



Media coverage and the escalation of militarized interstate disputes, 1992–2001

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Abstract

Some international crises – such as the Cuban Missile Crisis – receive widespread media coverage, while others are barely reported at all. Does this matter for the behavior of the dispute participants? Can widespread media coverage change the course of history? The authors' goal is to assess how varying levels of coverage in elite news sources – *The New York Times* and *The Times* of London – influence the outcomes of international crises. Their analysis of over 300 dispute dyads indicates that, even after controlling for potential endogeneity and standard explanations of dispute outcomes, higher levels of media exposure make it more likely that targets of threats will escalate crises.

Keywords

audience costs, international conflict, international crisis, media coverage, militarized interstate dispute, military force, news coverage

There can be no question that the reason for this [intervention] ... lies primarily with the exposure of the Somalia situation by the American media. (George F Kennan, explaining the American intervention in Somalia in 1993)

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Some international crises – such as the Cuban Missile Crisis – receive widespread media coverage, while others are barely reported at all. Does this matter for the behavior of the dispute participants? Can widespread media coverage change the course of history? If the world is watching a crisis unfold, are leaders likely to make decisions they would not take in private? Surprisingly little systematic empirical research exists to address these questions. Our goal is to assess how varying levels of coverage in elite news sources – like *The New York Times* and *The Times* of London (from here on just *The Times*) – influences the behavior of states involved in international crises.

Our study differs from others on several dimensions. First, most systematic empirical research on the effect of the media on foreign policy is limited to the US. Ours is cross-national, looking at how levels of media coverage of militarized interstate disputes in elite news sources influence the behavior of targets of threats. Second, most of the systematic, cross-national, quantitative research on media coverage and policy outcomes has been limited to humanitarian aid and intervention. We shift the focus to an area that has received scant attention: international crisis behavior.

Using a data set of over 300 militarized interstate dispute dyads we find that levels of media coverage have a powerful effect on state behavior.

Theoretical and empirical issues

The idea that the media can influence foreign policy is hardly novel. However, despite repeated accusations of an undue influence of the media on government decisions (as represented by the quote from George F Kennan above), the effect of media coverage on governmental policy is by no means agreed upon by scholars (Gilboa, 2005, and Baum and Potter, 2008, provide excellent reviews). Nevertheless, there is a growing body of research that suggests that the media can and do influence the foreign policy behavior of states (Baum and Potter, 2008: 40), and this influence is particularly pronounced in the post-Cold War era (Zaller and Chiu, 2000).

One of the ways in which the media are thought to influence foreign policy in general – especially in democratic countries – is through agenda setting and priming. In its strongest form, the media–foreign policy phenomenon has been dubbed the ‘CNN Effect’, and the quote from Kennan at the outset of this piece captures this result: the media have the power to propel governments to create and to alter foreign policies. Although most scholars are reluctant to embrace the notion of the media as a foreign policy *maker* (e.g. Gilboa, 2005; Livingston and Eachus, 1995), there is growing recognition of the ability of the media to influence foreign policy, especially through priming audiences to care about some foreign policy issues more than others (Groeling and Baum, 2008; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Krosnick and Kinder, 1990; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Miller and Krosnick, 2000; see also Maholtra and Krosnick, 2007). As Behr and Iyengar (1985: 38) observe: ‘the amount of media attention devoted to particular issues determines the degree of public concern for these issues.’

Empirical studies of the media–foreign policy link are generally encouraging, and evidence of a relationship has been reported across multiple settings, including humanitarian aid (Drury et al., 2005) and US intervention policy in Iraq, Rwanda, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia (Gowing, 1994; Jakobsen, 2000: 134). One area that has not

received as much attention is the relationship between media coverage and state behavior in international crises, and that is the focus of our research (Baum, 2004, and Miller and Albert, 2015, are exceptions).

Central to our approach is the idea that leaders may face domestic political costs – formally called ‘audience costs’ – for behavior in international crises that domestic audiences deem ‘incompetent’ or damaging to the reputation of the state. Media coverage, in turn, is hypothesized to influence the choices leaders make in international crises by affecting the domestic political costs they anticipate for damaging the state’s international reputation as a consequence – for example, of losing a war or backing down in an international crisis. We begin with a discussion of audience costs and then turn to how the media may influence the audience costs–international crisis behavior relationship.

