

Foreign Affairs and the Local Newsroom: Local Television News Coverage of the 2006 Lebanon War

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Abstract

While media are the primary sources of information about foreign events, we know very little about how local television news, the most frequently watched news in America, cover foreign events and how their coverage relate to public attitudes. In this paper we examine public attitudes about Israel and show that Americans who watch local news were more likely to support Israel in the 2006 Lebanon War. We suggest that this attitudinal gap can be explained by the nature of the local news coverage of foreign events. To test this, we apply Entman's framing functions to the local and network coverage of the war in Lebanon, and find that coverage of the War in the local newsrooms was significantly more supportive of the Israeli position. We propose that this difference is caused by features of local news such as economic and institutional constraints, as well as newsroom routines, which result in the tendency of the local media to comply with authorities' position.

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For many years the conventional wisdom was that the public has little, if any, knowledge about foreign affairs and, therefore, their attitudes about foreign policy are random (Lippman 1955, 1965; Neuman 1986; Powlick & Katz, 1998). This view has been challenged during the last decade by scholars who argue that while the information available to Americans may not be full, it is nonetheless sufficient for evaluating government actions. They contend that the scant information available to Americans is added to their existing political attitudes and predispositions to form meaningful preferences about foreign policies (Brewer et al., 2004; Holsti, 1996; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2004; Page & Bouton, 2006). To get this limited information on foreign affairs where non-mediated information is rarely available, Americans rely on mass media (Baum, 2003; Baum & Potter, 2008; Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston, 2007; Bennett & Paletz, 1994; Soroka, 2003).

Despite the important role of mass media in the formation of public attitudes about foreign policy, we know very little about what is covered by different media outlets and how that affects public attitudes. Several studies examine the coverage of foreign events on network, cable and print news, and compare the differences between these sources (Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston, 2007; Entman, 2004; Mermin, 1999). None of these studies, however, examine how local television news cover foreign events. This is surprising considering that there are more Americans who regularly watch local television news than any other singular news source – print, television or internet (Hale et al., 2007; Hamilton, 2005; Kaniss, 1991; McManus, 1994; Stevens et al., 2006). We address this by examining and comparing the local and network coverage of the war between Israel and Hezbollah during the summer of 2006.

The paper develops in four parts. In the first part we discuss existing literature about media coverage of foreign events and argue that by overlooking local television news, this body of work is missing an important source of news that reaches a significant number of Americans. In part two, we summarize the events of the war in Lebanon during the summer of 2006 and present evidence

that during the war there was a significant correlation between the news source and public attitudes about the actions of the Israeli military in Lebanon. We suggest that this difference is explained by the framing of the news on different media outlets. In the third part we test this proposition using our analysis of network and local television news coverage of the war. Our evidence indicates that the framing on local television news is substantively different than that on network television news. Mainly, we show that on local television news the framing of the war was more supportive of the Israeli military actions. In part four we conclude with a discussion of the causes for the differences found between local and network news.

Foreign Events and the News Media

Unlike domestic issues, foreign events have little impact on the daily lives of majority of Americans and therefore are rarely brought to their attention in their everyday activity. This is especially true when it comes to events which have little immediate impact on American interests – i.e., do not involve American troops or threaten commercial interests. In such a setting, the media are usually the sole sources of news about foreign events and policies. Given this powerful role in bringing information to the public, studies of media coverage of foreign events have focused on elite influence on the media. They find that news reports of foreign events are highly influenced by the political elite (see, for example, Bennett, 1990; Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston, 2007; Bennett & Paletz, 1994; Entman, 2004; Mermin, 1999; Wolfsfeld, 1997; Zaller & Chiu, 1996).

Bennett (1990) argues that journalists tend to index the range of viewpoints expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic. On foreign issues, where a debate among elites is usually missing, this range is narrower because journalists heavily rely on official sources. Bennett and colleagues (2007) find that American media make room for official positions from other nations when key political policy decisions drift into international institutions or into joint international

operations (e.g. the Gulf War). Thus, the positions of other nations are expressed in the media only when the U.S. government seeks the help of the international community in order to facilitate its policy.

