the UK (59%). Not only are these countries US and NATO allies, but they have also experienced major terror attacks on their home soil – the type of attacks that the US drone program is purportedly designed to combat. Japan (82%) and South Korea (75%), key American allies in Asia, are also strongly opposed to drone strikes.
The Pew global study illustrates that most of the world is widely opposed to US drone strikes, including America’s allies, NATO members, and countries that have been directly hit by the type of terrorism that the US drone program purportedly combats. The
wide-ranging nature of these nations mitigates any argument that the American public’s support for drone strikes is the result of nation’s unique position in the global system.

Graph 1.2. Public Opposition to US Drone Strikes in NATO Member Countries, 2014

Source: Elaborated by the author based on the data from Pew Research Center.8

There’s a small group of countries that in addition to the US predominantly support drone strikes. The Israeli case, where just 27% of the public oppose them, is unsurprising. Israel typically leans to the far-right, elite rhetoric and media coverage about security threats is constant, and people have experience living amidst numerous legitimate dangers. Drones are seen as one of many tools that can mitigate those risks. As for India, where just 36% of the public oppose drone strikes, it’s safe to say there’s no despair among the population with respect to US actions aimed at India’s archrival and primary security threat in Pakistan.

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8 Pew Research Center, “Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance and Drones.”
The African case is more complicated. Support in Kenya, where only 38% of respondents expressed disapproval, and nearby countries such as Nigeria and Ghana can be partly explained by the crackdown on ivory poachers, and partly explained by people’s support for military actions against groups such as armed non-state actors such as al-Shabab. Indeed, a US drone strike occurred in Kenya as recently as July 2015, killing four al-Shabab leaders and the so-called mastermind of the Garissa University massacre – an act of terrorism that received international attention and struck fear into people throughout the region.9 Furthermore, the issues of poaching and terrorism are closely related, as al-Shabab reportedly brings in between $200,000 and $600,000 a month from ivory.10 So while a majority of the people throughout the most-terrorized regions in Africa support drones strikes, which isn’t surprising because considering that live amidst unspeakably horrifying attacks such as the university massacre and an outmatched, weak state that’s effectively lost control of much of its territory and the ability to govern.

So, what have we already learned? The people in countries all throughout the world and of all varieties strongly or at least mostly “oppose US drone strikes targeting extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.” Yet the US public continues to show broad support for this tactic. What gives? Why do Americans continue to support policies that are vastly opposed by people throughout the world? I argue that US public opinion about drone strikes is the outcome of a few key factors: elite rhetoric and elite cues; if and how the media covers drone strike events and related issues; and the nature of the

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relationship between elites and the media regarding foreign policy matters, particularly when there’s broad cross-party agreement among political elites. The argument is based on evidence that public opinion trends can be linked to elite rhetoric, or more specifically, to the messages and sources that consciously and subconsciously penetrate and influence media coverage. The upshot, to be clear, is that the US public opinion formation process involves power and influence and is a demonstration of the relationship that exists between elite political actors, the media, and the public.

More specifically, my argument has three key parts: first, political elites in the US widely agree regarding support for drone strikes. This is especially true with respect to agreement among Republicans and Democrats, as well as members of the military and CIA. When these actors do speak in public about drone strikes, they do so in positive terms, focusing on national security achievements and the helpful, unique aspects of the emerging weapon. Most notably, messages about drone strikes link them with specific military accomplishments combined with the ability to remove soldiers from harm’s way. Meanwhile, elites in the US infrequently debate the issues that could drive opposition to drone strikes, such as foreign civilian casualties, related blowback effects, sovereignty, legality, or even the methods of selecting targets and counting casualties – the latter two of which have been repeatedly highlighted by NGOs.11

The second part of this argument concerns political communication, or more specifically, the media’s role as the main transmitter of information and opinions about foreign policy issues. The media, thus, is a key intervening variable that functions between

political elites and public opinion. Indeed, the news media play an essential role in influencing people’s awareness, knowledge and attitudes about issues, especially those occurring abroad. This is especially true when we see cross-party agreement. In the case of drone strikes, the evidence shows that the media indexes its news coverage to the cohesive positive rhetoric espoused by political elites. Indexing, a media and political communication theory at the heart of this argument, says that public disagreement among elites spurs journalists and editors to highlight certain issues in the news and to frame them in multiple ways. The central argument and evidence presented in this paper supports the theory that the media requires open policy debates and conflict among political elites for there to be enough incentive to report news and to cast a wide lens on an issue. Indeed, “When a relatively open policy debate occurs along our idealized news information continuum, it most often develops because different officials along different news beats have broken with consensus and decided to go public with their policy differences,” W. Lance Bennett explains. “Elites in open conflict provide journalists with reportable opposition voices and viewpoints.”12 The opposite is also true. When there’s a high-level of agreement among elites and they refrain from publicly expressing their opinions, the media tends to index news coverage in a way that it becomes noncritical, infrequent, and sometimes nonexistent.

News coverage about foreign policies that are highly-supported by key Republicans and Democrats alike tend to be sporadic at best. When these issues are addressed in media coverage, they’re usually informed by “official sources” and associated with a positive

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message. In essence, political elites in the US broadly support a policy that should be controversial. High-levels of cross-party agreement about an issue mean politicians and other opinion-makers lack incentive to debate it in public forums. The rare times they’re forced to speak out, the message is unified and positive and in effect steers reports and the public by limiting the lens through which the issues can be presented and examined.

The case of drone strikes is evidence that elites and the media significantly influence public opinion, particularly under certain conditions. This relationship is especially true regarding foreign policy issues and the use of force, as most Americans aren’t directly exposed to issues or violence abroad, and don’t socialize with those who are directly exposed to foreign affairs. Political elites and the media thus emerge as most people’s main sources of information. John Zaller and Adam Berinsky, each of whom have made some of the most persuasive and comprehensive arguments about the role that elite cues play in public opinion formation, essentially claim that people’s opinions are an outcome of their prior dispositions combined with the partisan balance of elite messages. I will show that the case of American support for drone strikes resembles what these two scholars might refer to as a one-sided message or a mainstream model. Political predispositions don’t matter a great deal when individuals are presented with one-sided messages. In one-sided scenarios, those people exposed to political news are primarily affected by shared sentiments among elites and thought leaders, and the corresponding lack

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13 The statement that drone strikes “should be” controversial is premised upon the fact that the general public in most countries that are the closest international and regional allies of the US consistently oppose drone strikes (always majority opposition, and usually strong opposition).

15 This is compared to two-sided information flows which change public opinion – that is, information flows that consist of both a dominant message pushing much of public opinion in one direction, and a less intense, opposing message that partly counteracts the effects of the dominant message.
of public debate and media coverage. Such is the case with public support for US drone strikes, which helps explain why US sentiment could so drastically fly in the face of friends and foes.

Third, my argument is rooted in the theory that the news media influences the way individuals think about sociopolitical issues and events. These effects, often referred to as agenda-setting and framing, refer to how often or whether an issue is deemed to be newsworthy (agenda-setting), and what sort of “spin” a reporter puts on “story” (framing). The field of journalism has long considered objectivity to be the ideal, but objectivity – the complete absence of conscious or subconscious biases – will forever remain an ultimate goal rather than reality. The result is that news reports, to some extent, are stories told by the reporters who are influenced by their sources. Drone strikes, as mentioned, are often mentioned in the news, but are usually associated with national security successes such as the elimination of a “militant” or “terrorist.” Reports about drones are usually informed by current or former Washington “officials” who infrequently analyze the issues from a critical perspective.

US support for the drone strikes persists not because Americans have a unique relationship with war, terrorism or military aggression, or because the US holds a unique position in the international system. Rather, American public support persists because of elite cues, media coverage, and the one-sided message that’s steering people toward approval. Add in reporters’ reliance on “official” elite sources and the covert status of the drone program, and what we’re left with is a situation in which the US public is either uninformed or informed by a singular message.

16 “Political exposure” refers to the amount of time people spend paying attention to political news.
I examine the process of public opinion formation and the foundations of American support for drone strikes by conducting a rigorous content analysis of mainstream media coverage and congressional rhetoric. The findings from the content analysis are compared to nationally representative public opinion data in order to identify patterns, trends and relationships in an effort to identify the most prominent messages about drone strikes, decipher which actors mediate those messages, and to establish a correlation between those variables and high-levels of US public support for what most of the world views as a controversial tactic.

The dissertation is laid out as follows. Chapter 2 contains the theoretical background and an explanation of terms and ideas that are fundamental to this paper. The ideas that I’m referring to include the public, public opinion, and the public’s role in democratic societies. As you will see, current literature states that public formulates sensible and rational foreign policy opinions, and that the public position on issues could be vital for decision-makers, especially in modern democracies. That positions my argument in the sense that we’re proceeding from a point in which we’ve established the active role that the public plays as well as

The discussion then turns to the media and communication theories that this research project is partly premised upon theories such as agenda-setting and framing. I explain that the media are a vital intervening variable that interprets elite messages and which ones to communicate to the public, as well as how to frame them. The section ends with a discussion about political elites and their manipulation of media coverage and public opinion, a process that can occur consciously and subconsciously and due to power-relations and well as structural constraints.
In Chapter 3, I explain the methodological approach to this project. I start by explaining content analysis and why I chose this as the main method to collect original data regarding media coverage of drone strikes. I also provide an explanation of why I chose the research dates – 2000 through 2014 – and go over the public opinion data, including the sources and years, and importantly, the question wording.

The empirical analysis begins in Chapter 4 and starts with a presentation of US public opinion data about drone strikes. This includes a look at over-time trends and partisan breakdowns that reveal important patterns. Chapter 5 features the main findings from the content analysis of media coverage and elite rhetoric, including Presidential mentions of drones and congressional debate throughout the research period. The findings from this analysis is then compared to the public opinion data discussed in the fourth chapter.

In Chapter 6, I tackle each of the other countries that support drone strikes, explaining why each of those cases is different from that of the US. Indeed, Israel, India and Kenya all have a different history with terrorism, different geographic locations and different media systems, in addition to a multitude of other differences. Finally, I use Chapter 7 to review and discuss the key findings, before detailing some of the weaknesses of this project and how the research could be improved. Finally, in light of the international opposition and the negative aspects of drone strikes, I offer some logical policy recommendations.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE AND THEORY: THE MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS

This chapter is a presentation of the theoretical framework and a discussion about the processes that underpin my argument about the power that elites and the media wield with respect to public opinion. I present the most important theoretical positions upon which my main argument is premised, including: the public’s role in democratic societies; the influence of elite cues; the effect of news coverage and the media; the structural relationship between news journalists and official sources; and ideas regarding public opinion-formation and its relationship with the interplay between domestic and international politics.

The first section focuses on the marketplace of ideas, a term that refers to the view that democratic societies function best when different groups and actors espouse competing opinions. The public is the most essential component to the marketplace. In essence, the public is part of the system of checks and balances in that it constrains leaders and incentivizes them to consider differing viewpoints. The other key players in the US marketplace are political elites, such as the president and other elected officials, and the media, which is the main medium of communication between elites and the public. Elites and the media, as I have stated and argue in this paper, are primary independent variables that steer the US public to express an unusual amount of support for drone strikes.

The second section focuses on the theories and research that contextualize my main argument. First, I define what I mean by the public and discuss the role it plays in democratic decision-making processes. This isn’t meant to be a comprehensive overview
of the history of democratic theory regarding the role of the public. I focus on what some
of the most influential political philosophers have said about the public’s role in
democracies. The upshot is that regardless of the precise argument, most theorists
emphasizes the importance that the public and collective opinion play in well-functioning
democracies, albeit to varying degrees.

The third section emphasizes the public’s ability – or lack thereof, according to
some – to formulate orderly, sensible, and rational foreign policy opinions. Public opinion
researchers have gone through some dramatic shifts in terms whatever they view the public
as able to play a sensible role in foreign policymaking. Rather than asking the question,
‘does the public matter,’ these folks asked, ‘should the public matter.’ It’s a fair question
based on the notion that most people do not have direct knowledge or experience about
foreign policy events. Although tax issues, for example, impact every American citizen,
foreign policy issues are unique in that most people are uninformed or informed by
secondary sources. This is mind, I present the watershed moments and key literature related
to this debate. As you will see, modern mainstream theory states that the public does indeed
respond in explicable and predictable ways to variables such as elite cues, media coverage,
and real-world events.

That leads me to the fourth section, in which I focus on the determinants of public
opinion specifically regarding the use of force. Here, I make a key distinction between two
schools of thought about public support for the use of force. These schools, which I (and
others) refer to as the event-outcome and elite cues schools, each promote distinct theories
that explain people’s support for military engagement. I cannot overstate the importance
of the distinction between these two schools, especially the elite cues school, as my central
argument that elites and the media drive American public opinion about US drone strikes is deeply embedded in this theory.

Finally, I present key research and theory regarding the media’s impact on public opinion. This discussion focuses on casual mechanisms such as agenda-setting and framing effects as well as the structural relationship between news organizations/international news journalists and elite/official sources. I begin with an overview of agenda-setting and framing, both of which refer to the media’s powerful intervening role as the main medium of communication between elites and the general public. This leads is to agenda setting and framing, which refer to causal-mechanisms that exist between the frequency and nature of media coverage about particular issues, and public awareness and opinion about those issues. These theories, which can be attributed to the work of communications scholar Maxwell McCombs and his colleagues as far back as the 1960s, have been applied across the social sciences and frequently in studies on politics and public opinion. I then transition to Lance Bennett’s indexing theory and the structural relationship that exists between journalists and “official sources,” particularly if there’s a high-level of agreement among elites about an issue, and thus a one-sided message.

This upshot of this chapter – an overview of key research, milestones and theories – is that the public matters in democratic societies and that the public is capable of formulating explicable foreign policy opinions. That’s the starting point. The middle point I try to make is that the public can be manipulated by distinct forces, such as actual events and elite and media rhetoric. The stopping point is that these variables operate in certain ways under certain conditions, and that in the case of public opinion about drone strikes, they operate in very particular ways.
2.1. The Marketplace of Ideas

Democratic and public opinion theorists argue that an open marketplace of multiple ideas and competing opinions is an essential component of any well-functioning democratic society. For example, Chaim Kaufmann argues that the marketplace of ideas failed during the buildup to the war in Iraq, enabling the state’s [mis]representations to cause the American public to support military engagement. The singular message advocated by political elites was that Iraq posed a threat to the US and its allies and possessed weapons of mass destruction. Media organizations frequently repeated that singular message, which was generally supported across parties. The public, in turn, accepted elite cues and information from the media and broadly supported the invasion of Iraq. Ideally, the marketplace would be populated by a number of ideas and voices in order to influence people’s attitudes in a way that collective opinion constrains the state’s behavior. Under such conditions the marketplace can even, as Dan Reiter and Allan Stam put it in their 2002 book *Democracies at War*, “undercut fallacious claims made by leaderships about foreign threats…reducing the ability of leaders to shape public opinion.” In the case of Iraq and in the case of drone strikes, the message among US elites is a singular one that’s accepted and repeated by the media, which ultimately impacts people’s opinions.

Three main actors fill the marketplace of ideas with respect to foreign policy ideas: the public; the media; and political elites. The first actor, the public, is a major factor in democratic societies. Indeed, public opinion and the ceaselessness of the electoral cycle

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18 Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*. 
dictate that decision-makers adhere, to some extent, to the will of the people, as politicians must maintain a sufficient level of public support in order to continue their time in office. This alone makes collective opinion an extremely significant force in democratic political systems. As where the public was once thought to be disinterested and uninformed regarding foreign policies, developments in the field of political psychology, combined with theoretical and methodological advances, led to the increasingly shared view that the public helps shape and constrain foreign policy making – even regarding issues that cross the ‘water’s edge.’ Indeed, “[Because of the democratic electoral cycle] there is some reason for optimism regarding the efficacy of public opinion…A mounting body of evidence suggests that the foreign policies of American presidents—and democratic leaders more generally—have been constrained by the public’s foreign policy views.”

Political elites are the second key player in the marketplace of ideas, primarily with respect to their influence on people’s awareness and perception of foreign policies. “The power to make decisions of national and international consequence is now so clearly seated in political, military and economic institutions that other areas of society seem off to the side,” C. Wright Mills wrote in 1956. “This triangle of power is now a structural fact, and it is key to any understanding of the higher circles in America today.”20 Now in the 2000s, not much has changed. Yes, partisanship and so-called tribal allegiances influence public opinion, but that does not diminish the role of the elite establishment. Elites dominate foreign policy debates and the issues they raise in public forums, combined with the way they frame the issues, has a profound effect on people’s perceptions. This is especially true

Regarding issues and events that are distant to most people, such as military tactics and other foreign policies. Elites subconsciously and strategically steer public opinion by way of rhetorical strategies, speech acts, and an institutionalized relationship with the media that enables the former to exist as a main tool of public persuasion.

That brings us directly to the third player in the marketplace of ideas, which is the news media. The media is an intervening variable and information delivery system that transmits messages from elites to the public. There are causal mechanisms with respect to the effect that media coverage has on what individuals think about and how they think about things. These effects – known as agenda-setting and framing – have been frequently examined for decades and are now well-established across the social sciences. In addition to these effects, there’s a structural relationship between the media and elites that manifests in the way journalists cover international news stories. In particular with respect to my main argument, I’ll focus on what the elite-media relationship looks like when there’s a high-level of agreement among elites, including across political parties – as is the case with drone strikes.

Graph 2.1., below, is a straight-forward flowchart depicting the marketplace of ideas and the direction in which the main three variables impact one another – elites and the media as the two independent variables influencing public opinion, the main dependent variable. Ultimately, public opinion is primarily an outcome of elite rhetoric and media coverage.
The following sections in this chapter contain theoretical background regarding each of the variables and how they function in the process of opinion-formation in modern democratic societies.

### 2.2. Public Opinion in Democratic Societies:

**Theoretical Debates and Milestones**

Numerous philosophers and political and democratic theorists, at some point, have stressed the importance of participation and representation. Aristotle and later others argued that democracy should be concerned with achieving ethical goals through a political system. A key part of that system, he said, is the participation of all qualified individuals. 21 John Dewey also emphasized participation and argued that democracy is more than a governance. Participation, according to his writings, is a moral requirement essential to the establishment of any functioning democratic system. “It is [a structure/system], of course. But it is something broader and deeper than that….it is….a way of life, social and individual. The keynote of democracy as a way of life may be expressed…as the necessity

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21 Donald Devine, *The Attentive Public: Polyarchical Democracy* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1970), 2. Note: the definition of qualified individuals has changed drastically over time, from the immoral (racist, sexist) to what we now think of as relatively moral (with questions always remaining).
for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate
the living of men altogether.”22

In addition to participation, political and democratic theorists emphasize the
importance of representation. Representation refers to the extent to which public opinion
results in actual policy outcomes. Do governmental actors implement the policies that the
public desires? Phrased differently one could ask, ‘does public opinion even matter?’
Political philosophers such as James Bryce contend that democracy only exists when the
“will of the majority of qualified citizens rules,” and the masses are represented in decision-
making processes vis-a-vis voting power.23 Policies that are an outcome of public opinion,
he wrote, “can be unwise, but not be wrong.” This is mind, researchers frequently attempt
to measure the level of representation – or as it been called, the ‘degree of democracy’ – in
various democratic societies.24

The Federalist Papers present arguments that the then-new national government
was the embodiment of what political elites often referred to as the American people.
Citizens of the US were described as a group that transcends local attachments and
numerous references to “the public” were not metaphorical. “It was essential to the
argument of the Federalists, and its claim that the new national government would in fact
be truly republican in form of character, that there was ‘one united people’ and that this
‘great body of people’ and the physical configuration of the country were ‘made for one

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22 John Dewey, "Democracy and Educational Administration," School and Society 45 (1937): 457-67; Also
see Robert Dahl, Modern Political Analysis (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 26-8; Devine, The
Attentive Public, 2.
24 This is a reference to Stuart Soroka and Christopher Wlezien, Degrees of Democracy: Politics, Public
Opinion, and Policy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), which is one of many modern works
on democratic representation.
another,”” John G. Gunnell explains. Indeed, the US Constitution is a quintessential example of the public’s role and impact in society. Initially ratified by the “people,” the Constitution continues to be regulated by public opinion, including legislative discretion.

Alexis de Tocqueville (July 29, 1805 – April 16, 1859), who was among first to unequivocally describe America as a democracy and to focus on the importance of public opinion, argued that national-level democracy is ruled by individualism and interests, as where local-level governance is more deeply rooted in people’s experiences, interests and opinions. Localities, Tocqueville said, are more homogenous and in some ways easier to govern than a nation. Elements of his argument are at play in modern democratic governance with respect to state-level governance in the US or decentralization and localities in the UK. Tocqueville nonetheless believed in the power of the public and wrote that collective opinion is real and sustainable. Indeed, “when an opinion has taken root amongst a democratic people, and established itself in the minds of the bulk of the community, it afterwards subsists by itself and is maintained without effort.”

Francis Lieber, among the founders of American-style political science, applied such an approach to the study of popular sovereignty in the US. His belief in the power of the public was so strong that he shied away from the word “democracy” and preferred terms such as “self-government” or “hamarchy,” both of which refer to the notion that

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 272; also see: John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 2nd ed. (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1859). Tocqueville feared the passion for equality and ethic of individualism would cause the accrual of power and authority in the form of mass sentiments (as compared to numerical majorities, a similar argument made by James Madison when writing “The Federalist Papers: No. 10” (Yale Law School, last modified November 23, 1787, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed10.asp)). But these occasional observations are outweighed by his insistence in Vol. 1 of *Democracy in America* that we bring “everything before the bar of public opinion.”
governance should be rooted in popular representation.  

John Stuart Mill was more skeptical about the public and described collective opinion as “collective mediocrity” “unorganized.” He nonetheless acknowledged that the public plays a role in democratic politics. “The opinion of the masses or merely average men are everywhere become or becoming the dominant power,” Mill wrote, illustrating that despite his broader critique, he did see the public as a real and significant force, far from benign. James Bryce, who was an ardent liberal and argued about the democratic nature of American government, wrote extensively about “the people” and the public as the ultimate force in “the conduct of affairs.” He maintained that the US, more so than any other state in the world, is governed by “public opinion…by the general sentiment of the mass of the nation” and the “idea and feelings of the people at large.” He defined public opinion as “cooler and larger [than political parties]; it awes party leaders and holds in check party organizations. No one openly ventures to resist it. It determines the direction and character of national policy.” Democratic societies are a “sovereign multitude with “chief and ultimate power,” and rulers are merely representatives of the public operating under “constant oversight.”

While this assessment, in my opinion, overestimates the public’s ability to control political

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31 Gunnell, “Democracy and the Concept of Public Opinion,” 275; see also Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 301. Bryce uses volumes 1 and 2 to define and proclaim US public opinion as being the broadest and most influential of all countries. He said it was “stronger,” “more active,” “unique,” “vigilant,” and “whole and upright.” Moreover, he addressed Tocqueville’s claims that public opinion is related to “the tyranny of the majority,” and instead argued that it was a case of “fatalism of the multitude.” That is, fatalism disposes people to “acquiesce in the rule of numbers” and to believe the majority was right and would prevail. This was not the “power of the majority” at play, nor was it an attempt to subdue or oppress the people; rather, it refers to the fact that the people’s power is slightly reduced to the fatalism of the multitude (Bryce called this the “loss of resisting power”).
outcomes, it again highlights the importance placed upon the issue of public opinion throughout the mid-to-late 1800s.

Public opinion began to be understood as a measurable concept during the 1920s. “During the nineteenth century, public opinion had been conceived as the opinion of a collective entity, but since the beginning of the twentieth century, it has been increasingly understood as an aggregation of individual and group preferences.” Walter Lippman produced an extensive critique, capped with his piece *Public Opinion* that addressed the manner in which the public had influenced “traditional democratic theory” and “the original democratic dogma.” “The people should be supreme, yes, its will should be the law of the land,” he wrote. “But it is a caricature of democracy to make it also the law of individual initiative. One thing it is to say that all proposals must ultimately win the acceptance of the majority; it is quite another to propose nothing which is not immediately acceptable. It is as true of the nation as of the body that one leg cannot go forward very far unless the whole body follows. That is a different thing from trying to move both legs forward at the same time. The one is democracy; the other is – demolatry.” He proclaimed that traditional democracy is an unattainable “false ideal” due to a “deep pluralism” that necessitates constant adjustment. He discussed the measurement and persuasion of public opinion by way of scientific methods. “While some clung to the traditional theory, a new normative account of democracy was being erected on the foundation of the recent descriptive account of American politics,” Gunnell explains.

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Francis Wilson wrote in the 1930s that the relationship between democracy and public opinion in America is “pragmatic” and that the former is less about attitudes regarding particular issues than about deep consensuses in society, such as the US Constitution. Representation is the prime function of government, he said, expressing an idea that came to be embraced across the political and ideological spectrum in the US and characterizes liberal principles of toleration, plurality and representation. Indeed, “By the mid-1930s, this had become the received view that constituted the theoretical core of what came to be designated as liberalism and liberal democracy.”

Modern American public opinion research and survey analysis started to develop in full-force around that same time. “This assumed importance if not decisive power of public opinion, not only to the US but worldwide, was central to [the Public Opinion Quarterly’s] founding in 1937, spurred on by private and public ‘polling’ in the new ‘scientific’ approach to research on mass opinion,” Shapiro explains. We’ve seen the consistent advancement of all aspects of public opinion research since that time. Issues in the post-behavioral era such as the split between “empirical” and “normative” research have had little impact on the concept and political scientists’ understanding of public opinion. By the 1980s, Converse and others were arguing that survey data and public opinion research should be accepted, and that the academic community should pursue

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improvement rather than criticism and rejection. Despite some methodological obstacles and an acceptance that public opinion data is imperfect – which quite frankly is the case with most political data – public opinion research is now an extremely powerful force in democratic societies.⁴¹

Mainstream US society is currently swimming in a vast – perhaps overwhelming and persuasive in itself – number of surveys and amount of public opinion research and polling data. Debate about the public and public opinion has evolved over the past century-plus, ranging from highly-critical assessments that deemed people to be ignorant and/or insignificant to arguments that the public plays play a major role in political decision-making and/or outcomes. What’s not up for debate is this: Today, the US public plays a major role in constraining political actors, as evidenced by the institutionalization of public opinion research organizations, associations, and quantitative-minded employees specifically assigned with the responsibility to monitor public sentiment.⁴²

2.3. Public Opinion and Foreign Policy:

The (Un)Informed Public?