Audience costs, the media, and international conflict

The concept ‘audience costs’ was originally coined by James Fearon (1994) and refers to the penalties that negotiators suffer for backing down in international crises. Thomas Schelling (1960) was one of the first to explore how leaders’ *anticipated* costs for capitulation influences the outcome of those crises. Schelling suggested a paradox that he dubbed the ‘strength of weakness’: the greater the probability that leaders are punished by domestic audiences for backing down in bargaining situations (i.e. the weaker those leaders are), the less likely it is that they capitulate once they have staked out a public position, lest they suffer audience costs. Adversaries know this, of course, and respond accordingly, by either avoiding international crises altogether (Chiozza and Goemans, 2004; Choi and James, 2006), or yielding to demands of initiators in order to avoid escalation (Fearon, 1994). Thus, the weaker the leader is at home, the stronger the bargaining advantage internationally.

There is a sizable amount of formal and empirical research that supports the claims of audience costs scholars. First, consistent with audience costs logic, leaders who lose wars or international crises are significantly more likely to lose power than leaders who prevail in those international interactions (Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson, 1995; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1992; Croco, 2011; Debs and Goemans, 2010; Goemans, 2008; Miller, 2015). Second, states that are less able to generate audience costs are more likely to back down in international crises (Clare, 2007; Eyerman and Hart, 1996; Gelpi and Griesdorf, 2001; Partell, 1997; Partell and Palmer, 1999; Prins, 2003; Schultz, 2001a, 2001b; Sullivan and Gartner, 2006). For contrarian views, see Downes and Sechser (2012), Snyder and Borghard (2011) and Trachtenberg (2012). There are two important gaps in existing approaches to audience costs, however, and we address these in the following section.

First, in most of the audience costs literature, media coverage is not included as an independent or as an intervening variable in models of international conflict (Baum, 2004, and Miller and Albert, 2015, are notable exceptions). Instead, in traditional approaches to audience costs (e.g. Fearon, 1994; Schelling, 1960), the working assumption is that the public nature of an initiator’s demand against a target state is sufficient to inform the initiator’s domestic audience (those in a position to punish leaders for failures) of the behavior of its leaders. This assumption is – in turn – built into most research

designs constructed to evaluate audience costs arguments, where the potential audience costs faced by the initiators are indicated by a simple democracy–nondemocracy variable that is intended to indicate the ease with which the informed audience can punish the leader (e.g. Clare, 2007; Eyerman and Hart, 1996; Gelpi and Griesdorf, 2001; Partell, 1997; Partell and Palmer, 1999; Prins, 2003; Schultz, 2001a, 2001b).

The disregard for potential media effects in most audience costs models is somewhat surprising, especially given the importance of the *public* nature of foreign policy behavior for audience costs arguments (Schelling, 1960: 29). Indeed, for the audience costs logic to work, there must be *some* way to transmit information about leader behavior to domestic audiences, otherwise it is difficult to see how leaders can be held accountable for foreign policy failures (Baum and Potter, 2014; Slantchev, 2006).

Slantchev (2006) was one of the first to conclude through formal theoretical work that the media play a role in the generation of audience costs. He reports that a free press can significantly increase audience costs for leaders by providing a way for the public to discover leader incompetence. Empirical research by Choi and James (2006) and Van Belle (2000b) both corroborate this prediction: states tend to avoid disputes with leaders facing free presses because those leaders have higher audience costs, and will be unable to back down once the crisis is underway. Baum and Potter (2014) extend this logic to media access (to print, television and internet news) in democratic states, and find that more access means more audience costs.

Baum (2004) takes this a step further, and finds that media coverage of an international dispute can actually push leaders to take public positions on foreign policy issues that they otherwise might avoid. In fact, in Baum's (2004) analysis, US presidents were significantly more likely to issue public statements if *The New York Times* covered the participants involved in the crises. Similarly, Miller and Albert (2015: 64) contend that high levels of media coverage may cause audience costs to increase for participants in international crises, leading to greater fatalities in those disputes. We adopt a similar approach below, and hypothesize that the greater the media coverage of a crisis, the greater the likelihood of escalation by targets of threats.

A second shortcoming – or gap – of most formal and empirical work is that it excludes from consideration the possibility that audience costs might also be faced by *targets* of threats. Instead, the main focus of most research has been with comparing the audience costs of democratic and nondemocratic *initiators* (e.g. Clare, 2007; Downes and Sechser, 2012; Eyerman and Hart, 1996; Gelpi and Griesdorf, 2001; Partell, 1997; Partell and Palmer, 1999; Prins, 2003; Schultz, 2001a, 2001b).