Recent developments such as the formation of social ties between foreign correspondents and their foreign sources, the ability to employ new communication technologies to report instantly on events around the world, and the implementation of effective public relations systems by foreign nations, all work to widen the range of opinions expressed in the U.S. media. For example, Shafer and Gabay (2009) find that positions opposing views of the American elite may find their way into the American media more easily when the initiator of a specific event or policy is not the U.S. government. Such is the case with regards to the Israeli-Arab conflict in which the U.S. government is involved but American troops are not taking an active part.

These studies have focused predominately on print, network and cable news broadcasts thus neglecting one of the primary sources of news for most Americans: that is, local news. During the last decade about seventy-seven percent of Americans reported that they regularly watch local news, compared to sixty percent reporting watching nightly network news and fifty-eight percent reading newspapers. This rate has since declined, due in part to the increasing share of the cable and online news sources. Yet, in 2008 local television news has still remained the leading news source with fifty-two percent of Americans reporting that they regularly watch local news, more than ten percent higher than any other news source.²

Despite the fact that most Americans watch local television news, there has been no systematic study of local television news coverage of foreign policy issues (Pevehouse & Goldstein, 2005). This is surprising given our current understanding of the unique characteristics of the local

² In 2008 52% of Americans reported that they regularly watch local news, compared to 39% reporting that they regularly watch cable TV or 37% regularly searching for news over the internet. Pew Research Center Biennial News Consumption Survey, August 17, 2008.

newsroom. News reporters often rely on their affiliated networks as their main source of news when covering foreign events – taking segments of network news stories editing them and placing them in their reports. Yet, their coverage is not identical to the coverage on the networks, and is usually shorter and prone to factional report and little commentary.

Kaniss (1991) argues that the differences between local and network news is a consequence of time limitations characterizing the local newsroom. This leads local channels to shorten their coverage to factual information and avoid critique. McManus (1994) finds that this difference is caused by market forces curtailing the news on local channels. News is the local channels' primary source of profit and, therefore, investors and owners – who see the news as a commodity – prefer to exchange adversarial reporting with deference to the authorities' position. Finally, Eliasoph notes that the notion of an objective "balance," which constitute the representation of each side in the debate, is usually unwarranted in local newsrooms. She documents that in the local newsroom "reporters assume that most everyday stories [are] straightforward, not full of opinions and choices for framing, not really need of analysis" (Eliasoph, 1998: 224). We assess these explanations by examining the television news coverage of the war in Lebanon during the summer of 2006, decidedly not a local issue and without direct involvement of American troops.

The 2006 Lebanon war

The *2006 Lebanon War* refers to the military conflict between Israel and Hezbollah during July and August of 2006.³ The war started on July 12 with a Hezbollah attack on a routine border patrol which resulted in three casualties, two wounded soldiers, and two soldiers captured and taken to Lebanon (later declared dead after Israel negotiated a prisoner swap in July 2008, and the

³ The War is referred differently by Arab countries and Israel. In Israel the War is called the *Second Lebanon War* thus contrasting it from the "First Lebanon War" of 1982. In Lebanon, and most Arab countries it is known as the *July War*.

remaining of the two soldiers were brought back to Israel). Israel responded with massive air strikes and artillery fire on military and civilian targets in Lebanon, resulting in severe damage to Lebanese civic infrastructure, the death of over a thousand people and the displacement of approximately a million Lebanese. These massive attacks, however, did not stop Hezbollah's fire on Israeli cities reaching as far as Haifa, the third largest city in Israel, and Hadera, only thirty miles from Tel-Aviv. Approximately half a million Israeli civilians left their homes and moved to the southern parts of the country. Failing to stop the rocket fire with only air strikes and artillery fire, Israel then deployed its defense forces to a ground operation into Lebanon thus encountering guerrilla warfare with Hezbollah.