Two questions public opinion researchers often ask are whether it should matter what the public thinks; and whether the public is capable of formulating preferences regarding

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⁴² The POQ remains the most significant public opinion research journal. See: American Association for Public Opinion Research, accessed March 10, 2018, https://www.aapor.org/.

Notably, some political philosophers such as Herbert Blumer (1947) were still arguing against the increasingly science of public opinion polling. Their main claim, which can still be heard quietly from non-mainstream quarters, is that surveys methods are imprecise, perhaps unscientific, and that valid measurements of public opinion are impossible to attain. Blumer agreed public opinion exists, but said that it’s interwoven in a complex web of social structures, and essentially out of our analytical reach. Ultimately, Blumer and others on that side of the debate fizzled.
foreign policy issues.” For many years, conventional wisdom suggested that the public lacked the sophistication necessary to form coherent foreign policy attitudes. Here, the terms rational and coherent refer to whether people respond to information about foreign issues and events. Do their attitudes change when they receive new information? Are people sufficiently aware and do they receive an adequate amount information to formulate informed preferences? Is there any relationship between what the public think and what policymakers do and under what conditions do different outcomes occur?

The so-called Almond-Lippmann consensus – developed by Gabriel Almond and Walter Lipmann – was most critical with respect to the public’s foreign policy attitudes.43 Shortly after WII, Almond and Lippmann concluded that most individuals are incapable of formulating sensible policy preferences and that public opinion about foreign issues is volatile and irrational.44 Research over the first two post-WWII decades resulted in broad agreement regarding three specific points regarding public opinion about foreign affairs: it is volatile; it lacks coherent structure; and it has little impact on policy outcomes. The consensus, which remained the mainstream view throughout the 1950s and 1960s, was the ultimate indictment of the public’s ability to impact – or to capably impact – US foreign policy decisions.

The Vietnam War was a watershed moment with respect to American foreign policy the study of public opinion about foreign policy, and changes in thinking were accelerated due to the fact that scholars gained more and more access to vast public opinion datasets based on survey questions specifically designed to measure peoples’ opinions

44 In addition to volatility and irrationality, Almond and Lippmann said the public lacks interest and is susceptible to manipulation.
about foreign policy issues. Sustained popular opposition to the war in Vietnam contradicted the longstanding notion that public opinion about foreign issues is unpredictable and irrational.\textsuperscript{45} In 1967, there was a subtle but important shift away from the Almond-Lippman consensus.\textsuperscript{46} Almond and Lippmann were correct in that public opinion about foreign policy does often fluctuate, but public views “were not as bad as had been assumed; and [the] phenomenon under study was not as simple as previous reports had suggested.”\textsuperscript{47} At the very least, collective opinion is “orderly.”

This wasn’t a comprehensive shift in attitudes about the public’s ability to opine about in foreign affairs, but it did mark a partial shift in that the public came to be seen as a moderate force rather than a non-factor. The public, according to the prevailing viewpoint at the time, hesitates to surrender to rivals and simultaneously tends to oppose increased involvement.\textsuperscript{48} Other studies from the Vietnam era supported the notion of a moderate but logical public.\textsuperscript{49}

Others have painted a more positive view of the public’s competence with respect to formulating sensible, rational opinions regarding foreign issues. Page and Shapiro were

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\textsuperscript{46} Sidney Verba, “Democratic Participation,” \textit{The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science} 373, no. 1 (1967): 53–78. The intellectual shift away from the Almond-Lippman consensus by Verba et al. was made possible by using a new and far more advanced survey format. Drawing heavily from the Downsian proximity model and related spatial models, scholars asked respondents to indicate where they stood on an issue scale. In addition, respondents were asked to place competing candidates or parties on the same seven-point scale. With data in this form, scholars could measure distances from individuals to candidates and distances between candidates.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. The authors documented a reluctance to pay the costs of the war but also found strong public support for negotiations with the Vietcong and strong opposition to a withdrawal of American troops, 88% and 81% respectively.
\textsuperscript{48} The public’s tendency to take such a middling stance can prevent the level of engagement needed to achieve a victory, according to some. The public had long been seen as distanced from and wildly confused about foreign affairs.
\end{flushright}
among the first to present empirical evidence of the public’s capabilities. Their argument is that public opinion is rational in the aggregate, even if individual opinion is prone to error. Individual errors cancel out in the process of aggregation, and thus collective opinion conveys real and true information about people’s preferences. Furthermore, they found that when opinion shifts did occur they were usually precipitated by changes in the international environment.

Buttressed by this and other studies, scholarly assessments increasingly describe public opinion about foreign policy as sensible, rational, and predictable. These terms certainly don’t mean the public is all-knowing; rather, it says that public opinion about foreign policies is respondent to identifiable variables. This idea has been repeatedly tested and supported with respect to various policy issues, such as arms control, Central America, the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorism, and military intervention. Trends in public

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51 The 1988 study employed a dataset of more than six thousand questions compiled from five polling organizations, including 425 foreign policy questions asked at least twice in the period 1935–1982. The authors then use these repeated questions to examine stability or change in public opinion. The data revealed that responses to 51% of the questions remained constant (less than 6% variation) throughout the research period and an additional 22% of the foreign policy questions fluctuated by less than 10%.


opinion research continue to support the notion that collective opinion about foreign policy is sensible and responds to information and events.\textsuperscript{56}

2.4. Public Opinion and the Use of Force: Events-Outcomes versus Elite Cues

There are at least two schools of thought about the causes of American support for the use of military force. The distinction is a crucial one. I refer to the first as the \textit{event-outcome} school and the second as the \textit{elite cue} school. Event-outcome refers to way that actual events – as well as the likelihood that certain events will take place – affect people’s opinions about engaging in international conflicts. Elite cues refer to the way that elite and other authoritative rhetoric affect people’s perceptions and opinions. This distinction positions my main argument regarding the power of power of elites and the media in the case of American support for drone strikes. To be clear, in this case my main hypothesis is that elite cues outweigh other factors, including event-outcome hypotheses.

\textit{Event-outcome} theorists say that real-world events, such as real or potential outcomes of violent conflict, are the main factors that impact the level of public support for US military engagement. I use the word events somewhat loosely in that it refers to a variety of possible factors. The three most notable among them are the number of US casualties (real and potential), people’s perceptions about the potential for the US to succeed, and the level of international agreement. In terms of the former, high-levels of international agreement is typically correlated with what the general public thinks are

moral policies and practices. In the case of drone strikes, we see extremely low levels of international agreement, yet high levels of support in the US. What gives?

This “casualty hypothesis,” probably the most prominent of all event-outcome theories, is rooted in Mueller’s argument that public support for war is inversely related to number of US casualties.

In other words, we should expect public support for military engagement to dwindle as war deaths mount. It’s a simple, sensible argument, and Mueller’s theory laid the roots for further research and theorizing. There are also more nuanced versions of casualty hypothesis, including Scott Gartner and Gary Segura, who researched the impact of local casualty rates, and David Karol and Edward Miguel, who studied the relationship between casualties and presidential elections.

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Eric Larson’s event-outcome theory states that public support for military engagement is based on the likelihood of success.\textsuperscript{60} He argues there are three main variables that determine the amount of public support: 1) public perception about the consequences of not taking action, 2) the clarity of the mission objectives; and 3) public perception about the probability of success. Other scholars have combined research on casualties and the likelihood of success. Scott Gartner, for example, shows that images of casualties have a negative influence on wartime opinion,\textsuperscript{61} mainly by assessing the impact of photos symbolizing destruction and loss, such as a flag-draped coffin. Christopher Gelpi argues that casualty rates and the potential for success (real or perceived) are the main factors that cause public support or opposition to war and specifically that new information generally causes individuals to revise their support for war.\textsuperscript{62}

A third prominent idea that emanates from the event-outcome school is one commonly referred to as the rally-around-the-flag theory. This says that major international conflicts cause the public to broadly support military engagement. Mueller defines rally-around-the-flag conflicts as international, often involving the president, and “specific, dramatic, and sharply focused.”\textsuperscript{63} Think about the attacks on Pearl Harbor or the attacks on September, for example. After both of these events, which clearly fit Mueller’s description, US citizens unified in support for military engagement. Drone strikes, on the other hand, don’t fit with this theory. The US-led program isn’t a single, sharp isolated event; rather,


it’s a military technological advancement that turned into the primary weapon in the drawn out, ongoing US strategy in violent conflict around the world. The drone program has been growing for at least more than a decade and its imprint has been rapidly expanding around the world.

Berinsky, among others, points out at least two flaws with the event-outcome school. First, this group assumes that people are knowledgeable about real-world developments, when in fact we know that the average individual is often uninformed about issues and events. Second, many of the theories about casualties and war are premised upon notions of rationality that are assumed but not tested. Berinsky favors elite cue theories, which tell a different story about public opinion formation. My research about US support for drone strikes – this paper – shows how persuasive elite cues can be, especially under certain conditions, such as when there’s cross-partisan agreement.

The same factors involved in public opinion formation about domestic issues also play a part of that process regarding international issues, including the use of force. Event-outcome theorists treat domestic and international politics as two distinct levels of analysis with little to no overlap. However, domestic politics and international politics are not two distinct levels of analysis to which people respond differently. Indeed, “Many researchers who study public opinion and war – even those scholars who conduct individual-level analysis – often talk about ‘the public’ as if it were a monolithic entity. But foreign policy is often as contentious and partisan as domestic politics.”

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Theories about public opinion and the use of force must account for the same issues that divide Americans regarding domestic politics. To be more specific, theorists must account for the factors that play into individuals’ heuristical processes. Individuals use heuristics – mental shortcuts that formulate opinions based on small amounts of information – to make political judgments. Most people aren’t heavily involved in politics and many more find political issues to be quite complex. Indeed, Anthony Downs correctly said as early as 1957 that that the average citizen “cannot be expert in all the fields of policy that are relevant to his decision.” Therefore, he will seek assistance from men who are experts in those fields, have the same political goals he does, and have good judgment.” Heuristics enable rapid information processing and cause significant changes in attitudes toward public policies. Indeed, “People can be knowledgeable in their reasoning about political choices without necessarily possessing a large body of knowledge about politics.” Elite cues, which are essentially the things political elites say and do in public forums, factor into this process insofar as their messages reach the general population. Media coverage factors into this process, but as I argue in this paper, it’s largely a product of elite cues and an intervening variable (the role of the media is discussed in detail in the next, and final, section of this chapter).

Individuals rely on cues from political elites and so-called experts in order to form their opinions about political issues. The advantage of this approach is that it mitigates

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70 Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, Reasoning and Choice.
people’s need to pay attention to most issues while still enabling them to formulate a rational opinion. This process also taps into peoples’ predispositions such as partisanship and ideology. As discussed earlier, people take cues from political elites, most of whom fall within one’s own political party or at least within one’s own ideological spectrum.\textsuperscript{71} So, individuals take their cues from members of their preferred political party and trusted journalists and tend to side with “their own” whenever it concerns a controversial issue.

2.5. Elites, Media, and Public Opinion: 

\textbf{Agenda-Setting and Framing}

The inspiration for this examination of media coverage of the use of drones is rooted in prior research and theory that shows the saliency and framing of policy issues in media coverage impacts public opinion.\textsuperscript{72} Simply put, there are causal mechanisms with respect to the media’s impact on public opinion. As an individual consumes political news coverage, their awareness of the positions of particular elites, and the distinctiveness of that position relative to other elites, increases. This is especially true concerning foreign policies and issues or events that occur abroad.\textsuperscript{73} As Doris Graber comments, “When

\textsuperscript{71} Ideology and party ID are not exactly the same. As where party ID is a survey question with a built-in limit regarding the amount of response categories, ideology is a broader category that captures a similar aspect of people’s political beliefs.


people know about current happenings that are remote from their daily experiences, there
normally is no likely source other than the mass media that could have supplied the
information.” Indeed, foreign affairs are by definition remote from the lives of most
Americans and people get most information from the media. Despite how clear the media’s
impact on the way people think about issues may now seem, it took decades before the
academic community arrived at general agreement about this. Modern mainstream theories
do, however, state that media coverage does significantly impact what things people think
about and how they think about them.

Paul Lazarfield’s well-known 1940s and 1950s research on the presidential election
in Erie County, Ohio, led to his argument that the media’s impact on the public is real, but
minimal. The study indicated that neither radio nor print have much influence on voters.
Lazarfield also correctly argued that people are exposed to the news media at varying rates,
which limits the potential impact of media coverage. He also said that each person has their
own distinct social network from which they receive political information, and social
networks are important with respect to opinion-formation. This is the foundation of the
limited effects theory regarding media’s impact on people’s political thought processes.
Joseph Klapper also argues in favor of the limited-effects model of media coverage in his
work *Effects of Mass Communication* (1960). Klapper makes at least two points that

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Robert Shapiro, and Pierangelo Isernia (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 1–7; also see: Robert

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As noted throughout this paper, social networks have a limited effect with respect to foreign issues. Most
people in the US, and most their friends and family, are not directly impacted by international conflict.
supported limited-effects theorists. First, he says mass communication does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences. Second and relatedly, he says these mediating factors typically render mass communication a contributory agent, but not the sole cause, in a process of reinforcing the existing conditions.77

As scholars learned more about cognitive processes and political communication, the notion that the public is autonomous and void of media effects dissipated. “The autonomy model stresses selectivity and inattention, but that leaves us to explain why many citizens do think about a great deal of the news information they encounter,” Robert Entman explains.78 The emergence of agenda-setting theory and the groundbreaking research of scholars such as Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw which was carried out in 1969 and published in 1972, significantly altered the common view. McCombs and Shaw showed that individuals’ opinions are highly influenced when they receive new information, especially from authoritative sources such as the mainstream media and political elites.79 Agenda-setting theory tells us that that by choosing to give more attention to some issues rather than to others, the media influences the priority of issues on the public agenda. In other words, the more frequently we see an issue highlighted in media coverage, the more likely we are to place it high on our list of concerns.80 A process such as this one

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77 Joseph Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), 8. The mediating factors that he was referring to are selective processes such as selective exposure, and selective retention, and to group processes such as group norms. These processes, he says, highly mitigate media effects.


79 People’s opinions are also highly-influenced by predispositions such as ideology and partisanship. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, especially with respect to indexing.

80 Maxwell McCombs, Donald Shaw, and David Weaver, eds., *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997). Agenda-setting is based on media content analyses, public opinion surveys, time-series, panel studies and
represented a drastic change from the previous notion of the public as almost entirely autonomous from external influences. Since the 1969 study, hundreds of papers about agenda-setting have been published in peer-reviewed academic journals, and the theory continues to be relevant across the social sciences.81

Agenda-setting is a process in which, first, issues are made salient by the amount media coverage they receive, and second, the attributes of those issues are made salient. Salience, in this case, refers to making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences.82 An increase in salience, for example, enhances the probability that consumers of a message will perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it, and store it in memory. The shortfall of agenda-setting, however, is that while the media may tell people which issues to think about, the theory does not say that the media tell people how to think about those issues.

Framing theory fills that gap and its arrival further distanced modern academics from the limited-effects arguments of the 1950s and 1960s. Framing essentially refers to the media’s role in influencing and communicating a broadly accepted narrative about a particular issue, including the causes, implications, and range of possible solutions.83 The experiments. Time series analyses have found large effects of media attention to an issue on public awareness of that issue; laboratory experiments have concluded the same. Regression studies have shown smaller effects. Nonetheless, over the past few decades, “thousands of studies have found support for agenda-setting effects.”

83 The second step of the agenda setting process, sometimes referred to as attribute agenda setting, is closely linked to media framing; Stephen Reese, Oscar Gandy, and August Grant, eds., Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World (New York: Routledge, 2001).
potential impact of agenda-setting and framing effects should not be understated. “Influencing the focus of the public attention is an important role [a reference to agenda setting], but, arguably influencing the agenda of attributes for an issue or political figure is the epitome of political power. Determining the way that an issue is framed – setting the ground rules for deliberation, if you will – can significantly influence the ultimate outcome.”

The modern conception of framing theory emerged from Tuchman’s notion of the social construction of reality, a reality he argued is largely created via media coverage.84 Other researchers have examined the ways that elites strategically frame issues in order to manipulate public opinion in favorable ways another clear indication that this theory is indeed a reality.85 “Journalism remains the principal convener and conveyor of conflict images and information, discourses and debates, and for this reason deservedly takes the lion’s share of discussion. It is in and through the different mediums, forms, and appeals of journalism that most of us come to know about the conflicts and contests waged in the world today, and this daily infusions is delivered into the rhythms and routines of our everyday lives,” Simon Cottle explains.86 William Gamson and Andre Modigliani, for example, take a constructionist approach in arguing that media coverage significantly impacts public opinion about international issues such as nuclear power.87

For the purposes of this project, the definition of framing is drawn from Entman’s, “Framing: Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” in which he argues that framing is “fractured” due to the term’s popularity across disciplines and in general society. And it’s true. Framing theory spans across several areas of systemic phenomena and individual life. Framing refers to the peculiar and institutional norms of news organizations, the strategic communication choices of mass movement organizers and interest groups, the structure and content of communication, and the mental processes of individuals. In an attempt to establish a single academic definition of this often-used term, Entman defines framing as, “[Selecting] some aspects of a perceived reality and [making] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendation.” This definition is comprehensive, fair and functions well in the context of this project. He also offers this convincing, clear description of the framing process. “Whatever its specific use, the concept of framing consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text,” he writes. “Analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location – such as speech, utterance, news report, or novel – to that consciousness.”

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89 Entman, “Framing,” 53.
90 Entman, “Framing,” 52.
2.6. Elite Cues and Official Sources

Baum and Groeling write that, “[Future] studies of public opinion and US foreign policy must take into account the intervening role of journalists, who function as strategic, self-interested gatekeepers of public information regarding foreign policy events.” The idea that media is an intervening variable is critical in order to understand the public opinion formation process presented in this paper. The intervening role of the media is simply to describe: political elites exert a significant amount of control over media content, and news coverage has a significant effect on how people think about political issues. Media organizations decide which stories to present to their consumers and how to depict them. International news journalists, informed by several official sources regarding any one news story, are repeatedly called upon to identify the most important issues, interpret and characterize the facts, and engage in debate or take positions. The public falls back on political elites, as well as on representations of elite rhetoric in the media, in order to obtain information regarding distant issues and events.

Most approaches to US democratic government – pluralistic versions as well as those that view the US as a state dominated by narrow elite-interests – recognize the disproportionate influence of some individuals, groups and institutions. Elites provide cues to the public and to the media regarding how to think about issues and how to cover them, respectively. Elite cues and opinion leadership is a complex process that involves

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93 Devine, *The Attentive Public*; also see: Hosti, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, chapter 4. The CCFR foreign policy surveys, which include a subsample that only consists of elites, shows strong and consistent differences between “leaders” and the “general public.” For example, leaders overwhelmingly indicate that the US should “take an active part in world affairs” (never dropping below 97 percent), as where support from the general public varies from 24 to 66 percent (Holsti, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 86).
objective events, official accounts, media reports of events, and interpretations by politicians, commentators, and experts. The media and the public rely on elite’ cues and “official sources” in order to understand foreign policy issues. These sources, who are experienced and presumably well-informed regarding most matters of national security, persuade the relatively uninformed recipients of their messages.

Reporters overwhelmingly turn to official sources regarding political issues, especially those abroad, for information and in order to frame the story.94 “News professionalism has developed in conjunction with modern news organizations, and professional practices serve organizational needs,” Tuchman writes. “Both, in turn, serve to legitimate the status quo, complementing one another’s reinforcement of contemporary social arrangements, even as they occasionally compete for the control of work processes and the right to be identified with freedom of the press and freedom of speech.”95 This process is particularly important regarding the use of force for at least two reasons. First, the public has little to no direct exposure with foreign policy issues and is therefore dependent on elites and the media. Second, reporters historically display a pattern of deference to political and military elites and other official sources when it concerns national security, covert operations, or other foreign policies that involve the use of force.

Gaye Tuchman cites three reasons as to why media organizations often reflect the sentiments of elite actors and institutions quo, including the institutionalized method of


95 Tuchman, *Making News*, 5. Tuchman’s study is based on participant observation and interviews conducted over a period of ten years throughout the 1960s and 1970s.
making information available to consumers and the fact news is gathered and disseminated by professionals working in organizations. Most importantly, he argues that news is an ally of legitimized institutions, such as social and political elites. Third, news is “inevitably the product of newswriters drawing upon institutional processes and conforming to institutional practices,” according to Tuchman. “Those practices necessarily include associations with institutions whose news is routinely reported.”96 In the case of drone strikes, you will see that an institutionalized reliance on “official sources” regarding drone strikes significantly correlates with “positive messages” from public elites, and ultimately, high levels of public support regarding drone strikes.

In comparing news to other kinds of knowledge, most notably the natural sciences and social sciences, Tuchman emphasizes that news is a “facticity,” a term he coined that signals a “social construction” and a “social resource”.97 The intertwined nature of media and elites and official organizations and institutions is a phenomenon that Tuchman refers to as the “web of facticity.”98 Drawing on data gathered by participant observation and interviews over a period of ten years, he argues that, “Ultimately…news sources and facts are mutually constituting, for the news net identifies some sources and institutions as the appropriate location of facts and dismisses others.”99 Again, in the case of US drone strikes, you will see that elite/official news sources and the facts and frames we see in the media are mutually constituted.

96 Tuchman, Making News, 5.
97 Tuchman, Making News, 14.
99 Ibid.
2.7. Indexing and Partisanship

Media organizations rely on the actors they perceive to hold the most power at given time in order to obtain information and opinions about issues. Indexing refers to news organizations’ tendency to weight their sources and frames according to a power index. Thus, media organizations often run with narratives that reproduce elite opinion and rhetoric. There are at least three important initial points to make with respect to indexing and the impact of elite debate/disagreement. First, indexing can impact the options, rationales, and standard of accountability that’s used to an issue or policy. Second, when elites publicly disagree and debate issues, it encourages journalists to report a wider array of facts and viewpoints, and to frame the story in multiple ways.100 Third, when elites publicly debate issues, it encourages media organizations to actually cover the story. The opposite is also true; when elites widely agree and refrain from public debate or criticism about a policy, media coverage becomes infrequent or disappears altogether.

Individuals rely on the elites they trust the most for cues that help formulate opinions about foreign policies. The process calls on a limited amount of information, so the process is fairly quick and doesn’t involve much time or research.101 “The news index of elite opposition in a given situation is one of the best predictors of opinion formation, particularly among informed publics who are looked to by both elites and journalists for

100 Bennet, “The News about Foreign Policy,” 25. It also helps lead to broader social participation and more frequent public opinion polling. Examples include El Salvador’s transition from a highly-contested topic in the early-1980s to a nearly forgotten one in the late-1980s; Vietnam and the increasingly plural news coverage that it received (Daniel Hallin, The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986)).
signs of support and legitimation in the policy process,” writes Lance Bennett writes, who happens to be the scholar most closely associated with the idea of indexing.102

The level of elite agreement/disagreement regarding a particular issue, especially across political parties, is a key determinant of the frequency and nature of public elite debate. News content is affected by the elite rhetoric and the level of agreement/disagreement for at least two reasons. First, journalists depend on conflict and public debate among elites in order to produce polarizing stories and flashy headlines that attract an audience. Second, the news media depends on elite or “official” sources for most of its information regarding issues abroad, and especially the use of force. The media relies on these official sources for information and in order to formulate stories, and when elites are unified and public conflict/debate is scant, news content gets “indexed” to the median elite opinion. Sometimes news content disappears altogether in these scenarios.

In other words, the range of policy information available to the public grows when elites are in open disagreement.103 When elites conflict over political issues and rant about it in public, it offers reporters easy access to opposition viewpoints and sensational rhetoric, and creates incentives for them to report the story and offer multiple viewpoints in doing so. On the other hand, journalists have little to no incentive to report foreign policy stories if elites are in agreement and not talking about publicly. In this paper, for example, you will see that elites generally agree about the US drone program, including across political parties, which causes the public policy debate to evaporate.

102 Bennett, “The News about Foreign Policy,” 32.
Zaller and Berinsky, each of whom have made some of the most persuasive and comprehensive arguments about the role that elite cues play in public opinion formation, essentially claim that people’s opinions are an outcome of their prior dispositions combined with the partisan balance of elite messages. Attitudes are the result of the mix of ideas to which people are exposed. Changes in the flow of political communication trigger attitude changes by producing gradual changes in the ideas that are present in people's minds and thus accessible when answering survey questions.

As has already been indicated, the effects of elite discourse vary depending on the relative intensity of the opposing messages and individual's prior partisan identification. Even the most aware people – awareness is determined by the extent to which a person consumes information – are wide-open to influence when there is little partisan or ideological basis to resist the predominant ideas and/or when there’s simply a lack of conflict in the marketplace of ideas. This is the case with public opinion about drone strikes; it’s an issue that many citizens have an opinion about, but that’s consistently presented to them as a one-sided message.