By way of example of the phenomenon of *target* audience costs and media coverage, Kurizaki (2007) contrasts the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 with the Cienfuegos Crisis of 1970. Although most people have heard of the former, few have heard of the latter. This is somewhat surprising because the two events share a number of important characteristics: both are Cold War crises involving the US and the Soviet Union, and both concern an alleged construction of a Soviet military base in Cuba. According to Kurizaki (2007), the reason why Cienfuegos is not common knowledge to most Americans is that the Nixon Administration purposely tried to keep Cienfuegos 'quiet' and out of the newspapers in order to make it easier for the Soviets – the target of the dispute – to yield. Thus, at least in Cienfuegos, *target* audience costs were part of the initiator's decision of whether or not to 'go public' with their demand.

Fortunately, there are efforts underway to rectify this gap in research and take into account target audience costs in both theoretical and empirical research.¹ Formal theories by Kurizaki (2007), Leventoğlu and Tarar (2005), Stasavage (2004), and Tarar and Leventoğlu (2009) all take into account the possibility of target audience costs. Kurizaki (2007) and Stasavage (2004) both found that potential initiators may rationally choose not to publicize their demands for fear that these demands may generate audience costs in target states, making it more difficult for the latter to yield in negotiations. Similarly, Leventoğlu and Tarar (2005) and Tarar and Leventoğlu (2009) conclude that highly public crises may drive up audience costs for *all* participants in crises – initiators *and* targets – making it difficult for *both* sides to back down. When both initiators and targets face high audience costs, war arises as an equilibrium outcome. Miller and Albert's (2015) empirical analysis supports this hypothesis, and they report that disputes characterized by high level levels of media coverage are associated with greater levels of fatalities.

The research by Baum (2004), Stasavage (2004), Kurizaki (2007), Leventoğlu and Tarar (2005), Tarar and Leventoğlu (2009), and Miller and Albert (2015) offers an alternative way to approach strategic interaction in international crises, at least with respect to audience costs: high levels of media coverage carry the very real risk of driving up audience costs for *all* parties involved in an international crisis, regardless of whether they are initiators or targets. This implies that higher levels of media coverage should be associated with more violent outcomes, since backing down is costly for all participants. Our research design is directed toward testing how elite news coverage influences the foreign policy choices of targets states involved in international crises.

Research design

We focus our analysis on target behavior in dyadic militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). MIDs are 'united historical cases in which the threat, display or use of military force short of war by one member state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state' (Jones et al., 1996: 168).

Although Downes and Sechser (2012) have questioned the use of MIDs generally to test audience costs hypotheses, their argument is essentially that MIDs – by themselves – do not automatically carry high audience costs. We agree. In our approach, it is coverage of MIDs in elite news sources that drives up audience costs for target states (and initiators). Otherwise – and all else being equal – for many MIDs, audience costs are relatively low for the dispute participants. Once the appropriate model specification is in place, then MIDs should be as effective as other data sets to test audience costs hypotheses. Baum and Potter (2014) arrive at a similar conclusion in their study of media access and audience costs: the empirical estimates they obtained using the MID data were substantively identical to the ones generated using the data set that Downes and Sechser (2012) assembled to test audience costs hypotheses.

Our goal is to explore how media coverage of MIDs influences the behavior of original targets of MIDs – those states to whom the challenge is directly focused. For example, in the case of Ukraine, on 14 March 2014, *The New York Times* reported that Russia massed troops on the border with Ukraine (Myers and Smalemark, 2014). This would be coded by MID as a display of force, the target of which is the Ukraine.

We look at targets rather than initiators for a few reasons. First, presumably initiators have already anticipated a certain level of media coverage prior to taking their action, and therefore an analysis that evaluates the effect of media coverage on initiator behavior faces powerful selection effects (Signorino, 1999). Second, if we are exploring conflict initiation, then we do not have media coverage *in advance* to motivate the initiator's behavior. Finally, even if we had more information on anticipated media coverage, the choice set facing potential initiators is more difficult to construct; and therefore predicting policy choices under conditions of high media coverage compared to situations of low media coverage is made more difficult. By focusing on target responses in MIDs we help to mitigate (although not completely eliminate) selection bias, and we also have a research design that helps to restrict the choice set down to one that is manageable for statistical analysis.

Our main hypothesis, H1, is: the higher the level of media coverage of an international dispute, the greater the likelihood that the target escalates the crisis. The corollary hypothesis (H2), derived from traditional accounts of audience costs, asserts that the audience costs advantage resides with the initiator: the higher the level of media coverage of an international dispute, the lower the likelihood that the target escalates the crisis.