The war ended with the UN Resolution 1701 (August 11) that called for the disarmament of Hezbollah, the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, and the deployment of UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) forces, reinforced by French, German and Indonesian soldiers and equipment, to monitor the southern part of Lebanon along with the Lebanese army. The Lebanese Army entered the area a week later followed by the UN forces; and by October all Israeli troops vacated Lebanon. According to the UN, the war resulted in hundreds of casualties on both sides, and an extensive damage to civilian infrastructure.⁴

At the outbreak of the war, Israel enjoyed strong international support for exercising its right for self-defense. As the war progressed, however, Israeli offensive military actions raised concerns by the international community and deteriorated their initial support. The critique of Israel's actions have substantially intensified after an Israeli air strike on a school in the town of Kana resulting in twenty-eight casualties, sixteen of which were children (July 30). In contrast to the international community, the United States had continuously supported the Israeli actions. Following the outbreak of the war, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution (S. Res 534; July 18 2006) condemning

⁴ According to UN Resolution 1701 (2006). <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8808.doc.htm>

Hezbollah and supporting the right of Israel for self-defense. The U.S. Congress also approved the request of the Bush Administration to authorize expedited shipment of military supply including precision-guided bombs. And, the United States blocked UN attempts to condemn Israel or impose a solution not accepted by the Israeli government.⁵

Public Attitudes about the War

The American public opinion during these events has been very supportive of the Israeli position. Overall, most Americans supported the Israeli use of force and, to a great extent, condemned Hezbollah's actions. For example, two weeks into the War, a Gallup poll showed that seventy-six percent of respondents blamed Hezbollah for the military escalation in the region (Gallup; July 21-23, 2006). Ten days later – and just a couple of days after the disastrous attack on Kana – a CNN poll showed that sixty-eight percent of Americans sympathized with Israel compared to only six percent sympathizing with Hezbollah (CNN; August 2-3, 2006). A Pew survey conducted during the final days of the war (August 9-13) showed that the majority of Americans (65%) viewed Israel's military actions as appropriate.⁶

This strong support follows a broader trend of American attitudes about the Arab-Israeli conflict showing greater sympathy with the Israeli cause. Figure 1 illustrates this by plotting of the

⁵ The support Israel received from the administration during the war in Lebanon joins a broader tendency of American governments to support Israel (Organski, 1990: 44). This tendency has only intensified in recent years due to the American efforts to build a coalition for the invasion of Iraq and the attempt to justify their actions there. Freedman finds that the shared fears against the rise of fundamentalist Islamic movements, the growing power of Iraq and Iran, and the fear of terror have made it difficult for the Bush administration to critique the Israeli actions in the region (Freedman, 2008). Similarly, large majorities in both houses of Congress argued that Israel is fighting terrorism just as the United States is doing in Afghanistan and Iraq. Secretary of State, Colin Powell in a speech delivered at Princeton University on February 2004, acknowledged the difficulties United States has in pressing Israel: "It is difficult for us...to put this kind of pressure on the Israeli side as long as terrorism us seen as a legitimate political act on the part of the Palestinians. It is not—it can't be, not in this post 9/11 age" (quoted from Freedman 2008, p. 297).

⁶ USA Today/Gallup poll, July 21-23, 2006. National adult sample, N=1105.

CNN poll conducted by Opinion Research Corporation, August 2-3, 2006. National adult sample, N=1047.

Pew Research Center Poll: August News Interest Index. Princeton Survey Research Associates International, sponsored by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, August 9-13, 2006. National adult sample, N=1506.

public response to the following question: “In the middle East situation, are your sympathies more with Israel or more with the Arab nations/Palestinians?” As the figure illustrates, throughout the last four decades nearly two thirds of Americans have sympathized more with Israel compared with Arab nations or the Palestinians.⁷

[Figure 1 about here]

To further assess the determinants of support for Israel during the events in Lebanon, we examine the public support for Israel’s military actions as recorded in a Pew survey run during the final days of the war (August 9-13).⁸ The advantage of this survey is that it includes multiple questions pertaining to general attitudes about the Israel-Arab conflict, and, in the interest of this paper, several items referring to news consumption of respondents.

