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Danny Hayes and Matt Guardino’s book, *Influence from Abroad*, provides important insights regarding the various influences on news coverage of foreign affairs. The book provides an interesting and convincing empirical demonstration of how foreign voices influence the news, and several lessons to political communication scholars about the importance of maintaining a fluid understanding of the ways in which the norms and routines of journalism interact with political context to exert systematic pressures on news content. What’s more, their work highlights the need for a more refined theory regarding how and when the norms and routines of journalism yield predictable patterns in political news coverage.

*Influence from Abroad* raises a provocative research question: Why was the partisan rift between Republicans and Democrats so wide in the lead up to the Iraq War, especially with no cohesive partisan counter-message from Democratic elites? The size of the partisan difference in support for the president would not have been predicted by most public opinion theory. In fact, extant research would predict a convergence of public support behind the president’s actions—especially in the face of no cohesive out-party viewpoint expressed by Democratic elites in the media.

To answer this question, Hayes and Guardino offer a central thesis: the norms and routines of journalism mandate a demand for both balance and conflict in political news reporting, and when a credible unified opposition does not emerge in the domestic political context, journalists will tap elite foreign criticism to provide the alternative perspective needed. Hayes and Guardino also assert that elite foreign voices can influence American public opinion in meaningful ways in certain circumstances. The conditions under which international actors can be influential are related to both individual-level characteristics and the political and informational context.

To test their claims, the empirical focus of the book examines elite national media outlet coverage of the lead up to the post-9/11 invasion of Iraq. The authors set out to examine several questions: How did elite media cover the
lead up to the war? What was the role of foreign voices in this coverage? How did the coverage of elite foreign voices influence American public opinion about the war? What was the role of media coverage in the prewar partisan polarization regarding support for the president’s actions?

The arguments and evidence presented in the book are noteworthy due to the implications for our understanding of foreign policy opinion formation and the indexing hypothesis. The indexing hypothesis posits that media coverage of foreign affairs crises should “index” domestic elite debate. Under this hypothesis, coverage of something like the lead up to the war should resemble domestic partisan debate on the issue, and may also reflect some degree of in-party debate from moderates or extreme hawks and doves. The Hayes and Guardino analysis sheds light on several holes for the commonly understood indexing scenario. What happens when a credible and unified opposition voice does not emerge? Indexing would predict overwhelmingly unified coverage supportive of the use of force, if not directly, then through a lack of criticism. Related literature on public opinion and foreign affairs would suggest that public support would follow until rising casualty counts led to increased opposition. Yet, as Hayes and Guardino note, our normal understanding of the indexing hypothesis did not predict the coverage or opinion surrounding the lead up to the Iraq War. Rather, we saw a steady beat of criticism in the elite national press, and from a fairly unexpected source: foreign elites.

The emergence of foreign voices in the news is something else indexing would not predict—nor would conventional wisdom about the news value of foreign elite criticism. Thus, it seems that existing models of foreign affairs policy opinion formation have been off the mark in at least two ways. They fail to fully take into account the power of journalistic norms and routines to shape news coverage, and therefore underestimate the potential news value of elite foreign voices in certain political contexts. Second, they underestimate the conditional ability of elite foreign viewpoints to shape American public opinion in significant ways. The authors present a three-pronged theoretical framework that addresses these shortcomings in the literature.

First, Hayes and Guardino argue that Americans’ exposure to the views of elite international actors is determined heavily by the norms and routines of journalism, specifically the manner in which news reporters make decisions about how to cover foreign affairs. They base their argument on a departure from the literature which argues that American public support for war is largely determined by facts surrounding the conflict, such as casualty counts or the expectation of victory. Instead, the authors claim that Americans’ views on foreign policy are shaped primarily through news coverage.

Second, they argue that the degree and presence of international elites’ views in the news should also be determined by the routines of journalism. Here, the assertion is that foreign elites’ views will emerge in coverage in the absence of a cohesive domestic opposition, and that this stems from news values of balance and conflict. Without a vocalized and cohesive domestic
opposition view, the pressures journalists face to present objective and two-sided news will yield coverage of a unified foreign elite view, especially when that view is put forward by familiar (and more newsworthy) allies who could credibly be expected to influence outcomes.