Although Miller and Albert (2015) also explore the role of media coverage in MIDs, their analysis is restricted to fatalities using disputes as the unit of analysis (and to *The New York Times* coverage). To our knowledge, this study is the first that explores the effect of media coverage on state-level decisions in international crises in a cross-national setting using multiple indicators of media coverage.

Data

As mentioned above, the unit of analysis is the militarized interstate dispute dyad, 1992–2001, and we restrict attention to the original participants in the dispute, with a focus on target responses. Most studies of conflict use the dyad as the unit of analysis, and to facilitate comparison with other works, we do the same.

We use two dependent variables – an ordinal indicator of the *Hostility* level of the target, and whether or not *Force* was used by the target, and both are from the Dyadic Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data set, version 3.1, 1992–2001 (Ghosn et al., 2004). The *Hostility* level of the target is based on the original MID ordinal scale, where one (1) represents no militarized action from the target; two (2) is the threat to use military force; three (3) is the display of force; four (4) is the use of military force; and five (5) is war. Because of the uneven distribution of cases across the measure, we reduced it to a trichotomy, where zero (0) equals no militarized response from the target; one (1) represents circumstances where the target issued a threat to use military force or it displayed military force; and two (2) represents cases where the use of military force was involved.

In models that are employed to correct for potential endogeneity, we use a dichotomous variant of the hostility variable. *Force* equals one (1) for dispute dyads when the target used military force, and zero (0) when they did not.

Measures of the independent variables

For *media coverage*, we extend Miller and Albert (2015) and Miller and Bokemper (2012) and rely on the coverage of MIDs in *The New York Times* and *The Times* as proxies to capture the extent of international news coverage of crises.

The New York Times and *The Times* are consistently ranked among the elite newspapers of the world (Blood and Phillips, 1995; Merrill, 1968, 2000; Peterson, 1981; Reese and Danielian, 1989; Wu et al., 2002). Not only are these newspapers read by elites in their home countries, their reports are also consumed abroad. Indeed, the international edition of *The New York Times* is distributed in over 160 countries (<http://newyorktimes.com>). Thus, the two periodicals should provide a reasonable estimate of damage to a country's international reputation for backing down from a militarized interstate dispute.

By way of illustration of the importance of media coverage in elite news sources like *The New York Times* and *The Times*, compare again the Cuban Missile and Cienfuegos Crises of 1962 and 1970, respectively. Both crises resulted in a Soviet yield to the demands of the US. But only one of the crises – the Cuban Missile Crisis – has been directly connected to the overthrow of a Soviet leader. If Kurizaki (2007) and Kissinger (1979) are correct, the reason for this can be traced directly to the perception of elites in the Soviet Union about the damage done to their international reputation by Soviet capitulation, as portrayed in *The New York Times* (Lebow and Stein, 1995: 163). The Cuban Missile Crisis had widespread, sustained, and international coverage in elite newspapers, whereas Cienfuegos did not. Moreover, in the Cuban Missile Crisis, because Kennedy's pledge to Khrushchev to remove US missiles from Italy and Turkey was kept secret from the elite presses as part of the overall agreement to resolve the crisis, Khrushchev's capitulation to remove the missiles from Cuba was reported as the *main* outcome in *The New York Times* (29 October 1962; see Kennedy, 1962). In the elite presses, therefore, Khrushchev's reputation as a leader was portrayed in the least favorable light, and consequently it cost him his job (Lebow and Stein, 1995).

Even though *The New York Times* and *The Times* may not have been read nearly as much as, say, *Pravda* by the Soviet masses public, the Soviet elites paid attention to what was contained in the former periodicals, and the elites were the relevant domestic audience. Writing over 50 years ago, in the context of the Cold War, Merrill (1968: 12–13) observed 'and, no doubt, Soviet officials, regardless of their feelings about Western journalistic bias and capitalistic exploitation of the press, peruse *The New York Times* and the *London Times* regularly.'

Weeks (2008) extends this logic to authoritarian regimes generally: even if the average citizen in, say, North Korea, does not have access to *The New York Times*, relevant elites will, and the latter are those in a position to punish leaders for foreign policy incompetence. Elites care about their international reputation in elite news sources because these sources advertise that reputation to potential international adversaries.

Moreover, using elite presses as a proxy for potential damage to a state's international reputation has some advantages over relying on domestic news sources, since some governments may have considerable control over what is reported in the domestic press. Governments have less control over international newspapers – especially the *elite*

presses (Blood and Phillips, 1995; Merrill, 1968, 2000; Peterson, 1981; Reese and Danielian, 1989; Wu et al., 2002).