The variable of interest is public support for the military action of the Israeli forces. This was asked using two interchangeable items summing up to a response rate of eighty-one percent (1227 of 1506 total respondents). Table 1 summarizes the response to these two items. To combine Q65f1 and Q66f2 we recode the latter following the binary structure of Q65f1. We, therefore, define our dependent variable as a binary variable where approval of the military actions of Israel is recorded as 1 and disapproval as 0, leaving out all respondents who refused to answer. Q66f2 is recorded as 1 if respondents indicated that Israel has “not gone far enough” or was “about right” – both indicating a support for Israel’s military actions. While merging the two questions raises some problems, we believe that it is reasonable to assume that individuals who thought that

⁷ Based on 41 surveys between 1967 and 2007 (Gallup, Roper, ABC, CBS, NYT, Pew) all asking an almost identical question: “In the middle East situation, are your sympathies more with Israel or more with the Arab nations/Palestinians?” see also Krosnick & Telhami, 1995, Mayer, 2004, and Organski, 1990.

⁸ Pew Research Center Poll: August News Interest Index. Princeton Survey Research Associates International, sponsored by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, August 9-13, 2006. National adult sample, N=1506.

Israel's actions were about right or not enough would have likely selected to approve the military actions of Israel had they been asked this question.

Several explanatory variables are included in a logistic model of the public support. First, studies have shown that religion is an important factor in understanding public opinion about U.S. foreign policy in the region (Holsti, 1996; Mayer, 2004; Page and Bouton, 2006) and that a substantial minority of the American public views the state of Israel through a religious lens (Pew Research Center, August 24, 2006). We therefore include an indicator of self identified Born Again Christians ($M=.40$). We expect that people who identify themselves as born again will be more supportive of the military actions.

Second, Page and Bouton (2006) point to Americans' general view of Israel as a Middle Eastern outpost of western culture, free enterprise and democracy. We instrument this by including an indicator for attitudes regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We expect that people who support the Israeli position in this broader conflict will also be more likely to support the Israeli actions in Lebanon (Support for Israel. $M=.60$).

Third, the attention given to the country and the interest Americans have in Israel looms large. A Pew News Interest Index from 2004 indicates that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is among the top issues of interest to Americans, reaching highs of more than thirty percent interest. This is also reflected in the massive attention given by the media to the Israeli-Arab conflict (Gilboa, 1987; Cavari & Unger-Cavari, 2006). To account for the possible effect of the media, we include a measure of media attention, instrumented by an indicator for the extent to which people follow the reports on the event (1 if "follow"; 0 otherwise. $M=.49$). Following our discussion of the media coverage of foreign affairs, we expect that these news stories would overwhelmingly express the favorable position of the administration.

In addition to the attention indicator, we include variables that account for the source of information from which respondents get their national and international news. The Pew News Interest Index Survey routinely asks respondents to note where they have been getting most of their news about national and international issues from. In the 2006 August survey the majority of respondents noted television news as their primary source (62 percent), followed by newspapers (16 percent), internet (11 percent) and radio (8 percent). We, therefore, include indicators for the three most popular news sources among Americans – television news, newspapers, and internet – leaving radio listeners and other smaller categories together as a reference.

Finally, we also include several control variables – education (ordinal. four education groups. $M=2.89$), age (ordinal. four age groups. $M=2.7$), gender (Male. $M=.47$), race (White. $M=.85$), and party (Republican. $M=.48$). These control variables are extremely important because it is likely that the news sources would pick up demographic variance rather than point to the relationship between the news source and public attitudes.

The logistic regression estimates, presented in Table 2, support the existing explanations to Americans support of Israel's actions. Religion, support for Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as attention to the issue, all had a positive and significant effect on approval of the military actions of the Israeli forces in Lebanon. Taking advantage of the binary independent variables and the tractable form of the logit model we calculate the odds ratios (probability) of the parameters in the model. For a unit change in each parameter, the odds of support for Israel's actions are changed by the factor listed in column 2. The interpretation is simple because the effect of a unit change in each variable on the logit does not depend on the level of the variable or on the level of any other variable (Long, 1997: 79-82). The probability of support for Israeli actions for born-again Christians ($BORN=1$) is 1.43 times that of those who are not self identified as born-again Christians, or in other words, born-again Christians are 1.43 times more likely to support Israel's actions. Not

surprisingly, the support for the Israel's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is outstanding. Respondents who were supportive of Israel were five times as likely to support Israeli actions in Lebanon compared to those opposing the Israeli side in this conflict. The effect of attention to the issue is smaller, yet significant.