Zaller says that the people form political opinions in response to elite rhetoric and the mass media and that these messages intertwine with these individual’s predispositions and partisan alliances. He claims that people’s opinions are driven by the net balance of partisan messages that individuals consume through various forms of political communication, especially the media. My argument is that US support for drone strikes is the product of what these two preeminent public opinion theorists might refer to as a one-sided message or a mainstream model.\textsuperscript{104} My expectation is that elite rhetoric will play a

\textsuperscript{104} This is compared to two-sided messages, which Zaller calls a polarization model.
primary role in determining public support for drone strikes, mainly because individuals use the positions expressed publicly prominent elites as reference points. In the case of drone strikes, elites are silent or supportive and provide a one-sided message as that reference point. Political predispositions don’t matter a great deal when individuals are presented with one-sided messages and politically aware people are steered to support policies due to the shared sentiments of Republicans and Democrats and the corresponding lack of media information.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{105} “Political awareness” refers to the amount of time people spend paying attention to political news.
CHAPTER 3
DATA AND METHODS

This chapter is an overview of the data that I collected for this project and an explanation of the methodological approach. In broad terms, there are two main ways I attempted to answer the question, ‘Is American public support drone strikes mainly the result of elite cues and media coverage?’ The first part way, the quantitative macro-study, is a traditional approach that compares nationally representative survey data to the findings of an original content analysis of media coverage, and executive and congressional rhetoric. The macro-analysis identified the main messages championed by elites and the media over a period of time. I probed the findings and linked my observations to trends and patterns in public opinion data.

The second part, the micro-study, is as an in-depth examination of media coverage and elite rhetoric regarding specific watershed moments in the history of the US drone program. The purely qualitative micro-analysis involved a close-reading of complete TV news transcripts and congressional floor rhetoric regarding the most significant moments in the history of the US drone program. Doing so does not help establish a correlation as significant as the one shown by the micro-analysis, but it’s necessary in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the actual content, including the opinion cues that elites and the media give to the public regarding drone warfare. Both of these— the micro and macro analysis – are explained in detail in the following sections, as is the public opinion data.

The macro-study involves univariate and bivariate analyses, the results of which are principally presented in the form of text, graphs, charts, tables and timelines showing
the outcomes of the content analysis and comparisons of those findings to nationally representative public opinion data. I also examined sub-group data in order to account for other potential explanatory variables, such as race, education and gender. Relatedly, I looked at responses to questions assessing people’s fear of terrorism and people’s fear of a looming terrorist attack, both of which theoretically have a positive relationship with people’s support for the use of force (and presumably, drone strikes).

To be clear and up-front, for the issues and time periods I looked at, there are not enough time-series data to conduct a comprehensive multivariate analysis to prove a cause-effect relationship. This project is in a similar vein as excellent previous studies that are rooted in the established agenda-setting, framing and priming effects of news content, as well as relationship between elites, the news and the public’s policy preferences. I explore the associations I can observe and compare public opinion trends with trends in my measures of news content and executive and congressional rhetoric.”106 My objective is to make a convincing, cumulative argument regarding the impact that the primary independent variables – elite rhetoric and media coverage, as measured by the content analysis – have on the dependent variable – US public support/opposition regarding drone strikes, as measured by national surveys. This is mainly accomplished by showing that there’s been a prevalence of “positive” messages about drones and drone strikes among elites and the media.

106 Brigitte Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Shapiro, Selling Fear: Counterterrorism, the Media, and Public Opinion (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011). The book Selling Fear was extremely influential with respect to the approach that I took to this project, as were my discussions with Dr. Shapiro early in the process, when I was formulating the methodological approach. The 2011 book is an ideal example of an important, relevant argument that essentially triangulates the main topic: that is, the authors apply and combine several research methods in a single study. Some might argue that due to certain data-related limitations, the argument is not based on a comprehensive multivariate analysis, and fails to establish a cause-effect relationship. However, due to the authors’ rigorous multi-method approach, the work is nonetheless convincing and important.
3.1. Key Definitions

In order to further clarify the main argument and help make sense of this paper, it’s useful to go over some definitions here at the outset. This is not an exhaustive list of terms and concepts relevant to this research, but these are some of the most fundamental ones.

- **Drones**, more formally referred to as unmanned aerial vehicles [UAVs], are pilotless aircrafts remotely controlled from the ground. They’re controlled by humans but generally follow a pre-programmed mission. Drones are used for a wide-variety of purposes, both non-lethal and lethal, and have become increasingly common in the domestic arena. The focus of this research is on the public opinion formation regarding drone strikes, not on the use of drones for reconnaissance or humanitarian purposes. The US drone program includes drone strikes, but refers to broader expansion of drone technology and infrastructure around the world. The drone program refers to the policies and actions – often covert – that relate to America’s growing reliance on UAVs as a foreign policy and military tool.

- **Rhetoric** is often-used throughout this paper and thus deserves a clear, formal definition – both in general and in the context of those research. Aristotle’s rhetoric refers to the ability to see what’s possibly persuasive in every given case. The rhetorician has a complete grasp of the methods of persuasion, but is unable to convince everybody all of the time. The meaning of rhetoric has evolved over the last century or so to include most situations in which people, groups, or other

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108 Aristotle described three main forms of rhetoric: Ethos, Logos, and Pathos. These will be reviewed in more detail in Chapter 3.
actors in society consciously communicate with each other. Philosophers and modern day scholars often focus on the persuasive effects of rhetoric, works which are integral to this project.\[109\] Logos (Greek for 'word') refers to the internal consistency of the message--the clarity of the claim, the logic of its reasons, and the effectiveness of its supporting evidence. The impact of logos on an audience is sometimes called the argument's logical appeal. Ethos (Greek for 'character') refers to the trustworthiness or credibility of the writer or speaker. Ethos is often conveyed through tone and style of the message and through the way the writer or speaker refers to differing views. It can also be affected by the writer's reputation as it exists independently from the message--his or her expertise in the field, his or her previous record or integrity, and so forth. The impact of ethos is often called the argument's 'ethical appeal' or the 'appeal from credibility.' [P]athos (Greek for 'suffering' or 'experience') is often associated with emotional appeal. But a better equivalent might be 'appeal to the audience's sympathies and imagination.' An appeal to pathos causes an audience not just to respond emotionally but to identify with the writer's point of view--to feel what the writer feels. In this sense, pathos evokes a meaning implicit in the verb 'to suffer'--to feel pain imaginatively. Perhaps the most common way of conveying a pathetic appeal is through narrative or story, which can turn the abstractions of logic into something palpable and present. The values, beliefs, and understandings of the writer are implicit in the story and conveyed imaginatively to the reader. Pathos thus refers to both the

emotional and the imaginative impact of the message on an audience, the power
with which the writer's message moves the audience to decision or action.

- **Public opinion** refers to the views prevalent among the general public, which are
typically measured with representative surveys conducted by major polling
organizations. Public opinion is premised upon the notion of *public reason*, which
in theory states that our moral or political rules be, in some sense, justifiable or
acceptable to all those persons over whom the rules purport to have authority.\(^{110}\)
Public opinion, in its purest form, is produced when “sentiment spontaneously
arises in the mind and flows from the lips of the average man” and “fuses into the
passive majority.”\(^{111}\)

- **Elites (political elites)** refers to the US President and members of Congress, the
CIA, FBI and Military. Elites also include, for the purposes of this paper,
authoritative voices in the media such as terrorism experts, academics, human rights
activists, and former members of the aforementioned groups.\(^{112}\)

### 3.2. Analysis of TV News Coverage

I analyzed mainstream television news coverage for two key reasons. First, TV is an age-
old tradition in the US and still likely reaches the widest audience in terms of numbers and
characteristics – nearly all households in the US own at least one TV and most subscribe

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\(^{110}\) This idea, which is rooted in the works of Hobbes, Kant and Rousseau, has remained influential in
contemporary political philosophy as a result of its development in the work of John Rawls, Jürgen
Habermas, and others. Rawls, in particular, made a distinction between domestic public reason and
international public reason. The former refers to shared public or political culture guided by constitutional
democracy. The latter is complicated due to the insertion of states, each guided by their own domestic public
reason.


\(^{112}\) A full explanation of the actors accounted for in this project will be presented in this paper. Also, an even
more complete document that details the content analysis and coding scheme is available upon request.
to a satellite/cable package that automatically includes several 24-hour news networks, including the ones assessed for this project. Meanwhile, the millions of internet users streaming video online are often viewing media from these same mainstream TV networks. The second reason for analyzing TV is a more practical one: TV news broadcasts have been thoroughly maintained over a long period of time and the retrieval process is cost-effective and straight-forward, as where the software that researchers rely on to retrieve data related to online activity is still in its early developmental stage and its reliability is debatable. Yes, the power of television news is mitigated in modern times due to the consumption of internet news and increased exposure to online social networks as Facebook and Twitter. This cannot be ignored or denied. Yet in light of the advantages that come with analyzing TV broadcasts – availability, cost, reliability and popularity – the choice to do so became quite clear to me. I nonetheless hope that, as reliable software becomes more readily available, I can expand upon this project by analyzing how newer mediums of political communication impact the way people think about important issues.

The research period runs from 1/1/2000 to 11/31/2014. The start-date of January 1, 2000, just precedes the attack on the World Trade Center and the first-ever US drone strikes. It’s an ideal starting point in order to compare the salience and framing of drone strikes in mainstream media before and after the attacks on September 11, 2001, and ultimately, under two different US presidents. The second-and-final midterm election of President Barack Obama’s two terms in office occurred in November 2014, hence the end-date. The drone program grew exponentially under his leadership and ultimately became the military and CIA’s weapon-of-choice in the fight against militant organizations around the world. The 2014 midterm elections also coincided with the timing of the research for
this paper, and thus provided a logical end-date. I should note that while the content analysis ranges from January 2000 through November 2014, I emphasize post-2010 trends because that’s when media coverage and survey questions about drone strikes began to appear more frequently. I do mention some important events that have occurred since the end of the research period, but they are not included in the analysis.

I examined and coded television news about drone strikes, starting with summaries of TV news segments and finishing with a close-reading of full broadcast transcripts. First, I accessed the Vanderbilt Television News Archive and obtained all records of evening news stories that appeared on NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, and FOX and include the word drone. The Vanderbilt archive contains thousands of abstracts of TV news segments dating back to August 1968. Every record contains essential data such as the date, time, main message(s), names and affiliations of all speakers and sources, as well as key excerpts from the broadcast.113

The unit of analysis is the individual news segment, sometimes called a news story, among other terms. Each record that I obtained from the Vanderbilt archives represents an individual TV news segment that has at least one mention of the terms drone, drones, or drone strikes. Graph 3.1 shows the breakdown, by network, of the 276 total records that I coded as part of the content analysis of media coverage.

113 The Vanderbilt Television News Archive, which began in 1968 and continues through today, focuses on creating, preserving and providing access to news broadcasts from US national television networks. The core collection includes evening news from ABC, CBS, and NBC (since 1968), an hour per day of CNN (since 1995) and Fox News (since 2004). The archive operates as a unit of the Vanderbilt University Libraries. See: Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Vanderbilt University, accessed March 15, 2018, http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/.
Graph 3.1. Count of Vanderbilt TV Abstracts, by Network

Source: Elaborated by the author based on the data from Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

The second step of the media content analysis – after analyzing the abstracts – involved an analysis of full TV broadcast transcripts. The Vanderbilt abstracts are ideal because every record contains vital information such as the date, time, main messages, sources, speakers and key excerpts. Thus the data from the records can be easily compared against one another, categorized, and compared against reliable public opinion data. The downside is that the Vanderbilt abstracts lack depth and detail. I’m a firm believer in a mixed-method approach, or what some call triangulation, if one wants to truly become familiar with the tones and message espoused by elites and the media. I was able to accomplish that by analyzing complete news transcripts, which develop a more nuanced understanding of the public debate about drone strikes and was necessary in order to truly understand the public debate, or lack thereof.

I analyzed transcripts of news segments for the networks ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, MSNBC and CNN and that appeared during the aforementioned research timeframe. The transcripts, which were obtained via the Lexus Nexus news database, contain verbatim textual representations of each news segment, although they do contain not images or
sound. I searched *Lexus Nexus* for the term *drone* and then filtered the results down to the appropriate television networks and dates, and sorted the results by relevance in order to weed out peripheral mentions of the search term. In total, I obtained and analyzed 274 records, which by any measure is a substantial sample in terms analyzing complete transcripts. The Vanderbilt archives surprisingly produced very few records for MSNBC, as where Lexus Nexus produced some full transcripts, and the same can be said for FOX. Considering that MSNBC is considered by many to be the liberal answer to FOX, and that these are two of two of the most partisan networks, I analyzed all of full transcripts for each. The networks and amount of transcripts reviewed are shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Number of Full Transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSNBC</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After reviewing this randomized sample of complete news transcripts, I reviewed a nonrandom sample of news stories about specific, watershed events in the history of the US drone program. For the sake of clarity, in this paper I mainly refer to these as “major moments.” These events were chosen after a thorough historical analysis of the US drone
program and my review of all of the aforementioned content. My aim was to assess whether the media covered each event, and if so, which elites spoke out publicly and what messages were delivered to the public.

3.3. Analysis of Presidential and Congressional Rhetoric

In addition to media coverage, I went straight to the source and analyzed the words that the US president has said in public about drones and drone strikes since 2000. I then did the same regarding what members of congress have said on the congressional floor. In order to do so, I looked at the Congressional Record and all statements made by the US President. First, I searched the US Government Publishing Office [FDsys] using the keyword “drone” and the research dates. I then filtered the results down to the Congressional Record [the Record], which produced 452 records. The Record is a verbatim account of remarks made during the proceedings of the House and Senate and has been published by the Government Printing Office [GPO] since 1873. After each day that Congress is in session, the proceedings are printed in the Record and made available the following morning. Daily Congressional proceedings may include legislative activity by the chambers and their committees, member remarks, communications from the president, and more. These summaries of the previous day's legislative activity include a so-called daily digest of the most important events, and business conducted within the Senate and House. The Record is the ideal archive for analyzing congressional rhetoric.115

Each record I retrieved contains at least one mention of the word “drone.” Upon reviewing a subset of the sample, however, I quickly realized that the vast majority of the records were at-best peripherally related to drone strikes. The term “drone,” for example, comes up during border and immigration debates, and as you will see, it’s an increasingly popular topic with respect to privacy and safety in the domestic arena.

So, I re-sorted the records by relevance, making it easy to see instances in which congressional actors focused on drones and drone strikes. I analyzed and coded the 100 most relevant records, a sample that includes revealing content such as speeches made around the time of John Brennan’s nomination hearings as head of the CIA. Other records relate to the use of force in Libya or Chuck Grassley’s outright demands for more transparency regarding the drone program. I coded all records using a scheme very similar to the one designed for the media content analysis, although I modified it where appropriate in order to adapt it to an analysis of congressional floor debate as opposed to mediated accounts broadcasted on television. For example, I still coded the all-important main message when a congressional member spoke, but for obvious reasons, I did not code the sources the same the same way as in the macro-analysis, as media is informed by a slew of sources as where the participants in congressional floor debates fall under two categories (e.g, speaker’s affiliation – house or senate – or their political party).

### 3.4. Coding Scheme

Content analysis – the best and most common way to systematically examine rhetoric – involves coding content into categories. The categories were determined using a few methods. First, theory suggested hypotheses regarding the effects of messages, and
evidence of those effects shown by linking those types of messages to corresponding trends in public opinion. Indeed, as discussed, theory suggests that the more we see positive and non-critical messages about drone strikes, the more likely we are to see public support. In order to assess the prevalence of different types of messages, I coded all media and congressional records at the \textit{message-level}. Message-level codes refer to the dominant message that’s expressed in each news report. For example, ‘do drone strikes protect Americans from national security threats?’ Or on the other hand, ‘are drone strikes a violation of legal, ethical and moral norms?’ To ask it another way, ‘are opinion-makers publicizing their opinions about drone strikes; are they for or against drone strikes; and what, specifically, are the predominant messages?’

Each of the message-level categories, which I’ll describe in the table below and provide excerpts, is associated with a positive, negative or neutral message, as seen from the perspective of a drone strike supporter. For example, a story coded as “national security” is one that associates US drone strikes with national security successes and that describes a successful operation while ignoring the more controversies that surround the tactic. On the negative-side, the category “human rights” refers to stories about civilian casualties and other human rights violations; stories coded as “legality/sovereignty” refer to those that focus on the violations of international legal norms, perhaps featuring a legal expert.

Second, I predicted relationships between source characteristics and message attributes.\textsuperscript{116} The hypothesis is that the more frequently we see official sources such as the

\textsuperscript{116} Kimberley Neuendorf, \textit{The Content Analysis Guidebook} (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2002); Klaus Krippendorff, \textit{Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology} (Los Angeles: Sage, 2004). These two texts were particualrly influential with respect to the design of the conent analysis.
president or CIA officials, the more likely we are to see positive messages. On that note, I also coded all media and congressional content at the source-level. I categorized the types of sources/speakers that informed each news report. For example, I looked for whether the message-givers, if you will, were at the time members of the executive/congressional branch, military, CIA, or if not, whether they were so-called “security analysts,” who are typically former members of these organizations. I also recorded the network, date, time of day, and duration of each segment, which sheds light on the frequency of media coverage about drones, and related to that, their salience.

Third, I used a grounded process of variable identification that involved analyzing a subset of the sample.117 This was crucial because when I began this research there were few available analyses of content about drone strikes. There was simply not a large body of research about drones, apart from journalistic work. This mean there were few coding schemes to follow.118 So, it was important to adapt the coding scheme as it became clear that a particular type of message or source appears in the content frequently enough to merit inclusion as a distinct category.

In addition to the message and source-level codes – which represent the primary independent variables – I recorded essentials such as the network, date and length of each news segment. I refer to these as document-level codes. Some of these are merely intended for the purposes of record-keeping and identification, while others can be used to assess

118 Sarah Kreps, “Flying Under the Radar: A Study of Public Attitudes Towards Unmanned Aerial Vehicles,” Research and Politics 1, no. 1 (2014): 1–7; Michael Horowitz, “Public Opinion and the Politics of the Killer Robots Debate” Research and Politics 3, no. 1 (2016): 1-8. Kreps and Horowitz have conducted numerous studies on drones, including some related to public opinion. None of these include a content analysis as robust as the one produced for this dissertation. Nonetheless, Kreps and Horowitz are among the most authoritative sources about drones, and their work drives concerns I raise later about the question-wording of survey items about drone strikes.
relevant issues such as issue salience. Agenda-setting theory, for example, states that the more we see a particular issue talked about in the media, the more likely it is to be salient among the public. So, I expect stories about drones to be more salient the more frequently they’re reported in the news. By collecting this information, I can assess pertinent issues such as how frequently the media report about drones and how often members of congress openly discuss drone strikes.

Intercoder reliability is a critical component of any content analysis, as without it, the research cannot be considered objective, reliable and valid. Near the outset of the content analysis, I provided one of my colleagues with the codebook, including a detailed explanation of each code, and a subset of the sample. We each coded the same subset in order to determine if the coding scheme would pass muster. Fortunately, we agreed on more than 82 percent of the results. After some discussion and debate, and refining of the codebook, we surpassed 90 percent agreement. “Coefficients of .90 or greater would be acceptable to all,” according to Kimberly Neuendorf, who adds that even “.80 or greater would be acceptable in most situations.”

The following is a complete explanation of the coding scheme that I developed and used for the content analysis of media coverage.

Document-level Codes

| Episode ID: each record is given a unique ID number for identification and record-keeping purposes |
| Date: month/day/year that segment originally aired on TV |

120 The coding scheme is also provided in the Annex. Chapter 6 includes more discussion as well as numerous excerpts and examples of each message-level category.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source-level Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military:</strong> members of the US military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Terrorism expert/analyst:</strong> guests identified on the news segment as terrorism experts or analysts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>President:</strong> US President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Executive:</strong> non-presidential members of the executive branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member of Congress:</strong> member of the Senate or House of Representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foreign State (representative of):</strong> official representative of a targeted country/region (E.g. Prime Minister of Pakistan, official tribal leader in Waziristan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Man on the Street (foreign):</strong> civilian sources in targeted countries/regions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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121 “Late-night” refers to any late-night news program such as ABC’s show *Nightline.*

122 “Lead stories” are those that appear within the first 5 minutes of a TV news show; any single story that is five minutes or longer; or both.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalist: guests identified as journalists. (E.g. Jeremy Scahill of <em>Nation</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Defense: member of the Department of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted Groups: representative of Al Qaeda, Taliban, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Organization: representative of human rights organization or a report issued by a human rights organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Tank/Academic: source identified as representative of a think tank and/or as an academic affiliated with a university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former CIA: sources identified as former CIA official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Dept. of Defense: guests identified as former Dept. of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBI: active member of the FBI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA: active member of the CIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natl. Counterterrorism Center [NCC]: active member of the NCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons Engineer/Technology Expert: sources identified as a weapons engineer, drone engineer, or drone technology expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intl. Institution: source identified a member of an international institution (E.g. United Nations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASA: guest identified as a member of NASA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: source identified as none of the above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Message-Level Codes**

National security: in this frame, drone strikes are generally seen as a tool that furthers US national security interests by way of seemingly stealth, silent, and relatively precise military successes abroad. These frames are marked by a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Drones framed as a beneficial tool based on benefits of the technology itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>Drones framed as a tool of US foreign policy that endangers civilians and threatens human rights standards in targeted areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legality/Sovereignty</td>
<td>Drones are framed as a threat to international law and/or there are calls for the establishment of international laws to regulate drone warfare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>Drones and the US drone program are framed as a threat to human rights standards and as responsible for the deaths of civilians, including Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blowback</td>
<td>Drones are framed as a weapon that causes collateral damage and violates the lives of civilians, thus causing an increase in the recruitment power of suspected terrorist groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Drone</td>
<td>Drones are framed as a technology that is growing rapidly around the world and particularly in states that are opposed to US interests. These stories can be general (a discussion about proliferation) or specific (Iran capturing a high-tech US drone).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Drones are framed as a domestic issue (usually of concern). This includes stories about FAA regulations, crashes and near-crashes, potential privacy violations, commercial product delivery, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Competing Issues: complex story that presents competing issues such as the effectiveness of drones and the ramifications of drones. Most television news stories are simple and brief and therefore focus on one aspect or one story, but stories that clearly present dueling messages are coding accordingly.

Other: drones are discussed and/or framed in a way that fits none of these categories.

Ambiguous: primary message/frame is unclear and indeterminable.

Next, I explain in detail each message-level category and provide one example from the sample analyzed for this research project.

*National Security*

In national security stories, drones are treated as a counterterrorism tool that enhances homeland security and is used to conduct important military operations. This mainly refers to reports that solely focus on the use of drones in a successful strike against members of a “terrorist” organization, but with no comment or debate about issues such as human rights (e.g. civilian casualties) or legality/sovereignty.

**ABC News reported in June 2011, just five weeks after US Navy SEALs entered Pakistan and killed Osama Bin Laden, that American forces had killed a “notorious terrorist and one of the world’s most wanted men.”**\(^{123}\) Reporter Mike Boetcher explained the accomplishment, saying that, “the killing of Ilyas Kashmiri would be a major blow to the post-bin Laden/al Qaeda network,” and that, “News of Kashmiri's death quickly spread through a rally in Karachi, Pakistan, called to protest American drone

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attacks. Kashmiri, a contender to take over the now leaderless al Qaeda, was one of the world's most wanted men. The US placed a $5 million bounty on his head.\textsuperscript{124} Thomas Anderson, of the CSIS Transnational Threats Project, confirmed that, “this is one of the most important hits we could possibly have succeeded in doing.” Defense Secretary Robert Gates also made an appearance, linking the important mission with the notion that drones are key to success in the region.

MIKE BOETTCHER (ABC NEWS): Pakistani authorities say a missile fired from a pilotless US \textit{drone} killed Kashmiri in the violet Pakistan tribal region called South Waziristan. Last month's deadly attack against a Pakistani naval base near Karachi put him on the top of that country's wanted list. India wanted him dead too. He was a planner of the vicious 2008 coordinated terrorist attack in Mumbai that killed 163. And just within the last week, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with Pakistani leaders to reboot relations between the two nations in the wake of the bin Laden raid. And during that meeting, Kashmiri was on the list of five terrorists in Pakistan that the US wanted killed or captured by July. Tonight, Defense Secretary Robert Gates has not commented on this particular strike. But while traveling in Afghanistan, he told Diane Sawyer these \textit{drone} missions have been crucial in the war on terror.

ROBERT GATES (SECRETARY OF DEFENSE): These \textit{drones} have played a significant role in taking a lot of Taliban leaders and trainers off the table.\textsuperscript{125}

\textit{Technology}

In technology stories, drones are typically depicted as a modern innovation and emerging weapon of choice that will eliminate enemies of the US while keeping American

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
troops out of harm’s way. These are often feature stories that focus on drone technology, in general, rather than on a specific event such as a drone strike. These reports are overwhelmingly informed by presumed supporters of drone strikes such as military personnel, engineers, pilots and manufacturers.

**An ABC News broadcast on February 19, 2011, for example, featured what was then the new Hummingbird drone.** Reporter David Muir described the newest addition to America’s military robotics arsenal: “It’s called the Nano Hummingbird, a pocket-sized drone, and it could soon be a powerful weapon for the Pentagon…The Pentagon has spent about $4 million so far building these birds. They can fly forward and backward, they can hover. They can land on a phone line, a cable line, all by remote control, watching over someone without them ever knowing. They are far more discreet than the drones increasingly used by the Pentagon and the CIA.” Muir explained that, “What [the Hummingbird] can do is fly right over an enemy’s shoulder, and the troops can carry those birds right in their pockets.” Matt Kennon of the drone manufacturer Aerovironment commented on the weapon’s impressive characteristics such as wing flapping and surveillance.