Third, Hayes and Guardino contend that regardless of the degree to which foreign elite views are presented, only certain Americans’ views are likely to be influenced. International elites’ views will be persuasive to only a subset of Americans. Of course, the degree to which individuals are exposed to the news will also influence their likelihood of persuasion. And individual factors such as ideology and partisanship will also partly determine the degree of influence. In the context of the Iraq War, obviously the level of war support among Democrats and Independents is more likely to be influenced by foreign elite opposition.

The authors present telling evidence. Through a very comprehensive content analysis, Hayes and Guardino demonstrate that foreign elite voices were quite present in national news in the lead up to the war, especially in terms of the critical coverage of the administration’s plans. In subsequent chapters, they effectively demonstrate journalists’ news values at work by showing that coverage of Democratic elites in Congress dropped significantly after the passage of the use-of-force resolution, only to be replaced by foreign elite criticism. The empirical evidence concludes with an analysis of merged content and public opinion data; the results clearly demonstrate that Democrats and Independents’ support for war were shaped by the views expressed by foreign elites in the news.

Scholars interested in foreign policy attitudes should take note of this study due to the importance it places on the role of U.S. elite voices and the news in foreign policy opinion formation. As the authors note, the current geo-political context creates an important role for international organizations and foreign allies in shaping U.S. public opinion.

Influence from Abroad provides many valuable insights for communication scholars as well. In particular, the book highlights the importance of the ways in which the norms and routines of journalism interact with political context to exert systematic pressure on political news content. Especially in the arena of foreign affairs, policy attitudes are often significantly shaped by the news.

Hayes and Guardino’s book adds to the substantial body of evidence about the strength of the influence of journalistic norms and routines on news content and public opinion, suggesting the need for a more refined theory about the structural and contextual conditions under which norms and routines produce predictable patterns in political news content. Though the burden of this should not be laid at the feet of the authors—their theoretical arguments are well stated—one criticism of the book is that at times the repeated reference to “deeply embedded journalistic norms” is a little unsatisfying without it being situated in a broader theoretical framework. Though the authors provide fresh insights about the consequences of pressure for balance and conflict, the
journalistic tendency to “follow the trail of power,” and coverage decisions based on the probability of affecting outcomes, it would be useful to have a more comprehensive theory about the uses and consequences of norms and routines. However, this is a comment more about the state of the literature than about the book itself. Influence from Abroad, without a doubt, advances us empirically and theoretically toward a better understanding of the news media’s role in U.S. public opinion generally, and on foreign policy opinions in particular.

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One of the most important economic phenomena of our time is rising income inequality. Not since the Roaring Twenties has so much of the nation’s output accrued to the tiny slice at the top of the income spectrum. Wealth is even more unevenly distributed. Scholars from many disciplines have puzzled over the lack of political reaction to this rising tide. The public seems oddly quiescent, save for the Occupy movement, and even that flamed out quickly, failing to produce sustained pressure to address the widening gulf between the have-a-lots and the rest of us.

In this timely book, sociologist Leslie McCall takes an in-depth look at the public’s attitudes toward income inequality. She explores existing explanations for the public’s seeming indifference and, finding them wanting, offers her own theory. She assesses the contenders with cross-sectional data and with an analysis of public opinion trends over time in relation both to actual economic trends and to media coverage of inequality. McCall argues that, contrary to much conventional wisdom, Americans are not indifferent to inequality. Instead, they view income inequality as undermining the equality of opportunity they hold dear. That said, objections to inequality do not rise in step with the changing income ratios between the top and the rest. Her over-time analysis reveals that public attitudes shift instead with the volume of media coverage of inequality. Thus, Americans hold nuanced views of inequality but over time are influenced more by media coverage than by objective conditions, a finding that may alarm some observers but that will come as no surprise to scholars of media effects.