Surprisingly, the media sources showed no significant effect in our initial model. To further test this relationship we separated television news audiences into three groups based on their main television source (outlet) for news about national and international affairs. These groups include local television news, the three network news (ABC, CBS, NBC), and each of the main cable news networks (CNN, MSNBC, Fox, and CNBC). The survey allows for multiple responses yet we record only the first response. While this significantly reduces the group of local news viewers, who do not necessarily watch local news as their primary source of news, it ensures that each "television-group" is best represented by the people who mostly rely on that source. Some respondents may regularly rely on more than one television newscast and therefore may be strongly influenced by more than one source. Yet, by including only the first response we follow the individual's own ordering of their sources of news and thus ensure that our measure will minimize measurement error.

Table 3 summarizes the support of these four television groups to the actions of the Israeli military in Lebanon: local news, network news, Fox news, and the three other cable television networks (CNN, MSNBC and CNBC). The differences are remarkable. Viewers of Fox news have been the most supportive group followed by those regularly watching local news. Viewers of the Network news and the three other cable networks have been the least supportive. The high support of the local news viewers is even more striking when compared with the preferences of the four television groups regarding the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians. While all four groups are more supportive of the Israeli actions in Lebanon than they are of the Israel position in the

broader Middle East conflict, the difference is most substantive for those who report that local news is their primary source of news.

[Table 3 about here]

This difference holds even when a more rigorous analysis is applied. In a second logit model (Table 2, columns 3 and 4), we include specific indicators for each group of television viewers: local, network and the two cable news. We find a strong effect for all television sources. Americans who report that local news or Fox news are their primary news source on national and international news are almost twice as likely to support the Israeli actions in Lebanon, whereas Americans who are tuned to network or the three other cable news are only sixty percent as likely to support the Israeli actions.

While the association between the news source and attitudes towards the Israeli actions are strong and significant, the data do not allow us to draw a causal relationship between the news source and the attitudes on the issue. We can only hypothesize about the nature for this significant relationship. One plausible explanation is that the people who watch local news are different in a way that also affects their support of Israel. This, however, is not supported by our evidence showing that the effect of local news was strong and positive while controlling for demographic and political differences among the public. Furthermore, studies have shown that there are little demographic and political differences between local and network news viewers (Pew Research Center Biennial News Consumption Survey). Therefore, for the argument that local news viewers are inherently different from other news consumers to hold, one must argue that people who watch local news differ in ways that are not related to the demographic or political differences we control

for: party identification, religious affiliation and practice, education level and race, gender and age. We find no theoretical basis for such a difference and thus find this argument difficult to sustain.⁹

We suggest that the difference in support can be explained by the framing of the issue on local news, which influences how the viewers respond to foreign events. This proposition is supported by Zaller's Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model. Zaller argues that the effect of available information is not a uniform one. Individuals with moderate amount of political awareness will be more likely to be persuaded by political messages compared to individuals whose political awareness is very low or very high: individuals with low levels of political awareness are less likely to understand the political messages, and individuals with high levels of awareness have sufficient contextual information to comprehend the relationship of the messages to their predispositions and thus are able to resist them. We examine education as our proxy for political awareness and find strong differences between local and network audiences that are likely to be receptive to the political message¹⁰.

In each of our four education groups – no high school diploma, high school diploma, some post graduate education, and college graduates or more – more people approved the Israeli actions than not. Yet, the size of the gap between approval and disapproval was not uniform across education levels and across audiences of local and network news. Concurring with the RAS model, the least educated and most educated groups were remarkably similar across television audiences, indicating that the attitudes of these groups are not affected by the information they receive. In contrast, the two intermediate education groups, who are most likely to be influenced by the

⁹ When we replace the attention indicator with an indicator for following the news on Iraq, the latter variable is not significant and our variables of interest are not substantively altered. This, together with our control for level of education, confirms that the effect of attention to news about the War in Lebanon is not capturing attitudes of less sophisticated respondents whose answer may reflect their acquiescence with this complex foreign issue rather than thoughtful opinions.

¹⁰ Our data did not include other measurements of political awareness such as prior levels of general political knowledge (see also Price and Zaller, 1993).

message, follow a very different pattern of support among local and network news audiences. Of those who regularly watch local news, the gap is approximately fifty percentage points. Of those who regularly watch network news, the gap is only twenty points. This indicates that the difference in approval of Israel actions in Lebanon between local and network news viewers is among the moderately aware individuals, those who are the most susceptible to media messages.