*Human Rights*

In human rights stories, drones are primarily depicted as a controversial weapon often used in operations that violate international human rights standards. These segments typically focus on civilian casualties from drone strike operations as well as specific policies that exacerbate collateral damage. The stories are usually informed by human rights organizations, foreign political actors with interests in the targeted regions, and investigative journalists.
ABC News reported on December 18, 2010 that a CIA Chief in Pakistan had been exposed, potentially by the host country’s spy agency. “The tension between spy agencies comes at a critical time,” reporter Nick Schifrin said from Islamabad. “The US is pushing Pakistan to do more to crack down on militants, while the CIA has launched 110 drone strikes this year, more than twice the number than during the entire Bush administration. But success here will only come if the ICA and Pakistan cooperate. And today’s retaliation is a sign there’s less support than suspicion.”126 Reporter Ron Claiborne explained the situation facing the CIA agent: “The CIA has ordered its top official in Afghanistan out of the country, after his identity was revealed. The CIA station chief is leaving after threats to his life. His name was disclosed in a lawsuit by a Pakistani man whose family was killed in a drone missile attack. Pakistan’s spy agency is denying that it blew his cover.”127 The same day, CNN reported that four alleged militants in Pakistan were dead from a suspected US drone strike and that the tactic was prompting outrage in Waziristan. International correspondent Reza Sayah was joined by human rights attorney Shahzad Akbar to discuss the mounting protests.128

REZA SAYAH, CNN INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Pakistanis have long protested U.S. drone strikes with cries of "Death to America!" But Kareem Khan is the first to sue the U.S. government.

"They kill innocent people," says the 43-year-old journalist. "Oppressors should be brought to justice."

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127 Ibid.
Khan says on New Year's Eve, 2009, missiles from a U.S. drone flattened his home in north Waziristan, killing his teenage son and brother.

"I'm angry. That's why I'm suing," he says. Khan denies any links to the Taliban and asks for $500 million in his lawsuit.

This is a rare look at what witnesses say is the aftermath of drone attacks. Pakistani officials say this year, U.S. drones hit more than 100 alleged militant targets in Pakistan's tribal region along the Afghan border, up from 52 last year. Privately, U.S. officials say the covert strikes are legal and have killed hundreds of militants.

SHAHZAD AKBAR, LAWYER FOR VICTIMS: It's mostly innocent people are being killed, and it's not the militants.

SAYAH: But Khan's lawyer, Shahzad Akbar, and human rights groups inside and outside Pakistan say U.S. drones kill too many civilians. They say target killings on mere suspicion break the rules of war.

AKBAR: In a western society, you cannot even arrest someone just on mere suspicion, but here you're executing people on mere suspicion.

SAYAH (on camera): Right after Kareem Khan went public with his lawsuit came the media attention. Then other families of drone strikes started calling him. They wanted to sue the U.S. government too.

And less than two weeks later, this happened, a protest a few blocks away from the parliament building in the federal capital of Islamabad by more than a dozen families, each saying they are victims of U.S. drone strikes too.
(voice-over): Thirteen-year-old Sadu Lahan (ph) says he lost both legs and three relatives in a September drone strike. Last January, Muhammed Fahim says shrapnel from a drone strike gashed open his stomach.

"I want to tell the world we are victims," Muhammed says. "We don't have any connections with the Taliban."

Verifying these stories is virtually impossible. Media access to the tribal region is banned by the Pakistani government.

Even so, Akbar says a class-action lawsuit against the U.S. government is coming.

The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad tells CNN they have seen the protests, but are not aware of any lawsuits. Akbar says he probably won't get the U.S. government to show up in court any time soon. He says that doesn't mean these families are going away.

*Legality/Sovereignty*

In legality/sovereignty news stories, drones are treated as a threat to the rule of law and to the sovereignty of foreign states. These segments are often about the issue of drone strike targets’ nationality and geographic location, and address the sensitive question, ‘Can the US target American citizens?’ These stories also focus on cross-border operations into regions outside of the theater of war.

**NBC anchor Brian Williams began an early-February 2013 edition of the evening news with one of the most significant stories ever regarding the US drone program.** “Some people regard death by drone as a necessary evil of our post-9/11 world, the way we have to do business against an enemy we can’t see, including, sometimes, Americans who have switched sides,” Williams said. “Others see the use of drones by the US as nothing more than execution by air, without due process, no court, no charges, no
trial and relatively little oversight. What’s beyond dispute is this – drone attacks have become a huge weapon for this country. And this president has made unprecedented use of them.” Williams disclosed that NBC News had obtained leaked government documents from the justice department, which sought to justify the US President’s use of drones to kill al Qaeda suspects, and sometimes American citizens such as Awlaki. NBC investigative correspondent Michael Isikoff continued. “Drones have been called President Obama’s weapon of choice. During his four years as commander in chief, US military and CIA drone strikes have accelerated in an unprecedented pace. More than 400 CIA strikes against targets in Pakistan and Yemen, eight times as many as under President Bush…NBC news has obtained this confidential 16-page Justice Department memo that concludes lethal strikes against US citizens, who are operational leaders of al Qaeda, are a lawful act of national self-defense.”

Numerous sources informed the report, including the White House’s counterterrorism advisor John Brennan, departing Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, Attorney General Eric Holder, and White House Press Secretary Jay Carney. On the other side of the table, so to speak, there was one representative from the ACLU. Carney said, “These strikes are legal, they are ethical, and they are wise,” and Holder said the US only conducts such operations consistent with federal and international law. President Obama was shown proclaiming, “[Recent drone strikes] have been very precise, precision strikes against al Qaeda, and their affiliates.” Brennan was on the same page as his President and provided some precise political rhetoric. “It’s this surgical precision, the ability with laser-like focus to eliminate the dangerous tumor called an al Qaeda terrorist.”

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On the other hand, ACLU deputy legal director Jameel Nelson commented, “It’s a chilling document. It’s – you know, it set out government’s claimed authority to carry out the targeted killing of American citizens. But the limits are really vague and elastic, and it’s very easy to see how they could be manipulated.” Isikoff concluded the segment mentioning that, “A bipartisan group of Senators is demanding more transparency about the drone strikes targeting Americans. And they’re expected to grill Brennan about the subject on Thursday, when he appears before the Senate Intelligence community at his confirmation hearing to be the next CIA director.”

As one can see, media reports such as these frame drones as an issue of international law. Multiple and often-times opposing voices speak about the issue, although this example also shows the predominance of “official” sources regarding controversial aspects about drone strikes. Most importantly, the segment acknowledges the growth of the drone program and popularity of drones under the Obama administration, and then focuses almost exclusively on legal aspects of drone strikes in foreign countries.

**Blowback**

Drones are treated as a US weapon that creates more enemies than it eliminates. This is closely linked to public opinion in targeted regions. Such stories typically feature sources speaking about public protests and anger among the public in states that are often hit by drone strikes.

**A CNN report in March 14, 2013 discussed an event in which Iran targeted a US drone flying over the Persian Gulf.**

This type of story is repeated in the news, as

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130 Ibid.

this was the third such relatively significant incident amidst an already-poor and deteriorating US-Iranian relationship. Then, on March 21, 2013, CNN aired one of the most informative news stories from the research period, during which it was reported the US was, “Thinking about moving the drone program away from the CIA and into the hands of the Pentagon.”\textsuperscript{132} The report was detailed and informative, and included a wide variety of sources, including CIA Director John Brennan, journalist Jeremy Scahill, and the New America Foundation. It offered information about the practices and policies that define the US drone program; transparency; legality; and even discussed public opinion about drone strikes in the US and Pakistan. Anchor Jake Tapper starts off.

TAPPER: Also leading nationally, a possible change in who is allowed to deliver death from thousands of miles away. I'm referring, of course, to drones. U.S. officials tell CNN the White House is thinking about moving the drone program away from the CIA and into the hands of the Pentagon.

That could lead to more transparency in the controversial program, which has been shrouded in shadows at Langley.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

TAPPER (voice-over): For years, unmanned killing machines in the sky have been the weapon of choice for the Central Intelligence Agency as a method of combating terrorism.

The drone kill count is formally classified, but the New America Foundation, which has tracked drone strikes since they began, estimates nearly 4,000 people have been killed. Among that number are the deaths of high-profile targets such as American-born

cleric Anwar al-Awlaki of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, but also in that number, several hundred innocent civilians in Pakistan and Yemen.

International rights groups say there is no recourse for the victims' families since the U.S. does not acknowledge CIA drone attacks even occur. The White House has argued drones are effective in protecting the U.S. and its interests. Defenders argue they are preferable to sending troops into yet more foreign countries.

But human rights groups argue that there are serious constitutional questions about the program, specifically the extrajudicial targeted killing of enemy combatants and, most notably, American citizens such as Awlaki or his apparently innocent 16-year-old son.

JOHN BRENNAN, CIA DIRECTOR: We only take such actions as a last resort to save lives.

TAPPER: John Brennan was battered in his nomination hearings to head the CIA by both Republicans and Democrats over the use of drones. Brennan expressed a desire to start moving out of the killing business and resume collecting and analyzing intelligence.

BRENNAN: The CIA should not be doing traditional military activities and operations.

TAPPER: The program has also divided Republicans. Hawks such as Senator John McCain of Arizona are all for it, but the drone strikes kept more libertarian Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky talking all night on the Senate floor earlier this month railing against possible targeted killings on U.S. soil.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

TAPPER: No final decision has been made on whether the military will take over the drone program. If the change is made, we're told it would happen gradually.
The latest developments in the U.S. drone policy brings us to a larger question, are we safer here at home because of the strikes overseas and is it right?

Joining me now to discuss this, Jeremy Scahill, national security correspondent for "The Nation," and here in Washington, Christine Fair, senior fellow at Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and assistant professor at Georgetown University.

Jeremy, I want to start with you.

With the military taking over drone strikes assuming this does go through, would that alleviate any of your concerns when it comes to transparency or accountability?

JEREMY SCAHILL, "THE NATION": Well, first of all, Jake, I think we're having the wrong discussion here. The reality is that the military and the CIA have both been directing drone strikes for many years now.

The military's Joint Special Operations Command has done drone strikes inside of Yemen, inside of Pakistan, so in a way this sort of misses the bigger point. But to directly answer your question, no, it doesn't because the Obama administration has relied on a policy known as signature strikes where people are targeted in certain regions of Pakistan or Yemen based on where they live and if they're military-age males.

It's sort of a form of pre-crime. So what we have seen and these are really escalating is that people are being killed by the U.S. government, whether it's CIA or JSOC, and they don't even know their identities. What I have seen in my reporting on the ground in Somalia, Yemen, and elsewhere is that we will have tremendous blowback from this if we don't take a serious step back and look at the impact of these drone strikes.
TAPPER: Christine, how about that? You have actually written about whether or not in Pakistan these **drone** strikes create more terrorists than they kill, as Jeremy has argued.

CHRISTINE FAIR, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: Well, our data don't actually say that.

What we actually look at is public opinion. And what is interesting, everyone knows Pakistanis tend to dislike the **drones** in the major cities. What we don't actually know is what Pakistanis think about the **drones** in the tribal areas. In my own travels in Pakistan, I find that people, the closer they are to the **drones**, the less willing they are to blanket say that they hate them, in part because they understand the options are the Pakistan military or living under the regime that the terrorists would prefer.

But I will say I very much agree with Jeremy. I am not a supporter of the so-called signature strikes. Even if we were to have transparency on what we were trying to do, we really wouldn't know anything about the signature strikes. On this, he and I are in absolute agreement.

TAPPER: Jeremy, you have called **drone** strikes murder.

If you were responsible for the national security of the United States and you saw Anwar al-Awlaki, you were sure it was him, it is not a signature strike, you're sure it's him, what would you do? What do you think the government of the United States should be doing?

SCAHILL: Well, first of all, there hasn't been any concrete evidence presented against Anwar al-Awlaki other than he said things that are deeply offensive to me and to probably most Americans.
I think the United States has made a big mistake in doing away with due process particularly for American citizens, but also for non-U.S. citizens. And I think if you have a man like Anwar al-Awlaki that you believe represents a concrete threat to the United States why not charge him with a crime, demand his extradition, go in and attempt to arrest him?

The United States did that recently with one of bin Laden's relatives. We have seen that in the case of Somalis accused of being members of Al Shabab in al Qaeda in East Africa. The idea that the president would authorize what I think is the assassination of a U.S. citizen who had not been charged with a crime really is a disturbing trend. And to kill his 16-year-old son two weeks later and then provide no explanation -- we have gotten no public explanation from the administration of why they killed 16-year-old Abdulrahman al-Awlaki.

To me, it would have been a moment to say we're going to put a moratorium on drone strikes, step back, and look at how it was we killed three U.S. citizens in three weeks, two of whom were not even supposedly on the kill list, one of whom was a 16-year-old citizen who was 6 years old when 9/11 happened.

TAPPER: Christine, I will let you have the last word. Does the potential move of putting drone strikes out of the CIA and into the Pentagon entirely, although as Jeremy notes, the Pentagon was already doing some of them, is that a good move?

FAIR: The only way it'll be a good move is if they're not under the command of Special Operations Command, in other words, that they are completely subject to transparency.
Speaking with respect to Pakistan, it could potentially be a good move because right now Pakistan is kind of a free rider. Right? It allows us to do the drone strikes. We're flying them from their territory. We're even building a new drone base in Pakistan, and yet it is able to disassociate itself from the attacks.

If we were to go forward with complete transparency, it would mean the ISI would have to come out of the closet. And my views about the drone problem in Pakistan, we don't have the option to arrest people like we do elsewhere. Having this sort of transparency and understanding who is targeted and with what consequences is actually good for Pakistanis.

What Pakistanis need to do is own their own struggle against their own terrorism. I think bringing the ISI out into the open and making it accept responsibility for what it is doing is probably a good step in that direction and can only happen if it's taken out of the purview of the CIA and put into the purview of the DOD.

*Foreign Drone*

Foreign drone stories focus on foreign nations’ development and acquisition of drones and their ability to execute drone strikes. These stories often arise around the time of UN inspections or mishaps such as US drone crashes in foreign territories.

**On March 10, 2003, CNN aired a segment about Hans Blix’s inspections report to the UN about weapons that, according to CNN Anchor Miles O’Brien, showed Iraq was actively developing drones that could potentially dispense chemical or biological weapons.** CNN aired a similar report the following day, as did ABC’s Good Morning...
America. Both networks reported on March 12 that Iraqi officials denied all claims. On March 13, British Prime Minister Tony Blair publically complained that evidence of Iraqi drones was buried in Blix’s report. Blair called on Iraq to explain the aerial drone that inspectors found there.

MILES O’BRIEN: Well, you talked not long ago about the Iraqi plan of some years ago to turn MiG-21s into pilotless drones. And there was, of course, another aircraft, the L-29 that that was also experimentally done with. There was also some previous discussion by Secretary Powell at the U.N. of drones. But what's interesting now is U.S. officials are pointing to a line in Hans Blix's latest report that talks about the discovery of a new type of drone aircraft in Iraq, and U.S. officials tell me that the inspectors have, in fact, found one of these. According to the Blix report, it has a wing span of 7.45 meters, and they say that it has not been declared by Iraq.

DAVID ENSOR, national security correspondent: Now, I understand from U.S. officials that this type of drone, which has just been discovered, is believed to have a payload of about 50 kilograms. As one official put it, that's a lot of anthrax, and a range of around 200 U.S. miles. So that would be well in excess of the 150 kilometer limit that was imposed upon Iraq on any production of drone aircraft.

So this is a new type of drone aircraft that has just been discovered in the last couple of weeks, I am told, by the inspectors. The U.S. feels that Mr. Blix did not make enough of a point of this, that this is evidence, clear evidence, of an additional violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1441. It's another potential weapon that is supposed to

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have been declared and wasn't. The inspectors have discovered at least one of them, and the great question is, how many of them are there, and how far advanced is this drone program.

...  

ENSOR: This is not the only drone aircraft that the Iraqis are understood to have tested. You may recall from the testimony at the United Nations some weeks back, more than a month back, that Mr. Powell talked about the testing of a drone on a kind of a circular path, where the Iraqis were flying it way in excess of the 150 kilometer limit, running it for hundreds of kilometers to test whether it could go that far. That would, of course, put it in range for Israel and some other U.S. bases in the area.

Domestic

In domestic news stories, drones are only discussed in terms of their application in the US. These reports typically focus on safety and privacy issues as well as related FAA regulations.

Consider this February 2013 CNN news report, for example:

ANCHOR: Up next, drones. They are not just for tracking and killing terrorists. They could be flying over your neighborhood, over your kids' school. Just how legal is that? And do we even know what kind of mess we got ourselves into with this? That's coming up.

BANFIELD: They are versatile reliable affordable and sometimes real lethal. Maximum bang for minimum buck. We talked about drones, unmanned remotely piloted aircraft in the context of U.S. terror-fighting efforts overseas. But drones aren't just for governments or militaries or even police any more. In fact, anybody can buy one, not armed
with missiles, thank god, but armed with cameras. In fact, we have flown them around the newsroom here in New York. That's a shot of flying it around the fifth floor outside of my office, hovering over one of his colleague's desks. I don't know what he was able to read. But he used his Smartphone to maneuver it. There are even drones that look like humming birds, teeny tiny. And they can get just about anywhere. It is the cover story of "Time" magazine, "Rise of the Drones." In small print, "What happens when they are unleashed at home?"134

Other:

Drones are discussed in terms that don’t fit into any of the above categories.

Ambiguous:

Unable to determine.

3.5. Public Opinion Data

I accessed the iPoll database as well as the Polling of the Nations archive and obtained responses to all identical and similar public opinion survey questions that have been asked about drone strikes since 2000. First, I searched the Polling the Nations database using the keyword search terms “drone,” “drones,” “drone strike,” “drone strikes,” “unmanned,” “UAV,” and “aerial vehicle.” I then conducted the exact same search of the Roper Center’s iPoll database.135

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135 Polling the Nations is an online database containing the full text of more than 600,000 questions and responses from more than 18,000 surveys and 1,700 polling organizations. The archive runs from 1986
The survey data comes from well-known polling organizations and arms of major publications, including *Pew, Gallup, CBS, NYT, Washington Post, Fox, Economist, YouGov, NBC, Wall Street Journal, Monmouth University, and Farleigh Dickinson University*. A complete list of the survey items presented throughout the paper can be found in the Annex. There, I provide the precise question-wording of each poll item and as much detail as possible regarding the survey methodology. It wasn’t necessary to use a date-range while searching the databases because drones and drone strikes are a relatively modern phenomenon. Indeed, relevant survey questions were nonexistent prior to the early 2000s and highly-sporadic until 2010. Since 2010, drone-related questions have been asked on a fairly consistent basis by most polling organizations that address international and/or domestic social and political issues.

The dependent variable – the level of support/opposition regarding US drone strikes – is measured by responses to the following question:

- As you may know, the United States military has made increasing use of unmanned aircraft called 'drones' to launch aerial attacks in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Do you think the increased use of drones by the military is a good thing, or a bad thing?

I used responses to that question as the primary measurement of the DV because it was the question asked the most times over the longest period of time. Question-wording is a highly-scrutinized, core aspect of survey research, and variation over time is not ideal.

through the present time. The Roper Center’s *iPoll* archive contains survey data ranging from the 1930s to the present time and survey responses on nearly any topic of interest. Polling of the Nations and *iPoll* primarily contain US data, but more than 100 nations are represented in each database, which helped compare the US with other nations (*Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, Cornell University, accessed March 15, 2018, https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/; Polling the Nations, accessed March 15, 2018, http://www.orspub.com/).*
The relative newness of the drone issue, and the lag time that generally occurs between an issue merely existing and becoming part of the public conscience, are the most obvious reasons as to why survey research about drones was scant until a full decade after the US first employed them in the so-called war on terror. Meanwhile, drone strikes are ongoing and our knowledge about the program is fluid, both reasons as to why the wording of survey questions has changed over time. In order to work with the most possible public opinion data points, I also probed the results of survey items that are worded similarly but not precisely the same, including:

- Do you favor or oppose the US using unmanned aircraft or 'drones' to carry out missile attacks against suspected terrorists in foreign countries?

- As you know, the United States has been targeting and killing suspected members of Al Qaeda and other terrorists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, and other countries. Many of these killings have been conducted using unmanned aircraft that are controlled remotely, also known as drones. Do you favor or oppose the use of unmanned aircraft, also known as drones, to kill suspected members of Al Qaeda and other terrorists? If you don't know enough to have an opinion on this issue please just say so.

- Now I'm going to read you a series of ways in which the United States might use deadly force against suspected terrorists. For each one, please tell me if you approve or disapprove. Do you approve or disapprove of the United States using unmanned aircraft called drones...to kill a suspected terrorist in a foreign country?
As you may know, the United States military has made increasing use of unmanned aircraft called 'drones' to launch aerial attacks in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Do you think the increased use of drones by the military is a good thing, or a bad thing?
CHAPTER 4

WHAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE THINK

4.1. US Public Opinion Regarding US Drone Strikes since 2010

Available survey data since 2010 shows that drone strikes have been normalized to a remarkable degree since emerging as the country’s main weapon in its ongoing effort to tackle terrorist networks in foreign states. The key fact I highlight in this chapter is that Americans have expressed majority support for US led drone strikes every time the question has been asked. As the dependent variable, establishing Americans’ ceaseless support for this tactic is of the utmost importance. While Americans are somewhat concerned about the legality, morality and long-term efficacy of drone strikes, peoples’ worries are do not prevent them from ceaselessly supporting the tactic.

There is also an important point to make regarding the salience, or lack thereof, of drone strikes throughout much of the research period. Pollsters between the years 2000 and 2009 did not ask about approval/disapproval of drone strikes, and they rarely asked questions related to any aspect of drone technology. The lack of poll questions means that we don’t have the observational data to come away with clear-cut conclusions, yet there is an important point to take away from the absence of survey data during this period. It is not a coincidence that during this period there was a lack of drone-related questions in surveys and an absence of media coverage about drones. The fact is that, even though we saw the US dramatically increase its reliance on drones during the first decade of the 2000s, it wasn’t discussed publicly by politicians, news networks or major polling organizations. And as a tactic being carried out thousands of miles from the US mainland, the US public didn’t know about it, think about it, or presumably, particularly care about it. The evidence
or in this case, the lack of data collection about drones and drone strikes – is a strong sign that the issue was an obscure one throughout the first decade of the 2000s.

Polling organizations began asking the American public about drone strikes in 2010, and more consistently for the five years that followed. The results are extremely clear – American citizens have provided majority support, sometimes overwhelmingly so, since at least early-2011. In order to emphasize the degree to which the data show Americans support US-led drone strikes (DV), I begin by averaging the findings from numerous, national polls that ask the question, “[Please] tell me whether you strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, or strongly disapprove of the use of unmanned, drone aircraft against terrorist suspects overseas.” The findings show that approximately 67.36 percent of Americans support drone strikes against suspected terrorists, according to polls conducted from 2011 to 2015. Support varies from approximately 60 to 80 percent, which can be attributed to the differing methodologies and unique samples of each research organizations. The following Table 4.1 shows the results from 19 national surveys, each of which asked people for their response to the aforementioned question or one of the similar versions cited in the data and methods chapter.
Table 4.1. US Public Approval and Opposition regarding Drone Strike Operations (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
<th>No opinion&lt;sup&gt;136&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>07/2011</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/2011</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/2012</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/2012</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/2012</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/2013a</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/2013b</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/2013c</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/2013d</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/2013</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/2013</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/2013a</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/2013b</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/2013</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/2014</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>29</td>
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</tr>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/2015</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/2015</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>06/2015</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AVERAGE</strong></td>
<td><strong>67.36</strong></td>
<td><strong>22.31</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.78</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>136</sup> This column includes “no opinion,” “don’t know,” and non-responses such as “not answered” or “refused to answer.”
Source: Elaborated by the author based on the data from:
September 2011: Pew Research Center (See: Pew Research Center, Pew Social Trends Poll, retrieved from Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, iPOLL, USPSRA.100511S.R34, https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/home/index.cfm, last modified September 2011);
December 2012: Fairleigh Dickinson University (See: Fairleigh Dickinson University, Fairleigh Dickinson University’s PublicMind Poll, retrieved from Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, iPOLL, USFDU.020713.R03, https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/home/index.cfm, last modified December 2012);
March 2013: Gallup (See: Gallup, Gallup Poll, retrieved from Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, iPOLL, USGALLUP.13MRC20.R06A, https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/home/index.cfm, last modified March 2013);
December 2013: Quinnipiac University (See: Quinnipiac University, Quinnipiac University Poll, retrieved from Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, iPOLL, USQUINN.1211113.R52, https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/home/index.cfm, last modified December 2013);
April 2015: Associated Press and GfK Knowledge Networks (See: Associated Press and GfK Knowledge Networks, Associated Press/GfK Knowledge Networks Poll, retrieved from Roper Center for Public
As you can see, poll-by-poll, American citizens have always expressed majority support for drone strikes. The high point (86 percent) occurred relatively early, before some of the more controversial questions surrounding drones had come to light. And as a technology new to the public, citizens, including myself, were somewhat enamored with the notion of military strikes that do not risk the lives of Americans. That’s a fascinating technological advancement, and in a vacuum, it would irrational to oppose. Support dissipated over time, with some expected variation, but has always remained above 50 percent. The average level of support over these five years was approximately 70 percent support according to the Table 4.1, above, as well as the data below (Table 4.2), which represent the findings from 18 national surveys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>52.00%</td>
<td>86.00%</td>
<td>66.8889%</td>
<td>8.08695%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>41.00%</td>
<td>22.6111%</td>
<td>9.06278%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>26.00%</td>
<td>11.1111%</td>
<td>6.47065%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Americans also indicate that they prefer drones over all other military options with respect to ongoing violence in Iraq. More specifically, a poll June 2014 polls shows the US
public’s desire to take the fight to sky, with just under 30 percent choosing traditional manned air strikes as the best response to the uptake in violence in Iraq, and more than 30 percent choosing drone strikes. The public was almost unanimously against the deployment of troops. Likewise, data obtained in March 2015 indicate that Americans support increasing airstrikes and drone strikes, but only want send “a limited number of ground troops to Iraq and Syria to fight Islamic militants.” The following Graph 4.1 illustrates where the US public stands regarding various military options in Iraq and its overwhelming support for drone strikes.

Graph 4.1. Support for Drone Strikes and Various Other Options, June 2014

Source: Elaborated by the author based on data from Pew Economist/YouGov Polimetrix.