That being said, we acknowledge that it certainly would be beneficial to include information from sources of coverage for each country involved in every militarized interstate dispute. We would also take into account the public speeches given by leaders regarding the dispute, as Baum (2004) does in his excellent study of audience costs and US presidents. However, the availability of press sources is not universal, and our language abilities are relatively limited. As a consequence, although reliance on *The New York Times* and *The Times* is not a complete account of the potential international reputation costs of leaders for their international crisis behavior, we believe it is preferred to existing approaches to state behavior in MIDs that include no estimate of media coverage levels.

We also acknowledge that governments and publics will vary in their sensitivity to press coverage. To help ameliorate this potential problem, we include in the analysis below controls for whether or not targets and initiators were democratic. This will help to control for the variance in regime sensitivity to international reputation as portrayed in *The New York Times* and *The Times*. In the models that correct for endogeneity we also include a control for whether or not the US was involved in the dispute.

In addition, in order to evaluate whether the results reported are only applicable to the US and the UK (because of our reliance on the *New York Times* and *The Times*), we ran additional tests that excluded cases where these countries were targets of disputes from the models using measures from *The New York Times* and *The Times*, respectively. The results, reported in the Appendix, are substantively identical to those we discuss in the main text.² We turn now to operationalization of the main independent variables.

Following Miller and Albert (2015) and Miller and Bokemper (2012), we construct six different indicators of media coverage of international crises, and all are based on the Militarized Interstate Dispute Incident Participant source data for the individual incidents in the MIDIP data set (Ghosn et al., 2004). The incident data sources are ideal for estimating the overall media coverage of the dispute because MIDIP lists the actual sources of individual incidents that make up each dispute.

By way of example, consider MID dispute number 3561 between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia. MIDIP actually codes 26 incidents in that dispute, and for each incident MIDIP lists the sources containing information about these incidents (in many cases multiple sources). This makes it possible to gain an overall sense of both the *level* (e.g. did it make the front page of *The New York Times* or *The Times*?) and *frequency* (were multiple incidents covered in a major news source?) of media coverage for each dispute. Although initially developed to provide replication materials for the MID incident data, the authors have captured the media coverage levels in major newspapers of the individual incidents that make up the disputes. The *New York Times* and *The Times* are consistently used throughout the 1992–2001 period, and both represent significant international newspapers. In virtually every instance of coding, specific page numbers are provided, thereby making it possible to distinguish whether or not incidents (and hence disputes) were reported in major newspapers, how often, and whether they were reported on page 1. Where specific page numbers were not included, we coded these incidents as being covered in the paper, but not on the first page.

We took these incident-level sources (over 6,000) and then aggregated them for each incident and for each dispute. Using this information we were able to construct four different measures of media coverage for participants in every dispute in the data set. All the measures are binary answers to the following questions:

Dispute level measures

1. Was the dispute covered in *The New York Times* at least two times?
2. Was the dispute covered in *The Times* at least two times?
3. Was the dispute covered on page 1 of *The New York Times*?
4. Was the dispute covered on page 1 of *The Times*?

The indicators of the frequency of coverage (numbers 1 and 2) are dichotomous, with one (1) representing disputes that had multiple incidents covered (at least two) in *The New York Times* or *The Times*, and zero (0) otherwise. Although there are certainly some disputes that achieve much higher levels of coverage than two, the number of disputes covered more than two times drops dramatically. We also opt to use two instead of one as the cutoff so as to differentiate the measure from the binary 'page 1' indicators (numbers 3 and 4).

The next two measures (numbers 3 and 4) of this first set simply represent whether the dispute made the front page of *The New York Times* or *The Times*. Front page coverage is particularly visible and is likely to have greater agenda-setting and priming effects than incidents that are covered farther back in the newspaper. Again, these are binary variables, with one (1) representing page 1 coverage, and (0) otherwise.

To establish inter-coder reliability we randomly selected 30 disputes from the MID and compared the MIDIP source coding against *The New York Times* archive. We checked whether or not the dispute was reported in *The New York Times* and whether or not it was found on page 1. Across our measures the codings were consistent, although not identical. Over 80 percent of the time when the MIDIP source measure coded a dispute as being covered we found corresponding evidence in *The New York Times* archive. Moreover, we did not find a single instance where a dispute was covered in *The New York Times* archive but MIDI did not list it as a source.