Framing of the War

To illustrate how local and network news covered the war differently, consider the events on July 20. During the night between the 19 and 20, the Israel air force launched a massive air strike on Beirut, including heavily bombarding a site which was believed to be the hiding place of Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah (he later held a press conference thus signaling that he was not hurt). The following morning Israel launched its first massive ground invasion into Lebanon. That day Hezbollah launched approximately forty rockets into Israel, down from the average of 150 rockets a day.

Now consider the striking differences between the news coverage of this day on national news (ABC) and on a local channel newscast (ABC, Chicago). The report on the network begins with images from the airstrike in Beirut. Anchor Charles Gibson turns to an ABC reporter in Beirut to describe what he calls "Israel's biggest air strike yet." Under the title "The War Zone," the ABC reporter describes the "twenty-three tons of thunder - from the pilot's vantage point. This is what it looks like on the ground, an urban wasteland." The first picture is taken from an Israeli airplane and shows a hit on a bunker. This is followed with images of a heavily ruined area and a Lebanese citizen shouting to everyone to escape because another Israeli warplane circles overhead. Then a clip of the reporter interviewing the foreign editor of Al Manar (Hezbollah TV) is shown. The ABC reporter then brings the viewers into a hospital and the camera focuses on an eight-year-old girl with

burns over her entire body. The reporter mentions that the girl “lost her parents. Her doctors do not even know her name.” A Lebanese citizen is interviewed saying “it's torture. I mean if - when you have kids, it's terrible. It's terrible.” Charles Gibson now turns to the ABC reporter in Haifa, Israel. The reporter describes Israeli forces moving across the border in Lebanon. An interview of an Israeli journalist and a Middle East analyst about the risks of a ground invasion into Lebanon is then shown.

Following the ground report, Charles Gibson turns to address the search for diplomatic solutions. Gibson mentions that UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan “told the UN Security Council that both sides are to blame. But he seemed to signal out Israel for how it is conducting its offensive.” Secretary General Annan is shown in an address to the UN council saying that: “While Hezbollah's actions are deplorable, and as I've said Israel has a right to defend itself, the excessive use of force is to be condemned. And Israel's disproportionate use of force and collective punishment of the Lebanese people must stop.” This is then followed by the a clip of Ambassador of Israel’s address to the council: “When you operate on a cancerous growth, you do not stop in the middle, sew the patient up and tell him, keep living with that growth until it kills you. You make sure it's totally removed”. The camera is back to Gibson, who moves on to other news items.

The report on the ABS channel in the Chicago media market is quite different. The ABC local news anchor begins the story with a report on the increased calls by the international community for a cease fire, but mentions that the US is “staunchly standing up for Israel right to defend itself from terrorism.” Pictures of Israeli soldiers entering Lebanon are the first images broadcasted. ABC local news anchor states that “Israel said it has no intention for occupying the country.” This is followed by the images from the Israeli airplane but with no images of the ground devastations or of the wounded. The anchor mentions that “Hezbollah is organizing a press tour to show what was left after the raid,” but there are no pictures taken from the press tour. The anchor

then states the call by Kofi Annan for a cease fire, but he does not mention Annan criticizing Israel and there are no images of Annan speaking directly to the council. The segment of the Israeli Ambassador addressing the council using his metaphor of a cancer disease, however, is included in the news story.

Americans tuned to one of these television images may reach a diametrically different conclusion regarding the conflict. Specifically, it seems safe to conclude that the events as reported on the network may indicate that Israel is acting in aggression whereas the local television news seems to emphasize Israel's right for self defense. Based on the evidence presented above, we investigate a possible influence of the local news by comparing the local and network news coverage of the Lebanon War. We expect that this comparison would reveal that there is a systematically different framing of the news in local versus network news. Specifically, that coverage on local news channels would be more supportive of Israel's military actions in Lebanon.

Data

Despite the importance of local television news in the American public sphere, very few studies have examined the content of coverage on these newscasts. To a great extent, this is due to the lack of a comprehensive local television news archive. We take advantage of a dataset available from the News Lab Project at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which archived local television news in the Midwest during 2006.