The following Table 4.3 shows support versus opposition to drone strikes from July 2011 through May 2015. Support peaks in 2011 and diminishes over time, but at no point dips below 50 percent. Support is fairly consistent throughout the period of July 2011 to November 2014, however, there is an interesting point in 2014 when Americans’

opposition toward US-led drone strikes increases to its highest-ever level (41 percent). This spike in opposition should be attributed to major, well-covered drone-related events, culminating with President Obama’s public comments about the drone program. These events, which all involved media attention and open division among elites, are the next topic of discussion.

Graph 4.2. Approval versus Disapproval of US-led Drone Strikes

The series of incidents began with the February 2013 leaking of a Justice Department document that provided a legal rationale for the killing of American citizens who join Al Qaeda. Targeting American citizens, rather than suspected terrorists who are not American citizens, is an important variable with respect to support versus opposition to drone strikes. The figure who brought this to the forefront was Anwar Al Alwaki, an Al
Qaeda operative and US citizen who was initially targeted in May 2010 by a US drone strike that narrowly missed him and his affiliates as they drove across a desert in North Africa. In September of 2011, after several days of surveillance, armed drones operated by the CIA departed from a secret base in the Arabian Peninsula, crossed into northern Yemen, and eliminated Awlaki and affiliates with Hellfire missiles.\(^{139}\) Make no mistake, Awlaki was known threat to US security and considered one of the most effective online recruiters and coordinators of attacks. However, Awlaki was a US citizen killed by a US drone without any attempt to arrest him and go through traditional legal channels. So, while many on the US side were pleased with the events, the issue became a politicized one in that it ignited a controversy regarding the targeting of US citizens.

The Department of Justice produced a white paper in November 2011 that set out a legal justification for the US drone program, and especially the killing of US citizens. The 16-page document, which was first obtained in 2013 by NBC, was quite clear:

In conclusion, it would be lawful for the United States to conduct a lethal operation outside the United States against a U.S. citizen who is a senior, operational leader of al-Qa'ida or an associated force of al-Qai'da without violating the Constitution or the federal statues discussed in this white paper under the following conditions: (1) an informed, high-level official of the U.S. government has determined that the targeted individual poses an imminent threat of violent attack against the United States; (2) capture is infeasible, and the United States continues to monitor whether capture becomes feasible; and (3) the operation is conducted in a manner consistent

with the four fundamental principles of the laws of war governing the use of force. As stated earlier, this paper does not attempt to determine the minimum requirements necessary to render such an operation lawful, nor does it assess what might be required to render a lethal operation lawful, nor does it assess what might be required to render a lethal operation against a U.S. citizen lawful in other circumstances. It concludes only that the stated conditions would be sufficient to make lawful operation in a foreign country against a U.S. citizen with the characteristics described above.¹⁴⁰

The leaked document forced politicians to publicly discuss the legality of drone strikes and media coverage was widespread. Meanwhile, polling organizations promptly formulated questions to better measure the effect that the citizenship and geographic location of drone targets has on US support for the tactic. We discovered that public opinion about drone strikes clearly varies based on these four distinctions:

1. Whether drones are used to target terrorist suspects who are not US citizens and who do reside in foreign countries.

2. Whether drones are used to target terrorist suspects who are US citizens and who do reside in foreign territories.

3. Whether drones are used to target terrorist suspects who are not US citizens but on US soil.

4. Whether drones are used to target terrorist suspects who are US citizens and on US soil.

The following Graph 4.2 shows the results from four items that were part of a 2013 national Gallup survey: "Do you think the U.S. government should or should not use drones to launch airstrikes [inside the US/outside the US] against suspected terrorists who are [US citizens/not US citizens]?" Clearly, Americans are OK with drone strikes against non-citizens in foreign countries. Support immediately dips under 50 percent if you assume the target is a US citizen in a foreign country, and Americans are broadly opposed to any drone strikes occurring inside the continental US. The results from the Gallup survey perfectly illustrate this variation.

![Graph 4.3. U.S. Public Support for Drone Strikes, Based on Location and Citizenship of Targets, March 2013](image)


The debate about the drone program began to rage and the Obama administration poured gasoline on the fire, when in January 2013, John Brennan was nominated to become the next head of the CIA. As the top White House Counter Terrorism adviser, in 2012 Brennan issued the first-ever public statement and defense regarding the US drone program
and targeted killings, saying the following: “As a matter of international law, the United States is in an armed conflict with al-Qaida, the Taliban and associated forces, in response to the 9/11 attacks, and we may also use force consistent with our inherent right of national self-defense. There is nothing in international law that bans the use of remotely piloted aircraft for this purpose, or that prohibits us from using lethal force against our enemies outside of an active battlefield, at least when the country involved consents or is unable or unwilling to take action against the threat.”141 In addition to saying drone strikes are legal, Brennan was adamant they are “ethical” and specifically argued the following, which is largely why he emerged as the man other than President Obama most closely associated with drone strikes:

- Targeted strikes conform to the principle of necessity, the requirement that the target have definite military value. In this armed conflict, individuals who are part of al-Qaida or its associated forces are legitimate military targets. We have the authority to target them with lethal force, just as we target enemy leaders in past conflicts, such as Germans and Japanese commanders during World War II.

- Targeted strikes conform to the principle of distinction, the idea that only military objectives may be intentionally targeted and that civilians are protected from being intentionally targeted. With the unprecedented ability of remotely piloted aircraft to precisely target a military objective, while minimizing collateral damage, one could argue that never before has there been a weapon that

allows us to distinguish more effectively between an al-Qaida terrorist and innocent civilians.

- Targeted strikes conform to the principle of proportionality, the notion that the anticipated collateral damage of an action cannot be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. By targeting an individual terrorist or a small number of terrorists with ordnance that can be adapted to avoid harming others in the immediate vicinity, it is hard to imagine a tool that can better minimize the risk to civilians than remotely piloted aircraft.

- Targeted strikes conform to the principle of humanity, which requires us to use weapons that will not inflict unnecessary suffering. For all these reasons, I suggest to you that these targeted strikes against al-Qaida terrorists are indeed ethical and just.

- Targeted strikes are wise. Remotely piloted aircraft, in particular, can be a wise choice because of geographic factors; the mitigation of US casualties due to the “surgical precision” of drone strikes; the reduced need to have troops on the ground in war zones, a tactic that Brennan said, “[play] into al-Qaida's strategy of trying to draw us into long, costly wars that drain us financially, inflame anti-American resentment and inspire the next generation of terrorists. In comparison, there is the precision of targeted strikes.”142

The nomination brought US drone policies before Congress and into the media spotlight, as Brennan, who underwent CIA Director Senate confirmation hearings from February 7, 2013 to March 7, 2013, was hammered with questions about the covert

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142 Ibid.
program. “Engaging a high-ranking Obama administration official for the first time in an extensive public discussion of the use of drones for targeted killing, members of the Senate Intelligence Committee on Thursday pressed John O. Brennan, President Obama’s nominee for director of the Central Intelligence Agency, about the secrecy of the strikes, their legal basis and the reported backlash they have produced in Pakistan and Yemen,” the NYT’s Mark Mazzetti and Scott Shane wrote at the time.\textsuperscript{143} The following FOX News segment about drone strikes exemplifies TV news coverage at the time:

\begin{quote}
— JAMES ROSEN, FOX NEWS CHIEF WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT: From the first U.S. drone attack outside of Afghanistan in Yemen a decade ago, through the six known strikes this year, including the one that took out this Taliban commander, his deputy, and eight others in Pakistan last week, the U.S. war on terror has grown increasingly reliant on these unmanned vehicles which are preprogrammed pared for flight an often armed with the hellfire missiles.

— BILL ROGGIO, "LONG WAR JOURNAL" MANAGE EDITOR: I believe John Brennan taking over at CIA will ensure that the drone program will continue. The administration has been -- and Brennan in particular, have been selling us on the fact that drones would be the magic weapon.

— ROSEN: President Obama inherited the drone program from the Bush administration, and despite his frequent criticism of his predecessor’s conduct on the war on terror, the current commander in chief has dramatically expanded the program, reportedly employing a kill list to authorize some 300 drone strikes that
\end{quote}

have killed an estimated 2,500 people. But the program has long strained relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan, who complain about civilian casualties.

— JAY CARNEY, WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY: We endeavor to reduce civilian casualties as much as possible. And I think that they broader record here of success and taking the fight to Al Qaeda is one that has made the United States safer.

— BARACK OBAMA, (D) PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: He has worked to embed our efforts in a strong legal framework.

— ROSEN: But civil liberties groups are less accepting of the legal justifications that Brennan and the president's lawyers have erected for the drone strikes.

— HINA SHAMSI, ACLU NATIONAL SECURITY PROJECT: The American government is using drones far from any battlefield to kill people who are not presenting an imminent threat to the United States. And that is the limited circumstance under which lethal force can used outside the context of any battlefield.

— (END VIDEOTAPE)

— ROSEN: Retired general Stanley McChrystal said this week that while the drone program has been instrumental in decimating Al Qaeda's top leadership, the strikes may actually be working against America's broader counterinsurgency mission because they spread fear and resentment amongst the very populations the U.S. is seeking to protect.
Brennan’s nomination was also at the center of CNN’s coverage in January 2013, when the network aired a lengthy segment covering his high-level involvement with the US drone program. The broadcast invoked a multiplicity of voices, including that of Tom Junod, an *Esquire* reporter who wrote the piece, “The Lethal Presidency of Barack Obama.” Junod spoke to the overwhelming elite support that drone strikes receive from Congress as well as Brennan’s “moral leadership” of the program. He discussed process and transparency, two controversial issue areas rarely highlighted in the mainstream media. Junod capped the segment off with a direct statement about the prevalence of drones under President Obama’s leadership and a lack of due process and transparency with respect to drone strike policies.

— BROOKE BALDWIN, CNN ANCHOR: Question number one being, you know, during these confirmation hearings, do you think it will be more of a defending, that John Brennan will be defending his use of drones or distancing himself from it?

— TOM JUNOD, WRITER, "ESQUIRE" MAGAZINE: I don't know if he has to defend it. It seems -- there really is no force within the Congress who is anti-drone who I think is -- I think that this is an opportunity to make him defend the drone program, but I don't know if that's going to come up.

— BALDWIN: You don't think people in your piece will be calling for more transparency.

— JUNOD: I think people within the piece, people that you -- from the outside, but the question is whether people with power are going to be calling for more transparency.
Baldwin: You said something interesting in a commercial break, I want to bring it up again. He's been the moral spokesperson when it comes to drones. What do you mean by that?

...  

Junod: There was a big conversation over this summer about basically whether the drone program should be sort of centered in the CIA or in the White House through the Department of Defense.

He has been a proponent of sort of shifting the center of the drone program to the White House, and the military. Now he's going to the CIA. But the thing about John Brennan is that he has made -- argued quite persuasively for drones. I don't see him sort of putting on the brakes at all at the CIA.

Baldwin: What about the opposite of putting on the brakes. You see speeding up?

Junod: Wherever he has gone, he has sped up the program. He is the spokesperson for the drone program. I cannot see him all of a sudden turning back on that.

...  

Junod: [The “enhanced I interrogation technique” topic] is old news. We're not going to hold people accountable for that. We sort of left that conversation in the dust and have gone on to this new conversation, which is the conversation about drones.
— Basically the people that we sort of -- that would have once been interrogated really are now under the Obama administration and now under John Brennan, you know, being eliminated.

MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow reported in January 2013 on the ethics of using unmanned weaponry, the frequency of strikes, and the lack of transparency. Maddow predictably hammered Brennan, who was seen by many Democrats as being too closely associated with the Bush administration. Maddow unpredictably hammered President Obama, who she said led the expansion of the covert drone program. Bill Burton, Priorities USA Co-Founder, spoke with Maddow and defended Obama and the use of drones. Burton is one of the most powerful liberal political consultants in the country now, as well as a former Deputy White House Press secretary in the first Obama administration, and Priorities USA is one of the most lucrative democratic Super PACs in the nation.

RACHEL MADDOW, HOST: In the debate now over the most modern form of American warfare, which is killing people using planes that don’t have pilots, using unmanned flying robots in far-away countries, what is often portrayed as novel and especially morally troubling about that means of killing people is that there isn’t a person inside the plane. There isn’t a person inside the plane that has the missiles on it. That the person piloting the aircraft and pulling the trigger to fire the missile used in that attack is actually thousands of miles away in Virginia, say, or Nevada, or somewhere, rather than him or herself actually being at the battlefield.

But the idea that the ethically relevant thing about a drone is how far away you the trigger puller are from the explosion or the damage that you cause with your

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weapon, that is a quantitative matter. That is not a qualitative matter. We have always been able to project force far away from the person who is exerting it.

The ethical sensitivity here is really not about the particular type of weapon of war we are using. It is that we are killing people using that weapon of war in place that aren’t war zones. And that is the unnerving consequence of the whole idea of a war on terror, or a war against a non-state actor that could be anywhere in the world and that therefore designates that war as taking place everywhere.

The most frequent, outside a war zone place where our government carries out these kinds of attacks is of course in Pakistan. In 2010, we saw what the Obama administration was going to be like on this score…Well, how is [2013] shaping up? It is January 10th. So, so far, there have only been 10 days in 2013. Of those 10 days in 2013, so far, we have launched a drone strike in Pakistan on seven out of those 10 days. Now, maybe that is an aberration. Maybe those are the only seven we will have this year and by the end of the year, our average will keep up this year-to-year pattern of decline.

But seven strikes in the first 10 days of the year, that’s kind of off the hook, right? Of course, the most amazing thing about this as a matter of policy is that it isn’t really a matter of policy, or at least it isn’t publicly a matter of policy. The administration, when we have a drone strike in Pakistan, never says, yes, we just launched a drone strike in Pakistan.

When you talk to people in the administration, or when they are willing to go on the record to the press about these things, they will describe these drone strikes as having been reported. They never full on admit that the United States is carrying them
out. But it is the United States carrying them out. The fact that we know that these things are happening and that our government nevertheless considers them to be deniable is frankly one of the more Orwellian things about being an American citizen in the 21st century.

The closest thing we have to a face for the drone policy or the drone non-policy is [Brennan]. He is the face of this policy that we have of killing people outside of war zones using this particular tool...So to the extent that there is a kill list, this guy is reportedly the keeper of the list. But the other reason that he is the face of the policy is that he is the member of the administration who came forward to give a speech about it. This past spring, it was John Brennan who gave the first ever U.S. policy address, admitting to some of our drone strikes and defending them as both wise and legal.

John Brennan also this past fall told "The Washington Post" this -- quote, "I think the rule should be that if we’re going to take actions overseas that result in the deaths of people, the United States should take responsibility for that. We should. But we don’t. At least not for all of the drone strikes that we launch.

The deniable drone strikes, the ones the U.S. does not take responsibility for, the ones the U.S. does not admit to even though everybody knows we’re responsible for them, those are the ones that are committed as covert action. They’re the ones that are launched by the CIA.

As John Brennan has now been nominated to head the CIA, he’s being described as somebody who wants to bring this policy out of the dark. Not that he wants to stop killing people using this particular tool, but he thinks we should do it in a way that is more accountable. He specifically thinks we ought to admit we are doing it. And
even more specifically than that he is said to prefer to have the military do these strikes instead of the CIA.

Now, we may or may not like what our military does in wartime. But the rules under which our military operates and the political expectations we have when they do operate are that we get to know what they’re doing. And our political leaders, who are at the top of their chain of command are therefore responsible for giving the orders, and our political leaders can be voted out of office if we do not like what they have the military do. We do not have that luxury, the accountability when our government doesn’t admit to what we do.

…

If [Brenan] does want to bring drone war -- drone warfare out of the dark and put it on more authoritatively legal and accountable grounds, if he moves to run the CIA, will that make him more able to effect that change in our government if he really wants to do if, if he really has wanted to do it all along but hasn’t been able to pull it off? I mean, it is kind of hard to believe he’s going to go run an agency so he can give some of that agency’s authorities away.

Or are we to believe that the president, who is nominating John Brennan to run the CIA, that the president also wants to make this change, that the president, who has used drone warfare in an unprecedented way, who has been unprecedentedly aggressive on that subject, that this president wants to bring the drones out of the dark too, and therefore he needs to move John Brennan over to the CIA because he knows then he’ll have a CIA director in press who will acquiesce to the CIA losing that particular job of running all our flying killer robots and never having to answer for it.
BILL BURTON, PRIORITIES USA CO-FOUNDER: Well, even if you just take this back a step from talking about whether we’re just talking about the left who has a critique or the American people who have a right to know certain things about what the government is doing, I think it’s worth noting that the CIA is accountable and they are accountable to Congress.

And anytime Congress wants to have a conversation with the head of the CIA they bring him down and have a conversation with him. Sometimes those conversations are open. Sometimes those conversations are not. But Congress does have oversight legally over what the CIA is doing.

And as for John Brennan, this is a guy who you note is for accountability, is for transparency, and is the guy who gave the first speech as you noted that talked about the **drone** program that the United States has. The question that we have to ask ourselves is if the presumption is that the president has to do every single thing in his power to keep the American people safe, then how is he going to do it? If there’s bad guys in Yemen who are a part of al Qaeda, is he going to send a **drone** in to go and get them?

... 

MADDOW: Killing people in wartime is something you do by all sorts of horrible means. **Drones** used by the military in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and places like that are not something that have ever attracted attention. The use of **drones** in Yemen and Somalia by the U.S. military in ways that were admitted to by U.S. policymakers I also don’t think upset very many Americans.
I think the thing that is morally different is covert action, denying that it’s happening. It has been reported that there has been a drone strike in Waziristan. Yes, I have seen those reports. I will not comment on whether or not that is an action of our government.  

Republican Senator Rand Paul (KY) was the most outspoken, prominent politician on the opposition side of various aspects US drone policies. A group of Republicans, led by Paul, waged a nearly 13-hour filibuster over the government’s drone strike policies — forcing the Senate to delay the expected confirmation of Brennan to lead the CIA. The filibuster and the stalling of the Brennan appointment garnered vast media attention, forced politicians to opine on the issue, and made the drone program more salient in the public arena. Indeed, every major news network covered the Brennan nomination and US drone policies in early March 2013, and on March 7 of that year, every network covered Paul’s filibuster. Prominent Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Ted Cruz (R-TX) supported Paul’s position, while other Republicans such as John McCain (R-AZ) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC) opposed Paul. This was an extremely rare display of elite division regarding US drone policies, which is partly why the media covered it so closely and why public opinion was ultimately influenced to a certain degree – in this case with opposition increasing in 2013 and even more so in 2014. And Brennan’s appointment as CIA Director did not bring an end to the story.

This series of incidents culminated when President Obama spoke on the issue before an audience at the National Defense University on May 23, 2013, saying that he had indeed incorporated targeted killing into US foreign policy and would outline more

145 Ibid.
stringent rules to govern future drone operations. He acknowledged the ways in which the drone strike issue could be framed – as a legal, moral and ethical question – but on both accounts strongly defended US actions. It was astounding to see the President Obama, who almost never uttered the word “drone,” publically acknowledge and discuss targeted killings and the most controversial aspects of the drone program.

So it is in this context that the United States has taken lethal, targeted action against al Qaeda and its associated forces, including with remotely piloted aircraft commonly referred to as drones. As was true in previous armed conflicts, this new technology raises profound questions — about who is targeted, and why; about civilian casualties, and the risk of creating new enemies; about the legality of such strikes under U.S. and international law; about accountability and morality. So let me address these questions.

To begin with, our actions are effective. Don’t take my word for it. In the intelligence gathered at bin Laden’s compound, we found that he wrote, “We could lose the reserves to enemy’s air strikes. We cannot fight air strikes with explosives.” Other communications from al Qaeda operatives confirm this as well. Dozens of highly skilled al Qaeda commanders, trainers, bomb makers and operatives have been taken off the battlefield. Plots have been disrupted that would have targeted international aviation, U.S. transit systems, European cities and our troops in Afghanistan. Simply put, these strikes have saved lives.

Moreover, America’s actions are legal. We were attacked on 9/11. Within a week, Congress overwhelmingly authorized the use of force. Under domestic law, and international law, the United States is at war with al Qaeda, the Taliban,
and their associated forces. We are at war with an organization that right now would kill as many Americans as they could if we did not stop them first. So this is a just war — a war waged proportionally, in last resort, and in self-defense.¹⁴⁶

The events of 2013 caused a whirlwind of media coverage surrounding the drone program, largely due to the divide within the Republican Party and among political elites – a divide that may have existed, but was not broadcast to the public before 2013. The following Graph 4.3 is a “poll of polls,” taking into account only responses of approval and disapproval – non-responses are not included. The curve represents a localized regression (Loess) and the ribbons represent the Loess’ standard error. While I would need additional data to conduct a robust time-series analysis, we can see a similar pattern in which disapproval increases around the time, or within a reasonable lag-time of one year, of these milestone events: the leaked Justice Department documents, the Brennan nomination, Rand Paul’s filibuster, and ultimately, President Obama’s remarks at the National Defense University.

The main takeaway here is that the American public broadly and consistently supports drone strikes against suspected terrorists in foreign countries, so long as they are not US citizens. The level of support remained above 50 percent throughout the research period regardless of the particular polling organization or methodology. Simply out, there’s no mistaking the overwhelming support for drone strikes among the American public. The second takeaway is that an increase in opposition toward drone strikes occurred in 2013/2014, coinciding with the most significant, well-covered, divisive period in the history of the US drone program. This was the one instance in which we have seen mainstream US politicians, including prominent Republicans, arguing with one another on the Congressional floor about drone strike policies. Ultimately, we witnessed a major Presidential speech act related to the most controversial aspects of the drone program. We cannot overlook the correlation between the variation in public opinion, the timing of these events, and the major increase in media coverage surrounding issues related to drone
strikes. It is a quintessential example of the public reacting to open debate and pronounced elite rhetoric, and it perfectly illustrates the process of indexing in that major media, which had long failed to address the controversial aspects of the US drone program, reacted to the division among elites by rigorously covering these events and issues.

4.2. Fear of Terrorism and Support for Drone Strikes

The scatter plot on the following page shows the US public’s level of fear that their country will experience a “major terrorist attack” (Graph 4.4). The data, which runs from 2001 through 2014, is important to consider because of the logical link between people’s fears of terrorism and support for extreme measures such as targeted drone strikes in sovereign countries. However, for at least three reasons I argue that people’s fear of terrorism is, at best, a secondary factor in terms of its impact on US public support for drone strikes.

First, there’s a downward trend with respect to those who are “somewhat” concerned about a looming terrorist attack on US soil. Second, the amount of people “very worried” ranged between 20 to 25 percent from 2011 through the end of 2014 – a far cry from the majority of the country that has always maintained its support for drone strikes. Third, there’s an upward trend in terms of people who are just “slightly” worried about the potential for a terrorist attack on US soil. Frankly, it’s rational to think that any American would acknowledge the mere potential there could be another terrorist attack in the US. The contingency that’s slight worried should be treated as a group that’s barely worried, but also realistic, and it’s downright unrealistic to claim there’s zero chance of another attack in the US.
Public fear of terrorism peaked just after the attacks on September 11, 2001, a rational reaction to the nation’s most fatal terrorist attack ever. Apart for some steadiness throughout the first decade of the 2000s, the level of fear has diminished since then, reaching some of its lowest points during a period of continued, vast support for US-led drone strikes. Some Americans remain “slightly worried” that there could be another terrorist attack in the US, while the amount of people who are “fairly worried” has dwindled concurrent with continued broad support for drone strikes. Indeed, that’s the key point here: terrorism overall has waxed and waned over the same time period as the US public has constantly provided majority support for drone strikes. The relationship between fear of terrorism and support for drone strikes seems to be a secondary one, at best.
Graph 2.5. Americans’ Level of Worry that the U.S. will Experience another Major Terrorist Attack, 2001-2014

How worried are you that the United States will experience another major terrorist attack—very worried, fairly worried, only slightly worried, or not really worried at all?

Source: Elaborated by the author based on data NBC News/Wall Street Journal Polls.
4.3. Americans are [sort of] Concerned about the Legality and Efficacy and Ethics of Drone Strikes

There are two revealing Pew polls, conducted in 2013 and again in 2015, that address whether the public takes is concerned about the controversial aspects surrounding drone strikes. The first question we look at asks Americans whether they are concerned about drone strikes endangering the lives of civilians. For reasons we can all understand, civilian casualties garner negative attention and is perhaps the most damaging aspect of the program in terms of public perception. What’s most noticeable is that about half of Americans are very concerned, and the bulk of the remainder are somewhat concerned. Very few respondents indicate they are not too concerned or not at all concerned. These results remained remarkably steady from February 2013 to May 2015, as shown in the following Graph 4.5.

Graph 4.6. Level of Concern with Drone Strikes Endangering Civilians, 2013 and 2015

![Graph showing level of concern with drone strikes endangering civilians]

*Source: Elaborated by the author based on data from Pew Research Center.*
The level of concern about endangering civilians is precariously close to the level of support for US-led drone strikes, which as you may recall averaged out to 67 percent. In fact, the level of concern for civilian deaths is lower than the average level of support for US-led drone strikes. Why would so many Americans support a tactic that causes a significant level of concern about innocent civilian casualties? Well, public sentiment regarding civilian death is not a very impactful variable with respect to swaying Americans to oppose drone strike operations. This goes straight to the heart of my hypothesis: Yes, people report they care that civilians are at risk. However, this sentiment isn’t nearly enough to override their support for drone strikes, a weapon and tactic that are either ignored by politicians and media organizations, or framed as an effective national security tool (this type of framing will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter on media coverage).

A second controversial issue that comes up among drone strike critics is that they could damage the reputation of the US and thus lead to acts of retaliation by extremist groups. The notion that drone strikes could create enemies and blowback is common knowledge, evidenced by the fact this has been at the center of the plot of TV shows such as HBO’s Homeland and NBC’s Blacklist, as well as Hollywood movies such as a Good Kill. Americans are slightly less concerned about blowback than about civilian deaths, likely due to one being an actual event and the other being a potential event. Still, the vast majority of the US public is either “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about blowback, and there’s a significant drop to “not too concerned” and “not all concerned.”