As an additional robustness check, we point to a procedure used by Miller and Albert (2015). As a way to check the MIDIP source coding of *The New York Times*, they estimated two separate probit models that predicted (1) whether or not a militarized interstate dispute would receive multiple coverage in *The New York Times*; or (2) whether or not a MID would be reported on page 1. From these probit models the predicted values were recovered, and based on those values they identified the 10 disputes (for each model) that the model predicted had the highest probability of being covered, but the MIDIP measure concluded otherwise. Each dispute was then checked against the actual *New York Times* archive using the ProQuest search engine. At least 80 percent (80%) of the time, when the model predicted that a dispute would be covered, but the MIDIP source coded otherwise, the ProQuest search concurred with the MIDIP source coding. Although MIDIP source may not be a perfect indicator of *The New York Times* or *The Times* coverage, it provides a relatively high degree of accuracy.

We also include several controls to help improve the robustness of our tests, and these are explained in the next section.

Controls

In order to maximize the comparability and replicability of our results we follow Weeks' (2008) specification (see Model 1 in Table 3 on p. 54) most closely. However, because of our relatively limited sample size we do not include all the variables. With the exception of the *democracy* indicators (see below), all measures were generated using the program *Eugene*, version 3.1 (Bennett and Stam, 2000).

The level of democracy of the initiator and target are both potential confounds for the effect of media coverage on target behavior in MIDs. To determine whether or not the initiator or target was *democratic*, we follow the procedure outlined in Schultz (2001b) and Weeks (2008), and employ a binary (1/0) measure. To be coded as democratic (1), the initiator/target had to have a Polity 2 score of 7 or higher for the three years before the year in which the dispute began; other characteristics are coded as zero (0).

Relative power_{target} is the target's share of the total initiator and target power, as measured by the Correlates of War National Material Capabilities index (target capabilities/[initiator + target capabilities]). *Contiguity* is dichotomous, with one (1) one representing dyads where the members are contiguous on land or across 400 miles of water at most; and (0) zero otherwise. *Alliance portfolio similarity* is the weighted global S score between the two states in the dyad. *Territory* is a dummy variable representing whether or not the dispute is over the issue of territorial revision. Summary statistics are presented in Table 1.

Empirical results

We begin with ordered logit models explaining target hostility levels. The results are presented in Table 2. In the top row, containing results for all four indicators of media coverage, higher levels of media coverage are associated with escalation by targets of MIDs. This is relatively strong support for H1, and suggests that those disputes that receive high levels of media coverage tend to lead to more hostile responses from targets. Contiguity and territorial issues both have a consistent, positive effect on the probability that the target escalates the dispute. None of the other controls have consistently significant effects across the models.

One objection to the estimates displayed in Table 2 is the possibility of reciprocal causation. In particular, it is fairly well established that violence (or a higher probability of violence) tends to attract greater media coverage (i.e. 'if it bleeds, it leads') (Hackett, 1989; Van Belle, 2000a), and therefore it may be the case that the coefficients for our media coverage variables in Table 2 are really capturing reverse effects: higher levels of violence may be attracting more media attention, and not the other way around.

To this end we explore two additional models, both of which are simultaneous models with endogenous regressors (Maddala, 1983). In order to accommodate the simultaneous probit models we transformed the original trichotomous *hostility* measure into a simple dichotomous (1/0) indicator of whether or not military *force* was used by the target.

Table 1. Summary statistics ($N = 333$).

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Hostility variables				
Hostility	.59	.84	0	2
Force	.23	.42	0	1
New York Times frequency	.11	.32	0	1
The Times frequency	.13	.34	0	1
Page 1 New York Times	.06	.24	0	1
Page 1 The Times	.05	.21	0	1
Democracy (initiator)	.31	.46	0	1
Democracy (target)	.25	.44	0	1
Relative power (target)	.43	.31	1E-3	.99
Alliance portfolio similarity	.70	.35	-.31	1
Territory	.32	.47	0	1
N = 357				
Media coverage variables				
Fatality (maximum)	.27	.85	0	6
Trade (logged)	9.5	3.1	0	13.7
US dummy	.32	.47	0	1

Table 2. Media coverage and target escalation, 1992–2001.