Given that our data were limited to only Midwest markets, we focus only on the Chicago media market. This media market is the third largest media market in the nation, and was found by previous studies to have substantial and consistent coverage of the events in the region (Cavari and Unger-Cavari, 2006).¹¹ Furthermore, with regards to the Middle East conflict, the audience in this

¹¹ In contrast, the Detroit media market, the eleventh biggest market in the nation, covered only the Palestinian elections without any reference to the disengagement from Gaza.

media market also seems to be a balanced one. Chicago has long been the home for a large Jewish population, a popular immigration city for Jewish Israelis and has become one of the main centers of the Palestinian immigrant community in the United States.

Included in our data are all evening newscasts of two networks – ABC and NBC – from July 12 to August 16, and all late night newscasts on the four main local channels in the Chicago media market – ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC - from July 17 to August 16.¹² From these newscasts all stories (N=316) covering the war were extracted for our coding analysis.¹³

As expected, the conflict was widely covered on both local and network television news, yet more stories were broadcasted on network news. Table 4a further indicates that on average each story on network news (133 seconds) was more than fifty percent longer than the average length of story on local news (82 seconds). The salience of the war in the news coverage on both local and network news was high, airing the majority of the stories in the first ten minutes of the broadcast. Nonetheless, network news also gave more salience to the issue (Table 4b). Twenty one percent of the stories on network news were lead stories, compared to only six percent of the stories in local news.

[Tables 4a and 4b about here]

To further test the difference in the framing of the war we rely on Entman's definition of framing as "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman, 2004, p. 5). According to Entman, substantive frames carry out at least two of the following framing functions when covering political events, issues, and actors: defining conditions as

¹²Local media coverage during the first five days of the War was not available. The results are not changed when we analyze the data using only the period in which we have data for both local and network news. See appendix for a more detailed discussion of these data limitations.

¹³ A total of 316 news stories were extracted from these newscasts: ABC, N=107; NBC, N=101; WLS_ABC, N=28; WMAQ_NBC, N=22; WBBM_CBS, N=25; and WFLD_FOX, N=33.

problematic, identifying causes, moral judgment and endorsing a remedy or improvements. Each of these four functions helps to sustain the others, thus creating a cultural logic that has the capacity to stimulate support or opposition to the sides in a political conflict (Entman, 2004, p. 6). For example, in a study on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict Sheaffer and Gabay (2009) find that frames supporting Israel typically defined the problem as Palestinian terrorism; the cause, the Palestinian authority and the Hamas; the moral judgment, condemnation of these agents as terrorists/evil; and the initial remedy as Palestinian concessions and/or war against terrorism. On the other hand, frames that supported the Palestinian side usually defined the problem as the Israeli occupation; the cause, the Israeli government and the Israeli military; the moral judgment, criticizing these agents as the aggressor/evil; and the remedy as Israeli concessions.

Based on Entman's framing functions we created a detailed code book for our frame analysis. The unit of analysis is a complete news item and can include all framing functions, some or none. Two coders were trained for several sessions before conducting the content analysis. An inter-coder reliability test showed a Cohen's kappa of at least .78 (40 news items compared).

Results

We find strong support for our expectations on all four framing functions – namely, that local news coverage of the war was significantly more supportive of the Israeli position compared to network news coverage (for analysis that compares between each of the four local news channels see appendix). Not every single story in the data expressed a clear frame. However three of the four frame functions were expressed in most of the news stories, only the framing function which define solution to the problem was articulated in less than fifty percent of the news stories. Due to their relatively extensive length, network news stories presented, on average, more frame functions compared to local stories.

As Table 5 illustrates, the definition of the problem on local news was clearly biased in favor of Israel, whereas the network news seemed to project a balanced view. While a small majority of the broadcasts on network news (53.2 percent) defined the problem as Israeli aggressiveness, only forty percent of the local news broadcasts defined the problem in the same terms. In contrast, sixty percent of the local news broadcasts defined the conflict as Hezbollah aggressiveness.¹⁴ The difference between the two groups is statistically significant (Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=270) = 3.829$, $p=0.050$). Similar patterns are found when comparing the identification of the causes to the conflict (table 6). While network news stories were relatively balanced, with a slightly more emphasis on Israeli actions as responsible for the conflict, a large volume of local news stories found Hezbollah to be the primary cause of the war. This difference is also statistically significant (Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=264) = 6.049$, $p=0.014$).