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147 As CIA section chief in Kabul, Carrie ignores warnings about major collateral damage and approves a drone strike on a hard-to-find Taliban leader, resulting in mass killings at a wedding in his family in Pakistan. She justifies her decision by saying that the civilians put themselves at risk by being present there.
The public is also concerned that drone strikes will damage the reputation of the US around the world. The data I have analyzed does not allow me to determine the salience of US drone strikes in foreign countries, it’s abundantly clear that almost every country in the world vastly opposes the tactic. A logical connection can be made between the problem of civilian deaths, the potential for blowback, and that drone strikes could lead to blowback, and the reputation of the US would being damaged. The data shows that Americans are worried about damage to the reputation of the US, albeit less so than the aforementioned, more specific poll questions (Graph 4.7). My argument is that while Americans are concerned about civilian deaths when asked if they are concerned about civilian deaths, for example, they do not think it’s sufficient to significantly damage the reputation of the US. And frankly, it’s true; drone strikes is merely one of a multitude of issues that could damage
the reputation of the US, and in my opinion, it’s legitimate to claim that drone strikes controversies are not a key variable in making this determination.

Graph 4.8. Level of Public Concern about Drone Strikes Damaging America’s Reputation around the World, 2013 and 2015

The fourth controversial aspect of the US drone program is the legality, or lack thereof, in terms of conducting drone strikes in foreign territories, and in general, targeted killings. Questions about the legality of such operations are extremely well documented by academics and human rights organizations.148 Questions of legality, as you will see in the following chapter, are sporadically mentioned by the media or political elites and rarely analyzed in-depth. The Bush and Obama administrations sought to justify targeted killings under both domestic and international law. The 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military

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Force (AUMF), which the U.S. Congress passed just days after 9/11, serves as the domestic legal foundation for US counterterrorism operations and targeted killings. The statute empowers the president "to use all necessary and appropriate force" in pursuit of those responsible for the terrorist attacks.\(^{149}\)

Peacetime assassinations have been officially banned by the US since 1976. Yet the US government argues that it’s engaged in armed conflict with al-Qaeda and affiliated groups and thus justifies targeted killings, and in particular, drone strikes. The government’s position is clear from public speeches and leaked governmental documents.\(^{150}\) The White House’s position is based on the right to self-defense and article 51 of the UN charter, which states that, “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.”\(^{151}\) Acts of self-defense include drone strikes against active al-Qaeda leaders operating from declared or undeclared theaters of war. The US unilaterally pursues targets without prior consent from foreign states if the targeted country is unwilling or unable to eliminate the threat.


Suspected militants are occasionally individuals who are also US citizens. The idea that the US would target US citizens is the single most divisive aspect of the US drone program. The President, other members of executive branch, members of congress, and members of the judiciary have all spoken publically about US policy regarding drone strikes against US citizens. Attorney General Eric Holder said in March 2012 that US citizens abroad who are suspected militants may be killed by US forces. Holder said that the Fifth Amendment's due process clause protects such individuals, but that policy "takes into account the realities of combat." The bottom line is that, according to Holder, it would be lawful to target a US citizen if the individual poses an imminent threat, capture is not feasible, and the operation were executed in observance of the applicable laws of war.

The white paper leaked in 2013 provided the media and the public with a detailed account of the legal framework for the targeted killing of US citizens. The documents were produced in light of the killings of suspected militants who also happened to be US citizens, although these drone strikes were not publicly acknowledged until months later. In May 2013, President Obama delivered his major speech at the National Defense University in Washington, during which he announced new policy guidance for targeted killings and the use of drones. In it, he defended US drone policies but also called for the refinement and eventual repeal of the AUMF.

The legal intricacies are complex and important, but for the purposes of this paper, it’s imperative to recognize that political elites publically expressed their strong disagreement about particular drone policies, and specifically, targeting suspected terrorist who are also US citizens. Subsequently, the American public expressed similar concern regarding the legality of drone strikes. The following Graph 4.8. is a measure of
Americans’ concern about the legality of drone strikes. While public concern about the legality of drone strikes is real, it does not correlate with public opposition to drone strikes. Even though these questions were asked during and following the most tumultuous period in the history of the drone program, and by far the most well publicized, Americans’ concern about the legality of US drone strikes, was simply not enough to cause a major change in public opinion.

**Graph 4.9. Level of Concern about the Legality of Drone Strikes, 2013 and 2015**

In sum, it’s clear that Americans are aware of and concerned about the controversial aspects and potential consequences of the drone strike program. The main questions surrounding the tactic – legality, civilian casualties, blowback, and damaging America’s reputation – are all of much concern to a majority of the public. The main takeaway is that while Americans report they are concerned, they simultaneously support US-led drone strikes. It’s quite clear that these variables, concern about these 4 issues, are not enough to sway Americans away from their overwhelming support for drones. In fact, these variables
were not even powerful enough to mitigate the unusually high level of bipartisan support for these military and CIA operations.

4.4. Bipartisanship? REALLY?

All theories about public opinion formation regarding foreign policy take into account people’s dispositions, and chief among those are Party ID and political ideology. In this section I focus on one of the most interesting findings from the analysis of survey research, which is that both Republicans and Democrats really like drone strikes – even if they’re concerned about every controversial aspect related to them. My argument, which I will explain in this section, is that Republicans are predisposed to support the use of force while Democrats are predisposed to support their popular president.

Recent research in the field of public opinion shows that partisan divides have increased over time, particularly with respect to the tenets of liberal internationalism, once a commonly shared ideology that, in relative terms, unified the American public. Specifically, since 2011 we have seen increased partisan differences in public and elite opinion regarding foreign policy issues such as the predisposition to increase US military power, to use of force in general, and the prevention of nuclear proliferation, and other polices related to violent engagement.152 There are times when parties unite to broadly support the use of force, but typically it’s restricted to the aftermath of major fatal events such as the attacks on the World Trade Center. In general, we expect to see a significant

gap – a growing gap – between Republicans and Democrats when it comes to issues such as military engagement.

Surprisingly, we see broad cross-party agreement regarding drone strikes. A Pew survey conducted in February 2013, for example, showed that 68% of Republicans and 58% of Democrats approved of drone strikes to target extremists in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. A Gallup poll in March 2013 found majority support among all three groups, Republican, Democrat, and Independent. Even the most recent polling shows cross-party support for drone strikes, including a March 2015 FOX poll that showed vast support across all three parties – 76% of the total population, 79% of Republicans, 74% of Independents, and 66% of Democrats.\(^\text{153}\) Yes, Democrats usually support drone strikes less so than their Republican counterparts, but that’s to be expected. The margin is minimal and there is clearly bipartisan support for drone strikes.

We know that partisanship is historically common in US politics with respect to the use of force, and as discussed, the partisan gap is widening. Moreover, in Europe there is a significant ideological gap according to a May 2013 Pew survey, which shows 56% on the political right in Britain supported the use of the drone strikes compared to just 31% on the left. In France, 49% of those on the right approve of drone strikes compared to just 26% on the left.\(^\text{154}\) So, while partisanship is on the rise in the US, public support for targeted killing and drone strikes is unusually bipartisan. What gives?

My argument regarding this unexpected case of bipartisanship comes down to two main factors: First, Republicans are generally more in favor than their counterparts of


aggressive military actions to handle suspected terrorists and to mitigate potential attacks on American soil. After the outbreak of the war in Iraq, pollsters reported that, “No military conflict in modern times has divided Americans on partisan lines more than the war in Iraq, scholars and pollsters say — not even Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{155} A 2006 New York Times/CBS News poll showed three-quarters of the Republicans agreed with US military action against Iraq, while just 24 percent of the Democrats agreed. This is a drastic example of the type of partisan chasm we’re accustomed to seeing in US politics.

So, we can’t be surprised to see Republicans support drone strikes in greater numbers than Democrats, and we can’t be surprised to see Republicans support drone strikes even in the face of international opposition. Republican support for drone strikes, or most any forceful military action that’s targeted at suspected enemies of the US, is almost always expected.

Second, while Democrats are generally reluctant to support the use of force apart from distinct, rally-around-the-flag types of situations, the drone strike program was greatly expanded by President Obama, a popular Democratic president with a reputation – true or not – for taking a measured, pragmatic approach to foreign policy. Obama nonetheless embraced the US drone program, overseeing more strikes in his first year than President Bush carried out during his presidency. A total of 563 air strikes, largely by drones, targeted Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen during Obama’s two terms, compared to 57 strikes under Bush.\textsuperscript{156} “Obama’s embrace and vast expansion of drone strikes against

militants and terrorists will be an enduring foreign policy legacy,” writes Micah Zenko, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and longtime drone researcher. “Whereas President George W. Bush authorized approximately 50 drone strikes that killed 296 terrorists and 195 civilians in Yemen, Pakistan and Somalia, Obama has authorized 506 strikes that have killed 3,040 terrorists and 391 civilians.”157 As previously mentioned, Bill Burton, Priorities USA Co-Founder and one of the most powerful liberal political consultants in the country, is one example of a known Democrat publically defending Obama’s use of drones. Moreover, Priorities USA is one of the most lucrative democratic Super PACs in the nation.

More important than the expansion of the drone program, the Obama administration quietly institutionalized and normalized the tactic. For years, there was absolutely no acknowledgment of drones. The President’s words in the spring of 2013 capped a period of turmoil regarding the drone program, and strike policies were finally forced onto center stage as an important, controversial issue. Yet after acknowledging the key issues, Obama and his senior aides provided scripted language that served as the policy framework and legal basis for lethal counterterrorism operations, including drone strikes against US citizens. Meanwhile, Obama’s aforementioned speech in May 2013 referred to new drone strike guidelines and reforms, but there’s no evidence that changes were ever implemented. What’s more, those reforms would not apply to CIA-led covert drone strikes in Pakistan, where the majority of all non-battlefield targeted killings have occurred.

So, a combination of factors contributed to the lack of partisanship regarding drone strikes: the program’s expansion by a popular Democratic president, which reaped unexpectedly high levels of support among Democrats. That, combined with Republicans’ tendency to support the use of force in general, resulted in broad, cross-party support in an ear of extreme partisanship on most issues, especially those about foreign policy and the use of force. This is a particularly interesting aspect of public opinion regarding drone strikes, as it defies much of what we expect with respect to partisanship, foreign policy and the use of force.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE
AND ELITE RHETORIC MEDIA COVERAGE OF DRONES

In this section I present findings from the content analysis of 6 major media outlets’ coverage related to US-led drone strikes. I want to reiterate some of the key methodological approaches, which were detailed in the methodology chapter. All news stories are coded at the message-level. In light of journalists’ aim to achieve balance in their reports, reporters often present dueling messages in order to remain as unbiased way possible. This approach is standard protocol and part of training in the field, something I can attest to after my own experience in a graduate-level journalism program. Objectivity is an admirable goal, but complete objectivity and balance are, quite simply, not realistically attainable. Most broadcast segments are brief, particularly as compared to print journalism, and frame the news in dominant way. Only at times do they offer a genuinely balanced view of an issue. In light of these realities, I code each TV broadcast segment at the primary-message level (the dominant message). When there is a genuinely balanced view presented during a broadcast, I code the segment accordingly.

In order to determine textual meaning, I analyzed content looking for different frames and to grasp whether each is salient and influential. In an ideal world, every message or frame would carry equal weight in terms of its impact on the audience, but that’s not reality. “Often, coders simply tote up all messages they judge as positive and negative and draw conclusions about the dominant meanings,” Entman writes. “They neglect to measure the salience of elements in the text, and fail to gauge the relationships of the most salient
clusters of messages – the frames – to the audience’s schemata. Unguided by a framing paradigm, content analysis may often yield data that misrepresent the media messages that most audience members are actually picking up.”

In this chapter I assess the data both ways: by looking at occurrences of positive versus negative messages, and second, by categorizing messages in order to gain a more nuanced view of the most prominent frames.

The content analysis of media coverage involved the review of 278 summaries obtained from the Vanderbilt TV broadcast archives. Some of these summaries did not provide any meaningful details. Thus, some of the numbers in this Chapter and analysis vary ever so slightly based on the actual availability of information available to me and whether a particular broadcast summary contained a sufficient amount of detail to adequately analyze the segment. As you can see in the following Table 5.1, only 13 stories were eliminated from the final analysis of the primary frame-main message – the main dependent variable – due to missing data.

Table 5.1. Quantity of TV News Segments about Drones, Irrespective of Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Primary Frame/Main Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Elaborated by the author.

The following Table 5.2 is a count of the news stories analyzed in this chapter, by network.

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Table 5.2. Quantity of TV News Coverage about Drones, by Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>278</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Elaborated by the author.

I examine the data in at least four ways: First, I look at the frequency of stories that mentioned the term “drone” in order to assess the salience and potential agenda setting effects. Did the media cover UAVs and drone strikes, and if so, how often? Second, I decipher which types of messages are most prominent in TV news stories about drones. How are drones and drone strikes framed? Are they looked at as a tool that enhances US national security, or as a weapon that raises profound legal and ethical questions? Third, I examine the types of sources that inform each TV news story. Are news stories about drones primarily informed by elite political actors such as the President, members of congress, the CIA, military, and other likely drone advocates? Alternatively, are these stories informed by foreign leaders, human rights organizations, international legal analysts, or other likely opponents? Or is there a multiplicity of sources – that is, are the sources that inform media coverage well-balanced, which would provide the public with a more nuanced view? Fourth, I compare the findings from steps two and three in order to determine if there’s a relationship between types of sources and types of messages.
5.1. Frequency, Salience and Agenda-Setting

The first aspect of drone-related media coverage under examination here is a measure of its frequency and salience. Remember the discussion in Chapter 2 about agenda-setting effects, a reference to the causal mechanism regarding the impact news coverage has on the public opinion. More specifically, the rate at which we see news coverage about a particular issue should impact people’s awareness of that issue. The issue should become more salient. This is especially true concerning foreign policies and the use of force, which do not directly impact the average American in the same way as, say, tax and healthcare policy.\(^{159}\) So, I examine the frequency of *NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN and FOX* evening news stories about drones that appeared from 1/1/2000 to 1/1/2014 and use the findings to assess the salience of drone strikes (Graph 5.1).

Graph 5.1. Frequency of Drone-Related TV News Stories, by Year (2000-2014)

Source: Elaborated by the author.

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\(^{159}\) Entman, “Declarations of Independence,” 11-26. In Part I of the same volume, the authors explain that the absence of a foreign policy consensus in most NATO countries, particularly among elites, was apparent before and after the US strikes on Serbia amidst the Kosovo crisis.
As you can see in the following Graph, the amount of drone-related TV news coverage increased significantly over time throughout the research period, with the largest peak occurring after 2010. There were less than 5 stories in 2000 and 2001 combined, and in 2005 and 2006 there were 23 stories. These numbers stayed fairly consistent until 2010 and 2011, by which time the drone issue had clearly penetrated the public realm.

Indeed, you can see there were 42 drone-related stories in 2010 and 52 in 2011, and in 2013 there were 55 relevant stories. Dips occurred at predictable times, most notably as the election seasons in 2004 and 2008. Even in 2012, by which time drones had become a central part of US foreign policy, there were 31 stories as compared to 52 the year prior and 55 the year after. Presidential election season dips are to be expected, as campaigns are often dominated by bottom line issues such as the state of the economy and non-policy issues such a likeability. When foreign policy does enter campaign rhetoric, it rarely touches on fine points such as preferred weaponry and tactical decisions. Drones almost disappeared from news coverage during election seasons of 2004, 2008. The dip in 2012 is most revealing because we know that by 2010 drone strikes had become relatively familiar to most Americans through news reports and events that took place from 2010 to 2014.

The surprisingly low amount of news reports about drones from 2000 to 2010 can be interpreted a few ways. It must first be noted that there’s always a time-lag between the existence of an issue, the occurrence of media reports about it, and its resonance with the public. That said, the initial US-led drone strikes occurred in the early 2000s, so it’s surprising and telling that TV news stories about drones did not become more frequent until nearly ten years later. Mainstream news networks almost never addressed the growing
drone program during the nine years that followed the attacks on September 11 despite the fact that it was under development under the Bush administration and aggressively ramped up under the Obama administration.

Given the abundance of evidence and agreement about agenda-setting effects, we must take note of the decade-long near absence of mainstream news stories related to drones. Ten years passed while the public was uninformed about the growing US drone program. Likewise, survey researchers did not ask about drones. Why ask people about something that neither the media nor political elites are discussing? Drone strikes are geographically distant from the US and Americans will never experience one or know somebody who does. So, drones were not salient; most people were unaware of the issue, and even if someone were aware, it’s unlikely they would deem it to be a very important one.

5.2. Messaging and Framing

The most significant finding from the content analysis of media content is that drones are primarily mentioned in relation to a US national security success, thus fitting into the most “positive” of all message-level categories. As a reminder, Entman defines framing as, “[Selecting] some aspects of a perceived reality and [making] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendation.”160 Stories categorized as “national security” signal that the weapon is strictly associated with an actual national

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security success and/or treated as a counterterrorism tool used to conduct operations essential to the protection of our national security.

This research shows that drones are usually mentioned in relation to successful strikes against members of “terrorist” or “militant” organizations with no comment or debate about “negative” issues such as human rights, civilian deaths or legality. Based on the message-level categories described in the previous section, there were are “national security” segments out of a sample of 265 in which the term drone was mentioned (37%). The full results for the message-level analysis are shown in the Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3. Message Level Categories, 2000-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natl. Security</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legality</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blowback</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Drone</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>69.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing Messages</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>88.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing System</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Elaborated by the author.
The following Graph 5.2 is the same data but with the categories “other” and “ambiguous” filtered from the resulted. This gives a better comparison on how often each message-level category appeared. We see that “national security” is the main message of news stories in which drones were mentioned throughout the research period (44%). That is to say, nearly half of the sample consists of news stories that link drone strikes with a national security success and offer zero critical analysis. Human rights and legality frames do appear, but far less than positive messages about drones.

Graph 5.2. Quantity of Message-Level Categories in Mainstream Media Reports, 2000-2015

The chart above provides us with a clear comparison between the different types of frames and specifically how often they appeared in media coverage throughout the research period. Most importantly, “positive” messages about drones, including stories framed as national security and technology, comprise half of the sample (50% combined). On the other hand, “negative” messages about drones – including legality, human rights, and
blowback – comprise just 18% of the sample. It also appears that journalists fall short of achieving balanced reports when it comes to drone strikes. This can be seen in the sliver of the pie labeled as competing issues (4%), representing the fact there a mere nine stories from the sample are well-balanced news reports that offer multiple perspectives and voices.

I accounted for stories about the domestic use of drones in order to compare the salience of UAVs on the international versus domestic-level. The results support the notion that people care more about what happens in their backyard than how weapons are used overseas. News stories that exclusively focused on domestic issues related to drones – such as the need for FAA regulations, the danger of UAVs near airports, illegal domestic surveillance, and so on – comprise 14% of the sample. We’re primarily concerned with how the media depicted drones as a tool of the military and CIA, but it’s important to recognize that American citizens are concerned about how drones are used at home, but not so much about how they are used abroad.

When did these different frames appear? Let’s take a look. The following scatter plot shows when different frames appeared from 2010-2015 and there are at least two key findings (Graph 5.3). First, we see national security frames scattered throughout the period, confirming the media’s tendency to solely present drones in the context of a major national security success.
Now, let’s look at the polarity of drone-related messages. How often are messages “positive” and how often are messages “negative,” and when they do they occur? Positive stories are those that frame drones as national security tools and technological achievements, as where negative stories are those that frame drone strikes as human rights and legal issues.

The occurrence of “positive” messages is fairly steady throughout the research period, as where we see some variance in terms of negative messages. The occurrence of negative stories begins to rise in 2010 and peaks in 2013, and remember that opposition toward drone strikes increased to its highest levels in 2013 and 2014 – 38% of the US public opposed drone strikes, according to a CBS/NYT poll conducted in June 2014, by far the highest level of opposition throughout the research period. Is this a coincidence? Well, while the analysis does not prove causation, it does show a correlation between the
occurrence of “negative” messages and a subsequent increase in opposition toward drone strikes.

In order to view the data and polarity as clearly as possible, the following categories were filtered from the results shown in the scatter plot: other; ambiguous; domestic; and competing issues. Excluding those categories gives us a more pure view of the polarity of media messages about drone strikes, as well as when they occur (Graph 5.4).

Graph 5.4. Polarity of Primary Messages in Mainstream Media Reports, 2000-2015

Source: Elaborated by the author.

What’s important to see here is that negative messages about drones increased dramatically during the period from 2011 through 2013. Division among elites, largely triggered by events such as the killing of US citizens and the Brennan CIA nomination, pushed the drone issue onto center stage. Members of congress began to speak out on the drone issue, publically disagreeing and ultimately forcing the issue to become more salient among media organizations. Ultimately, the President had to acknowledge the mounting
calls for more stringent, transparent polices, and in May 2013, Obama issued his milestone
speech about the drone program at the National Defense University. Meanwhile, media
organizations acted upon these elite cues and reported the issues more seriously and
consistently. As this increasingly nuanced information reached the public, we saw a
consistent increase in opposition toward drone strikes, going from 8% in 2011 to 16% in
mid-2013 to 38% by mid-2014.

5.3. Sourcing

The content analysis also provides insight into the types of elite sources that “mediate” the
messages and influence the aforementioned media frames. One way I approached this, as
explained in the previous chapter, was to categorize source and make predictions based on
attributes. So, the sample of media content was also coded at the source-level and predicted
were made about the relationships between source characteristics and message attributes.\textsuperscript{161}

For instance, the more we see the President inform a news segment, it’s likely that he will
be promoting drones as an effective tool of national security. On the other hand, a human
rights activist would likely focus on civilian deaths and international law. The hypothesis
is that the more frequently we see “official sources” such as the President or other state
representatives, the more likely we are to see positive messages. On that note, I coded all
media content at the source-level in order to categorize the types of sources/speakers that
informed each news report. For example, I looked for whether the mediators of the
messages are members of the executive/congressional branch, military, CIA, or if not,
whether they are so-called “security analysts,” typically former members of these
organizations.

\textsuperscript{161} Kimberly Neuendorf, \textit{The Content Analysis Guidebook} (Sage, 2002), 99 - 102
The Graph 5.5 below shows the outcome of the source-level analysis. The blue bars represent the true value, and the percentage of the sample (N=268) is indicated in red.

Graph 5.5. Prominence of Sources in Mainstream Media Reports, 2000-2015

Before discussing the results, let’s look to the following Table 5.4, which shows the relationship between types of sources types of frames. There are some expected and some surprising results. Most importantly, notice the significant relationship between the occurrence of national security messages and the following sources: the Department of Defense (52.9%); terrorism analysts, who are primarily former members of the CIA/FBI/Military (50%); the US president (47%); and other executive branch members (44%).
Table 5.4. Relationship between Types of Messages and Types of Sources, 2000-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Blowback</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Drone</th>
<th>Rights</th>
<th>Human</th>
<th>Legality</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Technology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchor-Reporter</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism Analyst</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Tank</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Elaborated by the author.

*Note:* Values as Percentage of Row Total. GREEN=Expected; YELLOW=Unexpected

One finding in particular was originally unexpected, but after the analyzing media transcripts, makes more sense. “Anchor-Reporter” refers to news stories in which there are no speakers other than the network’s anchor and/or reporter. As shown in the previous chart, a large portion of news stories about drone strikes do not feature speakers other than the network’s anchor and reporter (22.39% of the sample). In general, these are TV news reports of US drone strikes that killed high-ranking terrorists. Details are given about the event, the importance of the killing is explained, and often, maps and video clips are shown. In these segments there are no negative messages.
Anchor-reporter stories are the single largest category in the source-level analysis; that is, most TV news segments about drones do not feature outside speakers. Given the relative large quantity of “source-less” segments, the message that is delivered is important. In this case, we see that the single largest category accounts for 36.9% of the segments that singularly frame drones as effective tools that enhance US national security.

One of the more surprising results is the positive relationship between news stories informed by members of the Congress and the occurrence of legality frames (73%). However, what became clear throughout the upcoming analysis of elite rhetoric is that while the Senate and House rarely speak out on the issues surrounding drone strikes, they were highly active during the tumultuous, event-filled period from 2011-2014. During that time, we saw open division within the Democratic and Republican parties about drone strike policies, including calls for oversight and transparency, and strict rules regarding the nationality and geographic location of drone strike targets. This is what explains the relationship between congress and the topic of legality. This finding, most unexpected at the outset of the analysis, makes sense in light of what we know about media trends and what we will discover in the upcoming section about elite rhetoric.

5.4. Elite Rhetoric: The US President and Members of Congress

Presidential Rhetoric
The data obtained on presidential rhetoric regarding drone strikes is quite shocking: in nearly two decades, US Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama barely ever uttered the word “drone” and or discussed the burgeoning drone program. These two presidents used the term “drone” 36 total times in 22 speeches over a period of more than a decade
and half, amid America’s growing reliance on the technology and tactic. Furthermore, 12 of these mentions occurred during President Obama’s major speech at the National Defense University, by which time he had been all but forced by congress and the public to discuss drones and drone strike policies.

This has a profound impact on public awareness and perception. Why would people place importance upon a foreign policy issue that’s not discussed publicly by the most authoritative speaker in the country? How can an issue become salient under those conditions? How can the public develop a nuanced understanding of an issue? The answer is that it cannot.

The Obama administration claimed on multiple occasions that it would make drone strike policy and protocol more transparent, most notably during the February 2013 state of the union address, when the President stated that drone strikes would become, “even more transparent to the American people and to the world.” Attorney General Eric Holder doubled down on that promise when, in March of the same year, he said during a Senate hearing that the president would publicly address the issue “in a relatively short period of time.”