Media coverage measures				
Variables	<i>NY Times</i>	<i>The Times</i>	<i>NY Times</i>	<i>The Times</i>
	Frequency	Frequency	Page 1	Page 1
Media coverage	1.55*	1.27*	2.20*	1.31*
	(0.52)	(0.43)	(0.53)	(0.50)
Democracy (initiator)	-0.23	-0.14	-0.20	-0.18
	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.29)	(0.28)
Democracy (target)	-0.41	-0.53	-0.44	-0.50
	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.33)
Relative power	0.22	0.26	0.36	0.18
Target	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.42)	(0.40)
Contiguity	1.55*	1.46*	1.41*	1.39*
	(0.43)	(0.41)	(0.44)	(0.44)
Alliance	0.81	0.90	0.96*	0.76
	(0.57)	(0.56)	(0.55)	(0.54)
Territory	1.36*	1.33*	1.42*	1.36*
	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.29)	(0.28)
Log likelihood:	-261.20	-262.25	-259.72	-266.33
Pseudo R^2	.16	.16	.17	.14
N	357	357	357	357

Ordered logit models with *Hostility* as the dependent variable (with clustering by dispute and robust standard errors). Entries are coefficients with standard errors below them in parentheses. Starred coefficients (*) are significant at $p \leq .05$ (one-tailed).

Table 3. Simultaneous probit model with endogenous regressors using *New York Times* media coverage measures.

	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
Dependent: Force	Frequency	Page I coverage
Risk of media coverage	0.16*	0.14*
	(0.06)	(0.06)
Democracy (initiator)	0.02	0.11
	(0.19)	(0.20)
Democracy (target)	-0.28	-0.21
	(0.23)	(0.24)
Relative power (target)	-0.44	-0.37
	(0.29)	(0.29)
Contiguity	0.52*	0.44*
	(0.28)	(0.27)
Alliance portfolio similarity	0.77*	0.91*
	(0.31)	(0.32)
Territory	0.70*	0.65*
	(0.17)	(0.17)
Constant	-1.61*	-1.6*
	(0.32)	(0.30)
N	333	333
Log likelihood	-151.55	-135.50
McFadden R ²	.12	.21
Dependent: Media coverage	Frequency	Page I coverage
Risk of force	0.97*	1.18*
	(0.38)	(0.57)
Fatality	-0.11*	-0.20
	(0.2)	(0.20)
Trade	0.20*	0.002
	(0.10)	(0.13)
US dummy	2.22*	3.50*
	(0.72)	(1.10)
Constant	-2.68*	-1.81*
	(0.75)	(1.05)
N	333	319
Log likelihood	-91.33	-151.93
McFadden R ²	.47	.55

Entries are coefficients (with standard errors below) obtained from a simultaneous probit model with endogenous regressor using LIMDEP. Dependent variable in the top panel is **Force**, a dichotomous variable identifying whether or not the target use military force in the dispute. Dependent variable in the bottom panel is whether or not the dispute was covered by *The New York Times*.

We also restrict these models to *The New York Times* based media coverage variables. Given the consistency of these results we have no reason to believe that controls for potential endogeneity applied to *The Times* would produce appreciably different results.

The simultaneous probit models with endogenous regressors each rely on two equations (one for the reduced form model, one for the structural) for each of our dependent variables (Maddala, 1983). To conserve space, we use the general name ‘media coverage’ to represent both versions of coverage in the *New York Times*. We present simplified versions of the structural equations below:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Force} = & \text{Media coverage} + \text{Democracy}_{\text{initiator}} \text{Democracy}_{\text{target}} + \\ & \text{Relative power}_{\text{target}} + \text{Contiguity} + \text{Alliance similarity} + \text{Territory}. \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

There are two differences between the model presented above and the one employed in the ordered logit models. First, the dependent variable is dichotomous – whether or not military force was used by the target – whereas the model above employed a trichotomous version of the hostility indicator. Second, in the structural equation (1), *media coverage* is an endogenous regressor obtained from the reduced form of equation (2).

Our structural equation model for media coverage (2) draws on general research on the determinants of media coverage of foreign news (see, for example, Hackett, 1989; Van Belle, 2000; Wu, 2000).

$$\text{Media coverage} = \text{Force} + \text{Fatality} + \text{Total trade} + \text{US dummy}. \quad (2)$$

In this structural equation, *force* is an endogenous regressor obtained from the reduced form of equation 1 above; maximum *fatality* levels across *all original participants* in the dispute employs the MID ordinal scale, where 0 equals no fatalities and 6 represents disputes that resulted in over 999 deaths. This measure is included as a necessary control, since fatalities from other participants in the dispute are likely to increase media attention, independent of whether the media anticipates that the target will respond with force (the latter is captured by the endogenous regressor *force*). This, of course, is the famous ‘if it bleeds, it leads’ argument (Hackett, 1989; Van Belle, 2000a). *Trade* was found to have a positive and significant effect on whether an international incident was covered in print by Wu (2000, 2007), and therefore we include it as a control here. Total *trade* is the volume (in dollars, and logged to correct skew) of trade between the US and all other dispute participants (data are from Barbieri and Keshk, 2012).

Finally, we include a dummy variable for whether or not the MID involves the US (as originator or joiner) – *US dummy* – an obvious control given the location of *The New York Times*.

Our initial specification of equation (2) included two additional variables: the presence of news agencies from *The New York Times* in one of the originators (or its international edition, *The Herald Tribune*) (Wu, 2000, 2007) and distance from the US to the closest originator (coded as zero if the US was involved) (see Rosengren, 1977; Van Belle, 2000a; Wu, 2000). However, collinearity problems prevented proper model estimation with these indicators included. Alternating independent variables does not lead us to substantively different conclusions about the effects displayed in Table 3.

To conserve space, the models displayed in Table 3 are for the structural equations only. Thus, they contain estimates for the independent variables identified in equations (1) and (2). The results in Table 3 are unmistakable: even when sorting out endogeneity effects, media coverage has a positive, significant effect on the probability that targets employ military force. Once again, H1 enjoys consistent support. We do find evidence of reciprocal causation, however: the endogenous regressor of the risk of *force* is positive and significant – meaning, of course, that as the likelihood of the use of military force by the target increases, so does the likelihood of media coverage. However, it is not sufficiently powerful to eliminate the effect of media coverage on the probability that the target uses force. Continuing on to the control variables, we note that, although the estimate of *fatalities* in the MID runs contrary to expectations, this is not surprising considering the overlap between the endogenous regressor of the use of *force* and *fatalities*. We would expect that a greater probability of the use of military force by targets is collinear with dispute fatalities overall.

Conclusion

Our results suggest one clear conclusion: media coverage can have dangerous outcomes. It provides significant evidence that going public is serious business: once disputes are carried by major news outlets, the risk of escalation rises.

Where should we go next? If we are going to pursue media coverage and media exposure, studies of political communication have paved a clear way. How did Reagan earn the title ‘Teflon’ President? One answer may lie in how foreign policy behavior is *framed*. Schelling (1960) refers to this as casuistry, which Kirpichevsky and Lipsky (2007) define in very practical terms: ‘casuistry is nothing more than ex post rationalization, albeit with real consequences for the bargaining outcome.’ *What* was reported and *how* it was reported might be as important as *whether* it was reported. Therefore, a next logical step is to provide greater nuance to our indicator of media coverage. It is also worth pursuing greater variation in our dependent variable. Clearly the use of military force is an important consequence of foreign policy; however, current data sets like MID provide greater detail about the type of military force employed and this may produce meaningful results.

Finally, we only explore newspaper coverage. Although there is considerable overlap between internet and print sources (Wu, 2007), it may be the case that the speed provided by online news coverage has different implications than print reporting for the foreign policy behavior of states. Moreover, social media coverage can have significant consequences for foreign policy (Seib, 2008, 2012) and its effect on dispute behavior is worth exploring.

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2. We are grateful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this test.

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Appendix. Media coverage and target escalation, 1992–2001.

Variables	Media coverage measures			
	US excluded	UK excluded	US excluded	UK excluded
	<i>NY Times</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>NY Times</i>	<i>London</i>
	Frequency	Frequency	Page One	Page One
Media coverage	1.60* (0.51)	1.28* (0.43)	2.29* (0.56)	1.30* (0.50)
Democracy (initiator)	-0.08 (0.28)	-0.14 (0.28)	-0.04 (0.29)	-0.18 (0.28)
Democracy (target)	-0.49 (0.34)	-0.52 (0.33)	-0.53 (0.34)	-0.49 (0.33)
Relative power	0.12 (0.41)	0.28 (0.40)	0.25 (0.43)	0.19 (0.41)
Contiguity	1.52* (0.43)	1.46* (0.41)	1.37* (0.45)	1.38* (0.44)
Alliance	1.29* (0.57)	0.90 (0.56)	1.45* (0.52)	0.76 (0.54)
Territory	1.42* (0.29)	1.32* (0.28)	1.48* (0.30)	1.35* (0.28)
Log likelihood: -304.06		-262.02	-248.74	-266.20
Pseudo R ²	.18	.16	.18	.15
N	347	355	347	355

Ordered logit models with **Hostility** as the dependent variable (with clustering by dispute and robust standard errors). Entries are coefficients with standard errors below them in parentheses. Starred coefficients (*) are significant at $p \leq .05$ (one-tailed).