Ultimately, it took three years for the administration to provide even an ounce of transparency – an occasion that fell outside of the research period. President Obama finally commented in early-July 2016, just after the release of a White House report that included data such as drone war death toll estimates, saying that at the time the US had killed between 64 and 116 civilians throughout his tenure. He noted that that the government doesn’t always know how many civilians it kills and that it revises the death toll over
time.\textsuperscript{162} He stated that from 2009 through 2015 the administration launched 473 airstrikes, mostly with drones, and killed between 2,372 and 2,581 terrorist combatants.\textsuperscript{163} It’s worth mentioning that these comments were released on the Friday preceding the Fourth of July holiday weekend, presumably a savvy PR tactic intended to bury, as much as possible, the president’s remarks as well as the unflattering White House report about the drone program.

A more detailed breakdown shows that US presidents rarely mention drone technology, and that when they do, it’s usually to defend strikes depict the tactic as tool with respect to US national security. The following Graph 5.6 shows the nature of each presidential message about drones. The data are categorized in the same way as the media content in the previous chapter. As you can see, in five instances the President delivered a positive message about drones (national security) and on six occasions the message was either vague or completely unrelated to the drone program (other).

\textsuperscript{162} Scott Shane, “Drone Strike Statistics Answer Few Questions, and Raise Many,” \textit{New York Times}, July 3, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/world/middleeast/drone-strike-statistics-answer-few-questions-and-raise-many.html?_r=0. The quandary of collecting data regarding drone strike deaths has been documented by governmental agencies, journalists, humanitarian workers and academics. It’s extraordinarily difficult for ground troops to access the targeted regions, which are remote and dangerous areas such as North Waziristan, and many of these bodies are no longer identifiable following the impact of the strike.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
There are four instances in which the president mentioned drones in such a way that it could be classified as competing issues (competing). This occurs mainly when public and congressional pressure is applied to an issue, forcing the president to publicly address it.

In terms of national security, for example, President Bush first commented on drones during a July 2003 speech in Dayton, Ohio, when he said that, “Research done at this base has helped give America the finest Air Force in history. The predator drone, which is serving us so well overseas, was developed here.” Bush didn’t mention drones again until 2005, when from Tucson he remarked that, “When [US-Mexico border] agents can take advantage of cutting edge equipment like overhead surveillance drones and infrared cameras that can do a better job for all of us. In Tucson, agents on the ground are directing unmanned aerial technology in the sky, and they’re acting rapidly on illegal immigration

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or illegal activity they may see from the drones.” This exemplifies the nature of most presidential commentary on the drone program: rare, brief, and generally positive. Details of all 22 presidential references to drones from 200-2014 – including the date, occasion, verbatim comments, and number of references to the actual word “drone” – can be found in the Annex.

The category “national security” is particularly interesting because it essentially shows when the speaker frames drones in a positive way while ignoring all of the potentially negative aspects. Of course, US Presidents overseeing drone programs should be expected to discuss UAVs as effective weapons and to highlight their advantages, particularly in terms of protecting the state and the American people. On five occasions, the US President clearly discussed drones in terms that fit into this category.

As we know, the first time this happened was in 2003 when Bush made a statement that predator drones were protecting America and serving us so well overseas. The final such instance (during the research period) occurred ten years later, when President Obama was addressing a UN assembly in September 2013. “For the US, these new circumstances have also meant shifting away from a perpetual war footing,” he said. “Beyond bringing our troops home, we have limited the use of drones so they target only those who pose a continuing, imminent threat to the United States where capture is not feasible and there is a near certainty of no civilian casualties.” This came just less than four months after his major speech at the National Defense University, when public and congressional pressure had mounted to the point where he was forced to address the controversial issues surrounding drone strikes. Incredibly, within a short few months, the president was back to using phrases such as “near certainty of no civilian casualties.” By the time he said these
words, the debate had been ongoing for a few years, and the relative damage – a rise in opposition – had been done. While the US public continued to support drone strikes, the complexity of the issue had become more salient, contributing to the increase in opposition and relative decline in support.

The category referred to as “foreign drone” refers to instances in which the President acknowledged the development and/or use of UAVs by foreign states. This occurred on just one occasion, and it was only due to a question that a reporter posed to President Obama. While answering a reporter’s question about a drone that had been downed and seized by Iranian forces, Obama said in a 2011 news conference, alongside Iraq’s Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, that, “With respect to the drone inside of Iran, I'm not going to comment on intelligence matters that are classified. As has already been indicated, we have asked for [our drone] back. We'll see how the Iranians respond.”

Obama’s reply to the reporter’s questions about the downed US drone was bland and curt, and is illustrative of presidential rhetoric about drones in general, and especially when pressed by reporters. The president did acknowledge that Iran possessed a US drone, so the record was coded as “foreign drone.” Analysts have expressed concern about the growing drone marketplace and the acquisition of drone fleets by countries around the world. However, the evidence shows that the US president all but refuses to acknowledge this reality, even when pressed by the media.

“Vague” refers to instances in which the President says the following: ‘I'm not going to discuss specific operations that have taken place,’ as well as ‘In my speech in May, I was very specific about how we make these determinations about potential lethal

strikes, so I would refer you to that speech.’ This is often the president’s approach to answering reporters’ questions about the program or a particular drone strike. Indeed, in 2013 ABC’s Jonathan Karl asked President Obama when more transparency regarding drone strike operations in Yemen would come.\textsuperscript{166} The president responded by describing Al Qaeda’s growth in Yemen and the terrorist network’s potential impact, but then said, “I'm not going to discuss specific operations that have taken place. Again, in my speech in May, I was very specific about how we make these determinations about potential lethal strikes, so I would refer you to that speech.” Karl pressed, “So you won't even confirm that we carried out drone strikes in Yemen?” President Obama was clear. “I will not have a discussion about operational issues.” This type of back and forth is typical with respect to the media, the president, and drone strikes, and these types of presidential statements are completely uninformative, solely intended to shut down a line of questioning.

When the President discussed both the positive and negative aspects of drone strikes, the record is coded as “competing messages.” It came as a surprise that the president, presumably a ceaseless advocate of drone strikes, was so frequently associated with competing messages. Obama’s speech at the National Defense University is the prime example of competing messages. In it, he acknowledges the controversies surrounding drone strikes and says they, “must be used wisely and monitored closely.” He also lauds drone strikes and says they are an essential, effective feature of American military engagement abroad.

When reporters inquired about and pressed the drone issue, the responses were brief and void of any significant content. The presidents rarely mentioned the term “drones” and outright dismissed the issue or dodged the question in a period of more than one decade. The impact this has on the public conscience – or the marketplace of ideas, thinking back to earlier in this text – cannot be overstated. Presidential rhetoric is among the most influential factors in determining the level of public awareness and concern regarding any issue. This is true in general, and most true regarding foreign policy issue. When the President speaks openly about an issue, the media take the cue and reports it. As you can see, this has practically never occurred with respect to drone strikes. The results are slightly more

While the President is more closely associated with competing messages than I expected, the potential impact of these types of speeches is negated by the fact that presidential rhetoric about drone strikes and the broader program is borderline nonexistent. Presidents Bush and Obama exclusively mentioned the term “drone” when conditions among the public or in Congress demanded an executive response. These conditions arose just once throughout the research period (2013) largely due to the lack of division and debate about drone strikes in Congress – the topic of the following section.

Congressional Rhetoric

As a reminder, I first searched the US Government Publishing Office [FDsys] using the keyword “drone” and the aforementioned dates. I then filtered the results down to the Congressional Record [the Record], which produced 452 records. The Record is a verbatim account of remarks made during the proceedings of the House and Senate and has been published by the Government Printing Office [GPO] since 1873, so it’s the ideal archive
for analyzing pure congressional rhetoric. Each record I retrieved contains at least one mention of the word “drone.”

Upon reviewing a subset of the sample, however, I quickly realized that the vast majority of the records were at-best peripherally related to drone strikes. The term “drone,” for example, comes up during border and immigration debates, and as you will see, it’s an increasingly popular topic with respect to privacy and safety in the domestic arena. So, I re-sorted the records by relevance in order to code the 100 most relevant records. The sample that includes revealing content such as speeches made around the time of John Brennan’s nomination hearings as head of the CIA. Other records relate to the use of force in Libya or Chuck Grassley’s outright demands for more transparency regarding the drone program.

I coded all records using a scheme similar to the one designed for the media content analysis, although I modified it where appropriate in order to adapt it to an analysis of congressional floor debate as opposed to television news. More specifically, I coded at the message-level whenever a congressional member spoke about drones, and recorded the dates for each instance. I also recorded the party of each speaker and whether it occurred in the House or Senate. The main goal is of this endeavor is to better understand what political elites have said about drone strikes and if it reflects what we have seen in the media. The Table 5.5 below provides a bird’s-eye view of the data I collected, excluding records that featured a non-elected speaker. More analysis follows:
Table 5.5. Mentions of “Drones” during Congressional Floor Debates, 2000-2015

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Source: Elaborated by the author.

The following panel grid depicts the findings of the review of congressional rhetoric. Each panel represents a particular message-level category (Graph 5.7). The Y-axis signifies the intensity of the debate, while the X-axis signifies the year. The message level categories are similar to the categories for the media analysis but with slight modifications that were implemented following an initial review of the congressional

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The following panel grid depicts the findings of the review of congressional rhetoric. Each panel represents a particular message-level category (Graph 5.7). The Y-axis signifies the intensity of the debate, while the X-axis signifies the year. The message level categories are similar to the categories for the media analysis but with slight modifications that were implemented following an initial review of the congressional
Congressional rhetoric is inherently different than media coverage, and upon first analyzing the congressional record, it became clear there was a need for “oversight,” “transparency” and “morality” categories. Each data point within the panels represents an instance in which a member of congress spoke about drones, with red ribbons signifying Republican and blue dots indicating Democrat.

Graph 5.7. Intensity of Congressional Mentions of Drones, by Party ID and Message-Type (2000-2015)

The main concern among Congress when it comes to UAVs are domestic issues such as privacy and safety, which accounts for more than a quarter of the sample. Ted Poe, a Republican representative from 2\textsuperscript{nd} district of Texas, exemplifies the relative push in the House for FAA and other federal regulations, as well as the deployment of drones for border patrol purposes. He began to express concerns in 2013 about the domestic dangers that drones pose to the public, usually focusing on border patrol. Other times he discussed
the ways drones could threaten the privacy of US citizens. Poe referenced the role that drones play in national security matters on just one occasion.

I highlight Poe and his concentration on domestic issues because it’s clear from the analysis that members of Congress are more concerned about what drones could do in their own backyards than they are about what’s occurring abroad. There is a good balance between Democrats and Republicans in the domestic panel, suggesting that the two parties share these concerns. As mentioned throughout this paper, citizens and elites are generally more worried about the issues they directly confront than about distant, foreign policy issues. So, it’s no major surprise that Congress is discussing these aspects of drones. It nonetheless illustrates that the drone issue is far more salient with respect to domestic use than their role in foreign policy and targeted killing abroad.

That said, we do see some rhetorical activity in the “legality” panel. As expected, the majority of congressional concern about the legality of drone strikes comes from the Democratic side of the aisle. However, the difference between parties is not as vast as it is regarding most issues, and the most intense level of rhetoric about the legality of drone strike comes from the Republican side. This intensity is the result of the well-documented series of events (Brennan’s nomination as head of the CIA, Rep. Paul’s filibuster, etc.) that brought Republicans into a more heated, interparty debate about drone strike policies. Specifically, there was great division with respect to the citizenship and location of drone strike targets, with some falling into the “national security” panel and others into the “legality” panel. As where you had Rand Paul on one side of the debate, you had other prominent senators such as John McCain (R-AZ) arguing that drone strikes are an essential part of US policy. This is depicted in the two panels: you see a smattering of Republicans
discussing the legality of drones during the period from 2011-2014, and a similar pattern in the “national security panel.”

Dennis Kucinich, a House Democrat from Ohio until 2013, is responsible for most of the occasions when drone strikes were discussed in legal and moral terms, as well as human rights and blowback. Kucinich never held his punches, repeatedly pointing out the negative aspects of drone strikes. “Bombing raids and drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan have inflamed the civilian populations in these countries. Innocent civilians are killed in these massive and unpredictable attacks,” he said in one exemplary instance.

This includes innocent children, mothers, fathers, grandparents, sisters and brothers. Communities, homes and infrastructure are destroyed. The number of refugees and the internally displaced continue to rise from the destruction. The brutalities of war produce more than news reports of so-called ‘collateral damage.’ Taliban and insurgent recruitment profits from these failed policies. The drone attacks are propagating extremism in the targeted areas. Former Chief of Staff to Colin Powell maintains that drone attacks are not an effective counterinsurgency technique. If the Administration will not stop the drone attacks, Congress must use the power of the purse to ensure their cessation.167

Kucinich, among all other members of Congress, stands out for his repeated warnings about the morality, legality, and the long-term efficacy of drones, including blowback.

What’s clear is that Kucinich’s concerns never gained traction in Congress or elsewhere. Apart from Rand Paul and company, Kucinich was a one-man show fighting a lost cause. He had no allies in either chamber. Indeed, he frequently went down this

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rhetorical road – 12 instances in the sample that I analyzed – and on only two occasions was he joined by colleagues from either side of the aisle. His words, which almost perfectly represent the abundance of concerns expressed by drone critics, were typically met with utter silence.

The lack of division, either within or across parties stifled Kucinich’s efforts to embark on a broader debate about drone strike policies. As explained in the second chapter, the level of elite agreement/disagreement regarding a particular issue is a key determinant of the frequency and openness of public debate. News content is affected by the elite rhetoric and the level of agreement/disagreement for at least two reasons. First, journalists depend on conflict and public debate among elites in order to produce polarizing stories and flashy headlines that attract an audience. Second, the news media depends on elite or “official” sources for most of its information regarding issues abroad, and especially the use of force. The media relies on these official sources for information and in order to formulate stories, and when elites are unified and public conflict/debate is scant, news content gets “indexed” to the median elite opinion.

Sometimes news content disappears altogether in these scenarios. When elites are in conflict, they become more accessible to reporters and offer up opposition viewpoints and more sensational rhetoric. This creates incentives for journalists to report the story and impacts the manner in which they do so. On the other hand, journalists have little to no incentive to report foreign policy stories if elites are in agreement or do not care enough to discuss an issue publically. This is precisely the process we are seeing in terms of the lack of division in congress, where a figure such as Kucinich can speak early and often about the dangers that drone strikes pose, only to be ignored by his colleagues and the media.
Ultimately, what you see in the above panel grid is that congressional rhetoric closely resembles what we see in terms of media content. That is, the vast majority of the ‘most relevant’ congressional rhetoric about drones occurred from 2010 and beyond. The same can be said about meaningful media reports. The drone issue was simply not a salient one until 2010/2011. Then, the intensity of elite rhetoric about the more controversial issues surrounding drones, especially within the Republican Party, increased dramatically from 2012 to 2013 after Brennan was nominated to become head of the CIA. We see the same in terms of media coverage; reporters responded to the increased elite division and open debate by putting a spotlight on Brennan and the controversial nature of the drone program.

Now we can see all of these forces working together, as detailed in the second chapter. Division among elites, in this case Congress, led to the drone issue becoming more salient among media organizations. At the same time, the President was forced to acknowledge the mounting congressional pressure and calls for more stringent, transparent polices. In May 2013, as we know, the President was forced the chime in on the issue of drones, issuing a major speech about the issue. And all this time, media organizations were taking these cues and reporting the issues surrounding drones in a more in-depth manner and on a more consistent basis. The more nuanced information gradually reached the public, and the outcome is that opposition toward drone strikes increased on a consistent basis, going from 8% in 2011 to 16% in mid-2013 to 38% by mid-2014.
CHAPTER 6

THE EXCEPTIONS: ISRAEL, INDIA AND KENYA

Here, I examine the case of each non-US country that supports drone strikes or even comes close to supporting drone strikes. What you will see is that each of these states has a distinct and logical reason for supporting any tactic that’s effective. Controversy over the tactic is not important to these nations given the major security threats they face at all times, combined with the fact they often lack the sufficient amount of power to combat these threats. As you will see, none of these cases mirror the US, a country that more closely resembles its allies in Western Europe – all of which oppose drone strikes.

6.1. Israel

Israel is consistently at or near the top of the list of countries in which the public broadly supports US-led drone strikes. Indeed, some polls show that just 27% of the Israeli public opposes US them. In the case of Israel, geography, politics, religion, land rights, border disputes, extreme distrust and a slew of other factors such as the frequency of terror attacks and the likelihood of experiencing more in the future, all contribute to the Israeli’s overwhelming public support for US-led drone strikes. The conditions and context of Israel can fairly be described as the ‘perfect storm’ to nurture the development of broad support for drone strikes.

My hypothesis, as stated at the outset of this paper, is that American public support for drone strikes is determined primarily by the nature and frequency of media coverage and elite rhetoric about them. I reiterate here that the main characteristic underlying this hypothesis is that the US, comparatively speaking, has not been hit hard by terrorism. So,
Americans’ knowledge of terrorism is primarily rooted in what they see on TV (or the internet, radio, etc.) or what they hear from somebody in their social network. In Israel, the conditions and context are extremely different. In terms of personal experience and social networks, very few Americans have experienced terrorist attacks or know people who have experienced terrorist attacks. The degree of separation is gargantuan between the average American and one that has experienced an act of terrorism. Indeed, most Americans have never experienced, and do not even know somebody who has experienced an attack. On the other hand, in Israel, where attack occurs far more often than in the US, public support for drone strikes is easier to understand.

Society in Israel is largely structured in a way that is intended to provide security, with checkpoints throughout the country, interrupting routine daily errands such shopping for groceries. Armed military personnel and police can be seen just about everywhere. Meanwhile, certain states and numerous non-state actors have publicly vowed to destroy Israel, including the likes of Iran and Hezbollah, both of which operate in close quarters with the Jewish state. The result of conditions such as these is an Israeli public that consistently expresses its expectation that there will be more terrorism in the future, as shown in the following table 6.1.
Table 6.1. Israeli Public Opinion Regarding the Problem of Terrorism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>Very big problem</th>
<th>Moderately big problem</th>
<th>Small problem</th>
<th>Not a problem at all</th>
<th>DK/Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2007</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Elaborated by the author based on data from Pew Research Center, Pew Global Attitudes & Trends Question Database.

Terror attacks have occurred in Israel almost every year since 1948, and in some years have come in the dozens. From 1948-2017, terrorist attacks in Israel resulted in 3,671 deaths and 14,704 injuries/222 children were killed and another 240 were wounded. More specific to the research period, approximately 854 fatal terrorist attacks occurred on Israeli soil from 2000 through 2016. From 2001-2006, the level of terrorism in Israel was the worst to date, with 118 attacks occurring in 2001 and 135 in 2002. The frequency of terrorist attacks in Israel decreased, but nevertheless continued on an annual basis, before peaking again in 2014 (62 attacks), 2015 (108 attacks) and 2016 (122 attacks).168

The following two Tables (6.2 and 6.3) show the number of terrorist attacks on Israeli and US soil, and the amount of casualties and injuries, on an annual basis from 2000 through 2016. The Israeli figures account for all terrorist attacks that occurred in Israel and caused casualties. The US figures account for all terrorist attacks on US soil since 2000, including 9/11, the attack at Fort Hood, and the Boston Marathon bombing. Domestic-terrorism, such as the Beltway Snipers and far-right or far-left violent acts, such as the

168 Wm. Robert Johnston, “Summary of Terrorist Attacks in Israel,” Johnston’s Archive, last modified November 24, 2017, http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/terrorism/terrisraelsum.html. Note: Data are based on data from the Israeli foreign ministry and the list of 1,221 attacks at "Chronology of terrorist attacks in Israel."
bombing of an abortion clinic or an attack on an animal research center, were filtered out of the data. That said, even if these domestic acts were included, the change would not be significant. Looking at the data that these two countries have vastly different experiences with foreign terrorism.

Table 6.2. Terrorist Attacks with Casualties in Israel, 2000-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>ATTACKS</th>
<th>KILLED</th>
<th>INJURED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>1,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>2,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>1,002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>854</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,425</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,261</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3. Terrorist Attacks in US since 2000, Not Including Most Far-Right or Far-Left Domestic Terror Acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>ATTACKS</th>
<th>KILLED</th>
<th>INJURED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2998</td>
<td>8,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,124</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,389</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the face of such conditions and threats, Israel’s government recognizes the need to maintain aerial dominance and a military advantage over hostile state and non-state actors. In recent decades, especially since the 1970s, the effort has been focused on the development of UAVs, and Israel is now one of the world’s leading producers of drone technology. So, the main characteristics that differentiate the US and Israeli cases – most notably the aforementioned security factors, personal experience and peoples’ social networks, and Israel’s own manufacturing, sales and dependence on drone technology, lead to broad public support.

Israel also lacks a press that operates as freely as that in the US. No doubt that the folks in Washington and America’s political journalists frequently engage in order to
influence one another regarding whether a story should be published and the potential ramifications of doing so. That type of interaction between governmental actors and news journalists is fairly normal in democratic societies with a free or mostly free press. Still, in Israel, there are more formal mechanisms that the government can use to halt news coverage about issues they think might compromise national security, Israeli spies, foreign assets, and so on. An incident that perfectly illustrates this is a story the Tel Aviv newspaper Haaretz published on April 6, 2016. The article, headlined “Israeli army document confirms use of attack drones in terrorist assassinations,” contained information that was part of a non-classified, Israeli army report on its activities in 2014, including Israel’s used of armed drones during its bombardment of Gaza in the summer of that year.\footnote{Gili Cohen, “Israeli Army Document Confirms Use of Attack Drones in Terrorist Assassinations,” \textit{Haaretz}, April 6, 2016; Charlotte Silver, “Why Has Israel Censored Reporting on Drones?” \textit{The Electronic Intifada}, April 18, 2016, https://electronicintifada.net/blogs,charlotte-silver/why-has-israel-censored-reporting-drones.} The military report stated that on July 8, 2014, the Israeli army used a Zik – the Hebrew nickname for drone – to attack four Palestinian fighters (described as “terrorists”) on a beach in Israel. The document also stated that more than a week later the army used a drone to kill 13 Palestinian fighters trying to enter present-day Israel.

The article appeared on the Haaretz news website and in print, but was promptly removed following orders from the Israeli military censor. Meanwhile, the Israeli government does not acknowledge that it uses drones in combat or to conduct targeted assassinations. The use of drones went largely unnoticed until Haaretz published its article, and after it had been censored by the state, the military replaced the publication’s primary source – the original governmental report – with a similar one that had removed all references to drone strikes. The military censor also forbade other Israeli publications from
publishing anything mentioned in the original military report. While censorship is not commonly known to be rampant in Israel, it definitely occurred in this case and many others, including a New York Times story in 2014 about a kidnapped Israeli soldier.170

Israel’s political elites also refuse to comment on the drone program they operate. The Israeli army’s report on the so-called “central events” in its attack on Gaza during the summer of 2014 only lists nine moments – and number that’s only so low because the state doesn’t release information on its use of combat drones, which was the predominant tool issued in that particular conflict.

The upshot is not that a news story about drones protecting Israeli’s is surprising. On the contrary, much like the US press, when drone strikes are reported, they are framed as effective tools of national security or at least associated with events that protected Americans. The upshot, rather, is that the Israeli press I less free to report about its own countries’ drone program. The state has, in this sense, silenced the media. In the US, this is simply not the case. Yes, state actors and journalists converse and debate what’s in the best interest of the people to know, but there is no official method to silence an American publication from writing about the drone program.

In light of the censorship on media reporting about drone strikes, the complete absence of elite rhetoric about drones, and the fact that Israelite’s have a significantly more realistic fear of suffering foreign terrorist attacks (states such as Iran and non-state actors such as Hezbollah have vowed to destroy Israel), it’s not surprising that drones strikes are viewed positively by the Israeli public.

Moreover, it is not surprising that Israel would support the aggressive policies of its close ally, the US. Indeed, the following table 6.4 shows where Israelis stand regarding US efforts to combat terrorist threats.

Table 6.4. Israeli Public Support for the US-led Efforts to Fight Terrorism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>I favor the US-led efforts to fight terrorism</th>
<th>I oppose the US-led efforts to fight terrorism</th>
<th>DK/Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2007</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-03</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source*: Elaborated by the author based on data from Pew Research Center, Pew Global Attitudes & Trends Question Database.

The bottom line is that experience with terrorism, fear of future terrorism, geographic proximity to rival states, the lack of a truly free press with respect to its own drone program, and a close relationship with the US, are all key reasons that explain why the Israeli public supports American-led drone strikes.

6.2. India

As in the case of Israel, it’s not surprising that a majority of the Indian public supports US drone strikes. Indeed, just 36% of the public there opposes them. There are at least a few main reasons for India’s approval, the most notable being that the state is a US ally whose archrival and primary security threat is Pakistan, where most US drone strikes occur. Pakistan is a neighbor to India, meaning that geographic proximity is a major factor as to why citizens there would be legitimately concerned about potential terrorist attacks, such
as those on Mumbai in 2008. A second reason why the Indian public is more likely to support US drone strikes than many other countries is its own drone program, which is continuously being developed in order to mitigate the threat of terrorism and to control other looming regional issues, including China’s continued emergence and expansionist desires. The third reason why the Indian public is predisposed to supporting US-led drone strikes is because of its own country’s recognition that groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda pose a serious threat to regional and global stability.


The monumental assault on Mumbai was a game-changer in terms of public perception regarding the threat that terrorism poses in India. An already-vulnerable country was ruthlessly targeted while most of the world witnessed the immediate fallout live on their television sets. And these were far from the only attacks that year. Also in 2008:
• On May 13, Jaipur experienced serial bomb blasts at crowded market areas and at Hindu temples. At least 60 people were killed, and more than 150 injured.

• On June 29, Maoist insurgents attacked and killed 33 security forces in Malkangiri district in the eastern state of Orissa.

• On July 7, Indian interests were attacked in Afghanistan when terrorists drove a vehicle-borne IED into the outer perimeter of the Indian Embassy in Kabul on July 7. Two Indian diplomats died, and a number of Afghan citizens were wounded.

• On July 25, serial bombs were set off in Bangalore in both business and industrial areas. At least one individual died, while eight were injured.

• On July 26, in Gujarat’s capital, Ahmedabad, 21 devices exploded killing 54 and injuring at least 156. These explosions took place in market areas, on buses and other vehicles, and at the hospital to which the wounded from the first serial bomb blast were being treated.

• On September 13, terrorists detonated serial bombs in New Delhi in a variety of market places and other crowded public areas. These attacks killed at least 20 individuals and wounded more than 80.

• On October 30, insurgents detonated a series of nine bomb blasts throughout the north-eastern state of Assam, killing approximately 110 people.

Since the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, India has sought to enhance its counterterrorism capabilities, according to the 2016 US Department of State’s report on global terrorism. At the time of these assaults, “Department Interagency coordination and
information sharing remained a challenge, and local police forces continued to suffer from poor training and equipment. India has launched initiatives to address some of these challenges, including through a Multi-Agency Centre for enhancing intelligence gathering and sharing.” Despite these efforts, there has been little to no letup since 2008. The US Department of State reported that in the year 2012, “Although terrorist violence was lower than in previous years, India remained severely impacted by and vulnerable to terrorism, including from groups based in Pakistan. The Government of India, in response, increased its own counterterrorism capabilities and expanded its cooperation and coordination with the international community and regional partners.”173 Indeed, in 2016, India ranked third among countries that experienced the most terror attacks, including those by Maoist insurgents and Pakistan-based terrorists.174 Indian authorities continue to blame Pakistan for cross-border attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, and in January 2016, India experienced a terrorist attack on its military facility in Pathankot, Punjab, which was blamed by authorities on Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM).

The conversation here turns back to the role that personal experience and social networks. As in the case if Israel, India suffers an exceptionally high number of attacks that are coordinated by neighboring non-state actors and other sovereign states in the region. Folks in India have a legitimate of fear of being impacted by a terrorist attack. The US, as addressed in the previous subsection, suffers very few foreign attacks, and is based in a relatively non-threatening, nuclear-free region. So, it’s unsurprising that a highly-

threatened Indian public would lend support to a US-drone program that never carries out operations in on Indian soil, but that predominantly does so on Pakistani soil.

In response to these threats, India is rapidly enhancing its counterterrorism abilities, including its own drone program. The country’s reliance on a broad drone program to protect its citizens and borders is a second reason as to why the Indian people might be predisposed to support US-led drone strikes. This second factor goes hand-in-hand with the first one/that is, the Indian public supports the US-led drone program, which is predominantly aimed at the country which poses the biggest threat to Indian security. Meanwhile, India is developing its own broad drone program to accomplish precisely the same goal.

Indeed, the Indian military uses Israeli Searcher and Heron drones for command, control, communications, computers, information/intelligence, surveillance, targeting acquisition and reconnaissance [C4ISTAR] operations, and has obtained variants of the US Predator drone for similar purposes. In June 2017, the US cleared sale of Guardian drones to India – the unarmed Predator [MQ-9B Guardian] drones are high-altitude, long-endurance vehicles capable of flying more than 27 hours for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions. The expectation is that India will use the technology to better protect its territory from threats emanating from Pakistan, China and other parts of Asia.175

More importantly, India’s Defense Research and Development Organization [DRDO] accelerated the development of its own weaponized drone fleet after the 2008 attacks, beginning with the Rustom-I Medium Altitude Long Endurance UAV, and the

The military now possesses all of the elements required to operate an armed drone program, such as a high accuracy satellite-based augmentation systems (SBAS) and dedicated military communication satellites. Once lightweight drone-specific munitions that minimize collateral damage become available, India could target suspected terrorists in civilian communities, similar to what the US does along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

India’s impressive armed drone fleet is essentially for its own use and not meant for export. It’s a symmetric response to the development of UAVs by the Chinese and Pakistanis, and asymmetric response to some of the tactics commonly used by India’s rivals. All of these efforts – the development of UAVs at home and their acquisition from abroad, combined with the installation of advanced military satellites and control centers – have placed India in a position to operate one of the most robust drone programs in the world.

In addition to India’s legitimate security and the related development of its own drone program, it’s also important to point out that India is a strong US ally that’s been proactive in the fight against ISIS and Al Qaeda. This makes sense for a country that exists in very close proximity to where these organizations operate. In 2016, India continued to deepen counterterrorism cooperation and information sharing with the US and continued to monitor the domestic threat from these transnational terrorist groups. Meanwhile, Indian law enforcement agencies arrested at least 68 ISIS supporters in 2016, according to the 2016 US Country Reports on Terrorism. India has publicly recognized the threat ISIS poses to global security and has taken steps to degrade terrorist organizations in accordance

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176 Ibid.
with UNSCRs 2178 (2014) and 2199 (2015). While far from unique, this unified effort strengthens the US-India relationship in general, and the details show that the security interests of the two countries often go hand-in-hand – particularly as they pertain to Pakistan.

In sum, the conditions in India are ideal for building support for US drone strikes: they mainly impact India’s greatest threat and rival in Pakistan; India is a longtime US ally, particularly with respect to the fight against ISIS and Al Qaeda; and India is actively developing its own armed drone fleet to mitigate the same type of threats that US drone operations are intended to combat.

6.3. Kenya

The relatively high-level of Kenyan public support for US led drone strikes – just 38% of Kenyan respondents expressed disapproval – should first and foremost be attributed to the lack of state presence throughout the region and the Kenyan military’s inability to combat terrorist groups operating there. Indeed, the Kenyan government has long lacked counterterrorism legislation sufficient enough to conform to the UN and international community, and struggles to protect its borders or capture, detain, prosecute or kill

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suspected terrorists in the region. This leads us directly back to the idea of personal experience, social networks, and the likelihood that another attack looms. The second reason why the US drone program is supported by the Kenyan public is because of their effectiveness in combatting poachers, who are closely linked with regional terrorist organizations.

Despite implementing more impactful legislation and making many arrests throughout the research period, the US Department of State reported that in 2005, “Kenya registered little to no progress toward the overall strengthening of its capabilities to combat terrorism, prosecute terror suspects, or respond to emergencies.” So, despite the fact that Kenya is a member of the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism and a strong US ally in the effort to stomp out global terrorist networks, the public there is haunted by past violent attacks and reasonably fears there will be more. Indeed, as in the case of Israel and India, there are multiple, major terrorist organizations operating in the region. The conflict in Somalia created a fertile environment for terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and al-Shabaab to prosper. “The Government of Kenya did not knowingly provide safe haven for terrorists or terrorist organizations,” the 2007 US Country Reports on Terrorism reads. “However, Kenya's borders remained porous and vulnerable to movement of potential terrorists as well as small arms and other contraband. Supporters of [Al Qaeda] and other extremist groups were active in the East Africa region. As a result of the continuing conflict in Somalia, many members of these organizations have sought to relocate elsewhere in the region and some were believed to have traveled to Kenya.” 178 By 2009, Al Qaeda had established support networks in the coastal region and in parts of

Nairobi, and in 2012 alone there were more than three dozen presumed terrorist incidents in Kenya, mostly grenade attacks attributed to al-Shabaab or its supporters. 179 180

The key to explaining Kenya’s public support for US drone strikes is this: As in the case of India and Israel, the daily threat of a terrorist attack in Kenya is real, and the organizations that stage the assaults are operating out of weak states within extremely close proximity. The Kenyan government and military have been unable to dismantle terrorist networks, but the US, by targeting Somalia, is aiding the state and people of Kenya. The ineptitude of Kenyan and regional forces with respect to stomp out these threats is evidenced by the fact that some of the country’s most fatal attacks ever occurred between the years 2013-2015. This includes:

- The Westgate Mall shooting on September 21, 2013, when gunmen stormed into an upscale mall in Nairobi, ultimately killing at least 39 people and wounding more than 150 people. The New York Times referred to it as, “one of the most chilling terrorist attacks in East Africa since Al Qaeda blew up two American embassies in 1998.” 181
- Then, in another brutal rampage, on the night of June 15, 2014, dozens of attackers entered into the town of Mpeketoni, situated near the tourist resort of Lamu Island, and killed 48 people. A second attack on the nearby town of Majembeni on the following night left nine people dead.

In April 2015, gunmen swept into the Garissa University College, killing approximately 150 people and wounding several more. Al-Shabaab immediately claimed responsibility, saying they were retaliating over non-Muslims occupying Muslim territory. The militants took several hostages, freeing Muslims but withholding Christians. Can be partly explained by the crackdown on ivory poachers, and partly explained by people’s support for military actions against groups such as armed non-state actors such as al-Shabab.

Meanwhile, US forces have long targeted Somalia in order to combat the continued emergence of non-state actors such as al-Shabab and Al Qaeda, as you can see in the following Table 6.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>US drone strikes</th>
<th>Additional US attacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total reported strikes:</td>
<td>32-36</td>
<td>9-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total reported killed:</td>
<td>242-418</td>
<td>59-166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilians reported killed:</td>
<td>3-12</td>
<td>7-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children reported killed:</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>0-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total reported injured:</td>
<td>5-24</td>
<td>11-21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The extraordinarily fatal assault on the Garissa University College is a prime example of why Kenyans are inclined to support US-led drone strikes. On the heels of the attack, it was the US that in July 2015 conducted a drone strike in Somalia, killing the so-called mastermind of the massacre and three other al-Shabaab operatives. Ultimately,  

182 “Kenya Claims Garissa Mastermind Dead in US Drone Strike.”
the US and its drone program were credited for eliminating the leader of an unprecedented act of terrorism that received global attention and that, any reasonable person would agree, struck fear into the hearts of Kenyans. And these operations continue today/the US conducted a strike in Somalia as recently as July 3, 2017, when the military carried out an operation against al-Shabaab in the second drone strike there since March 2017, when President Donald J. Trump relaxed targeting rules for counterterrorism operations in the region.183

Furthermore, animal poaching and terrorism are closely related, as al-Shabab reportedly brings in between $200,000 and $600,000 a month from ivory.184 “Understanding how al-Shabaab’s success can be attributed to its ability to pay its soldiers adequately. Young Shabaab fighter can earn US$300 a month from his regional commander as a loyalty fee while his food, water, khat (a local drug also known as mirrar) and weaponry is additionally supplied by Shabaab leadership,” according to a study published by the Elephant Action League in 2016. “In effect, ivory serves as one of the lifelines of al-Shabaab, enabling it to maintain its grip over young soldiers, most of who are not radically motivated. According to a source within the militant group, between one to three tons of ivory, fetching a price of roughly US$200 per kilo, pass through the ports in southern Somalia every month.”185 That Somalis were involved in ivory trafficking was not a revelation, but what has come to light is the involvement of al-Shabaab. This was also reported by NYT writer Jeffrey Gettleman, who as early as September 2012 wrote

184 Fieldstat, “Drones Used to Stop Elephant and Rhino Poachers in Africa.”
that, “Some of Africa’s most notorious armed groups, including the Lord’s Resistance Army, the Shabab and Darfur’s janjaweed, are hunting down elephants and using the tusks to buy weapons and sustain their mayhem. Organized crime syndicates are linking up with them to move the ivory around the world, exploiting turbulent states, porous borders and corrupt officials from sub-Saharan Africa to China, law enforcement officials say. 186 187 Reports indicate that Kenya lost more than 435 elephants and around 400 rhinos to poachers from 2012 through April 2014.188 So, Kenya implemented a $103m drone program in 2014 and deployed the technology in all of its 52 national parks and reserves, an effort funded by the state and also by the US, Netherlands, France and Canada. Kenya’s drones are unarmed and mainly meant for surveillance, but the technology’s effectiveness in fighting poachers, and relatedly, terrorism, cannot be ignored.

187 Crosta and Sutherland, “The White Gold of Jihad.”
A recent book, *Democracy for Realists*, by Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, triggered much discussion about the role of the public in democratic societies.\(^{189}\) Their main argument is that people vote on the basis of group identity, defined generally as race, religion or gender, rather than on policy. Partisanship plays a role, they say, although a secondary to the interests of distinct groups. Indeed, the authors explain that people identify with a political party based on their group identity. First and foremost, people vote according to the interests of their group.

This goes against longstanding “folk theories” of democracy and the public, which state that voters have preferences about policies and that they express those opinions at the polls. In reality, voters have little to no knowledge about any one particular issue, and sometimes people are completely unaware of issues. Meanwhile, the so-called “miracle of partisanship,” advanced by many and originally by Page and Shapiro, falls short of always explaining voting preferences. “Retroactive theories” of voting, which refer to the notion that people vote according to the recent state of the economy, also fail the test, as we have seen times during which voting seemingly ignored understated the state of the economy.

So, Achen and Bartles present us with this extremely pessimistic view regarding the variables that determine public opinion in democratic societies. I describe their thinking as pessimistic because, essentially, they claim that information does not matter anymore, and that much of the population is downright ignorant regarding important

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policy issues. Group identity, and how a group’s preferences align with a particular party, is the lone key variable that determines public opinion.

This line of thinking raises important questions: Do people have the capacity to be aware of most issues? Can we still say that, at least on the aggregate level, people support and oppose policies based on information from elites and the media, as well as personal experience? Is it overly optimistic to think that agenda setting, framing, and priming are still extremely relevant? Or rather, does group identity now dictate public opinion more than all else, in which case information and the aforementioned processes would no longer matter?

All these questions public can have on policymaking in democratic societies, and raises concern with respect to peoples’ capacity to form opinions based on actual information. The question is at the heart of this dissertation, and in my estimation, drives a great deal of the body of research regarding public opinion in democracies – specifically, the factors that cause people to be aware of certain issues and the capacity to think about them in even moderately complex ways.

The answer, at least in terms of this dissertation, is that we see a fairly clear relationship between media content, the public rhetoric of elites, or lack thereof, and support in the US for drone strikes against suspected militants. When the facts changed and elites addressed and debated the issue at a more frequent rate, grabbing the attention of major media, public opinion responded and opposition toward US drone strikes increased.

Specifically, I opened this paper by posing the central research question, ‘why is the level of American public support for drone strikes consistently high (majority support), as where most every other nation that has been polled – including those with interests
similar and dissimilar to the US – oppose the tactic? First, and most importantly, there is a correlation between the frequency and nature of major American TV media coverage about drone strikes and US public opinion regarding the tactic. That is, from 2000-2009 drones were almost never mentioned on major TV news programs. During that same time period, polling organizations almost never included questions intended to measure opinion about the US drone program. The lack of data makes it difficult, if not impossible, to come away with clear-cut conclusions. But there are some extremely important points to take away, here. Indeed, the salience of the drone issue in the public arena correlates with the salience of the drone issue among major media organizations. The lack of polling questions and the absence of media coverage about drone strikes and the emerging US drone program speaks volumes: nobody spoke about it publically, including mainstream news networks, so the public did not take notice of it. Broadly speaking, drones and drone strikes were not salient issues throughout the first decade of the 2000s.

This brings us back to a key theory that underlies my hypothesis that media coverage and elite rhetoric are the main causes of US public support for American-led drone strikes. The average US citizen never personally experiences violent conflict abroad or at home, and will never know a person who does. Information about foreign policy, most notably the use of force and covert programs, must be transmitted to the public by an authoritative source, such as the media or directly vis-à-vis the rhetoric of political elites. The media all but failed to report on the emerging US drone program and the massive increase in drone strikes from 2000 – 2009, so during that time, the public was unaware or simply did not deem the issue to be important. The drone issue was quite simply not salient.
From 2010-2015 there was a significant increase in media reports that mentioned the term “drones,” giving us more data to examine with respect to the relationship between TV news and US public opinion. During the same time period, polling organizations began asking the American public whether it supports or objects to US-led drone strikes as a tactic to combat suspected terrorists. The issue of drones and drone strikes, then, emerged as a salient one relative to the previous decade. The media began reporting on the issue, the public became increasingly aware of the mushrooming drone program, and polling organizations began including items about it. This practical illustration of agenda-setting is important in that it reconfirms the role that mainstream media plays in influencing the issues that are important to, or at least known by, the American public.

The second key conclusion is that the nature of media coverage has a significant impact on how people perceive those issues. That is to say, the messages connected to drone strikes and how they were framed in TV news impacted the way the public thought about them. Mainstream media reports about drone strikes were usually associated with national security successes, such as the killing of known and suspected terrorists. The more controversial issues surrounding drone strikes, such as whether they violate international law or whether they endanger civilian lives, were rarely mentioned by broadcasters, reporters or guests/experts. Why, you ask? That brings us to the next point.

The third key conclusion brings us back to the idea of indexing, and more specifically, that partisanship and public disagreement among elites is necessary to cause journalists and editors to focus on an issue area. The evidence presented in this paper supports Bennet’s theory that the media requires open policy debates as well as conflict among political elites for there to be sufficient incentive to report and cast a wide lens on
an issue. Indeed, we saw that opposition toward drone strikes increased on a consistent basis from 2010-2014, the roughest patch yet for drone advocates. A series of major events was set off in 2010, starting with the targeted killings of US citizens. Following that, there was a leak of a justice department document that sought to justify the killing of Americans, the senate hearings related to John Brennan becoming the head of the CIA, and ultimately, President Obama’s grand speech about drone strikes in May 2013. During that same period, we saw opposition toward drone strikes go from 8% in 2011 to 16% in mid-2013 to 38% by mid-2014.

The opposite is also true. When there’s a high-level of agreement among elites and they refrain from public debate, the media tends to index news coverage in a way that it becomes noncritical, infrequent, and sometimes nonexistent. This is precisely what we saw in the early-2000s, while the footprint of the US drone program grew exponentially without much attention from congress, the media or the public.

7.2. Where’s the Partisanship?

Interestingly, the question of whether drone strikes are an acceptable tactic does not appear to be as partisan as most political issues. Even when US drone strikes faced particular scrutiny in 2013, a majority of the public continued to support the program (56%) while only 26% of respondents said they disapproved. The same poll shows that support for drone strikes crosses party lines: 68% of Republicans and 58% of Democrats said they approve of the tactic. The lack of elite and mass partisan conflict is particularly intriguing in light of today’s political climate. Indeed, “One the one hand, the US public opinion data still

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show basic support related to liberal internationalism…,” Shapiro wrote in 2017. “On the other, some partisan difference across a wide range of relevant issues have become more severe, and the differences that have emerged, which increasingly concern immigration, terrorism and trade, have caused new tensions.”¹⁹¹ Specific to foreign policy, Shapiro cites increased partisanship regarding the predisposition to increase US military power, which Republicans desire far more so than Democrats, and the same can be said with respect to the prevention of nuclear proliferation.¹⁹²

So, why is there less partisan conflict when it comes to drone strikes?

Well, as I have discussed, the two main factors were the scarcity and the uniformity of media coverage and elite rhetoric regarding the tactic. But there’s more. Most notably, it was a popular Democratic president who invested so deeply in expanding the country’s global drone footprint. Simply put, President Obama was a big-time proponent of drone strikes. Had a Republican president overseen their emergence and normalization, public support and opposition would have been split along more partisan lines.

Yes, there is a degree of conjecture here, but in light of the extreme partisanship that has emerged regarding foreign policies such as the use of force, combined with the Republican Party’s traditional tendency to support the use of force in much greater numbers than Democrats, it’s significant that it was a Democratic president who dramatically expanded the drone program. In early-2014, even after Obama was forced to address the controversies surrounding drone strikes, Obama’s approval rating hovered around 50%. Meanwhile, 83% of those who identified as a Democrat approved of his performance, while

¹⁹² Ibid.
79% of those who identified as liberal approved of his performance. The president, ever so popular within his party, played a nearly-silent, yet extremely significant role in influencing his fellow party members to support drone strikes.

The other notable factor behind continued majority support for drone strikes is the long-lasting toll that 9/11 has taken on Americans in terms of the public’s general fear of terrorism. Indeed, American citizens were particularly nervous in the immediate years following the attacks on the World Trade Center, and “led to government responses that encroached on fundamental rights and liberties and succeeded in manipulating public opinion…The administration of George W. Bush was able to effectively hype fear (and intimidate critics), obscure civil liberty abuses, and downplay concrete issues of terrorism prevention and preparedness.”

The media failed to provide information that would have been conducive to establishing a forum for public debate on a controversial issue and journalists didn’t scrutinize the policy decisions made by the Bush administration in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. In this sense, there was a sort of rally around the flag effect after 9/11, during which time the president maintained higher-than-usual approval ratings while his administration’s decisions were seen as part and parcel of enhancing homeland security and aggressively tackling national security concerns abroad. “Ultimately, Obama succeeded in making Americans comfortable with drone strikes, as they are generally supported by the American public (though opposed throughout the world), and wildly popular in Congress, Micah Zenko writes. “Americans will never know much more about

194 Nacos, Bloch-Elkon and Shapiro, Selling Fear.
195 Mueller, War, Presidents and Public Opinion.
these operations than what the Obama administration has selectively revealed, because, unlike the CIA rendition program, drone strikes occurred under both Republican and Democratic presidents. And there is no interest in Washington to fully investigate government programs that both political parties are directly responsible for.“196

7.3. Obstacles, Weaknesses and Further Research

The first weakness I want to point out is the limited body of survey data with which I had to work. Frankly, I suspected there would be more survey items addressing the controversial issues surrounding drone strikes, and that polling organizations would have begun to ask the relevant questions at an earlier point in time. Knowing what I do now about the way elites discussed the drone program – the fact that they did not pay much notice to it from 2000 to 2010 – it makes sense that survey designers failed to measure support/opposition toward drone strikes. Obviously, that changed in 2010, giving us more data to work with in terms of examining the relationship between elite rhetoric, media content, and public opinion. Unfortunately, that means there is little to determine with respect to first decade of the 2000s, other than that drones were not salient.

The second weakness that’s important to discuss is question wording, one of the more questionable aspects of drone strike survey research. The problems, which have come up in discussion at numerous academic conferences and are the topic of multiple research papers, must be disclosed as a potential obstacle to any investigation of public opinion regarding drone strikes.

Question-wording has been inconsistent over time. Some poll items ask about support versus opposition in non-specific geographical terms, while other questions identify target countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. This begs the question: are responses driven by how public sentiment regarding the region more than the tactic?

The second issue with respect to question wording are false assumptions. For example, one question asks if people support drone strikes aimed at “[terrorist organization] operatives.” The assumption, of course, is that the target is known, and the rational reaction of most respondents would be to approve of a strike aimed at a known terrorist operative, such as Osama Bin Laden. The reality, however, is that the identity of many targets are not confirmed, and that they are merely suspected to be terrorists due to a pattern of behavior. This is what the US calls signature strikes: drone strike operations that occur due to the behavior – the signature – of an individual. Their identities are not confirmed at the time of the strike. Signature strikes, the targeting of unconfirmed suspects, is undoubtedly the most controversial aspect of US drone strike policies. This reality is not only ignored in poll questions; it usually implied that the targets are known.
In light of this obstacle, which has been well researched by the likes of Sarah Kreps at the Department of Government at Cornell, I isolate the CBS/NYT poll question above: *Do you support or oppose the US using unmanned aircraft or 'drones' to carry out missile attacks against suspected terrorists?* I did so for two main reasons. First, the question wording remained the same over time. Second, the question is stated in general terms, using expressions such as “foreign countries” and “suspected terrorists.”

It is difficult to find consistent question-wording that is also stated in general terms, so the graph only shows five data points. Yet by isolating data from a single polling organization that consistently asked the most generally stated questions, we see broad support and a similar pattern as when we examine the aggregated poll data. Indeed, support remains above 50 percent throughout the period during which these questions were asked with some consistency, yet dip sometime around the well-detailed controversies of 2013-2014. The upshot is that, having noted the real, well-documented obstacles with respect to
survey design, it remains clear that a majority of the US public supported drone strikes throughout the research period, including the tumultuous period from 2010-2014, but that media coverage during that time period did have some impact on people’s thinking.

The third weakness of this research project that I would like to confront is that this does not result in a causal theory. As an observational study, there are inherent limitations to what can be done with the data, most notably that it cannot determine with 100 percent certainty that there is a causal relationship between elite rhetoric and levels of partisanship; media coverage; and ultimately, public opinion. There are also limitations regarding my ability to manipulate the data in extraordinarily complex ways, as has been done by accomplished scholars such as Baum and Berinsky.

7.4. Contributions and Recommendations

First and foremost, this research shows a correlation between the aforementioned variables: elite rhetoric, media coverage, and public opinion. It reconfirms the theories of figures who came before me by applying them to a new issue. Indeed, we can see the processes of agenda-setting, framing, and indexing all at work in the context of drone strikes. When we are able to compare survey data with the results from the content analysis, we do see a correlation between an increase in elite rhetoric, negative media messages about drones, and an increase in public opposition toward drone strikes.

Second, this research resulted in what to my knowledge are unique data sets. I conducted an original content analysis of TV news content as well as an original content analysis of the President’s rhetoric and that of Congress. The data should be used to continue to understand how these forces interact with one another to increase or limit the focus on drone strikes.
My recommendations begin with the need to create poll items that are asked in consistent intervals and with the same wording. Working with disparate survey data makes this type of research quite painful and assures there will be questions about the quality of the findings. Second, although it would be methodologically challenging, it would be very useful to conduct some longer-term studies to quantify the impact of that each variable – elites, the media, and the public, have on one another.

Third, it would be helpful to capture qualitatively the nature of elite rhetoric and media coverage. Originally, I sought to systematically examine key moments in the history of drone warfare. And I did so during the content analysis stage. However, capturing the information and presenting it without bogging down the discussion proved to be too difficult. Numerous excerpts were cut from this paper that could had provided another layer of data and context to the analysis. I hope to find a way to qualitatively capture and clearly present the true nature of media coverage about drone strikes – the main messages, the main tones, and the some of the finer points that were not captured in this dissertation.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


186