[Tables 5 and 6 about here]

The moral judgment function allows for a measurement of the way the Hezbollah's and Israel's actions are portrayed by each source (i.e., local and network television news) on a moral—immoral scale (+3 to -3 scale). Figure 2 plots the error bars (two standard deviations above and below the mean) for the moral judgment frame. Local television news tended to frame Israel as moral ($M=0.28$, $SD=1.360$), while network news portrayed Israel as immoral ($M= -0.58$, $SD= 1.686$). The difference between the two groups is statistically significant ($t= 4.249$). The message dominating the actions taken by Israel in local news was the right of Israel to defend itself and the belief that Israel has no choice but to win this war (imposed on Israel by the Hezbollah). Conversely, Israel was typically portrayed as the aggressor in network news, which often used words

¹⁴ It is important to note that the importance of problem definition lies in its ability to often predetermine the rest of the frame (Entman, 2004 p. 6). In other words, by defining the problem as Hezbollah attacks, other frame functions are more likely to put the blame on the Hezbollah and to present it as the villain, formulating a local news frame that is more sympathetic with the Israeli position.

such as ‘bombardment,’ ‘crippled,’ ‘demoralized,’ ‘seizure,’ and ‘targeting bridges and food reserves’ to describe the actions of the Israeli military. Similarly, although both network and local framing of the war presented the actions of Hezbollah as immoral, the image of these actions was significantly less moral on local news (Local: $M = -1.76$, $SD = 0.711$. Network: $M = -1.38$, $SD = 0.732$). The image of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization was more common in local news compared to network news. The latter, in contrast, used the term ‘militia’ when referring to Hezbollah, and emphasized their lack of specific targets or aiming capability when shooting at Israel.

[Figure 2 about here]

Next, we compared how network and local television news differ in their discussion of the solutions for ending the conflict. During the war, several solutions were suggested by different actors involved in the conflict. Among the solutions that were featured in the news were: total defeat of the Hezbollah, immediate withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, immediate ceasefire, US intervention without further elaboration on its role, and the deployment of UN or International Peace Corps to the region with or without the disarming Hezbollah. The majority of these solutions were covered by the news reports. We collapsed these solutions into two groups. The first follows the Israeli position (at least at the start of the war) which is the disarmament of Hezbollah in accordance with the 1559 resolution. The second includes different kinds of suggested remedies, none of which involve disarming of Hezbollah. We then compare how these two groups were reported on local and network news broadcasts (Table 7).¹⁵ Although most of the stories by both local and network news suggested solutions in which Hezbollah is not disarmed, local news coverage was more likely to discuss a disarmament solution (46 percent of all news stories on local news compared to 31 percent of all news stories on network news). Despite the fact that only about one

¹⁵ More than fifty percent of the stories (173 cases) did not mention any solution to the problem.

half of the stories mentioned any solution to the problem, the difference between the framing function of each television source is significant (Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=143) = 3.529, p=0.06$).

[Table 7 about here]

Discussion

The results of our comparison of all four frame functions support our hypothesis: local news coverage of the war was more supportive of the Israeli position compared to network news coverage. This difference, we suggest, can be explained by the nature of the local newsroom.

First, Table 2 indicates that the time devoted for the news coverage of the event was significantly shorter on local news. Kaniss (1991) suggests that this may be a consequence of the time constraints in local news that limits the capacity of local reporters to express critique. Table 8 supports this claim by summarizing an average newscast breakdown of local news during the last two months of the 2004 election campaign. More than half of the airtime was devoted to advertising (29.5 percent) and sports and weather (21.2 percent), thus leaving very little time for coverage of foreign affairs. During these last months of the presidential and congressional campaign, only three minutes were devoted to the elections and the war in Iraq was covered on average for only twenty-eight seconds.

[Table 8 about here]

A second source of difference between local and network television news coverage is the tendency of local channels to defer to authorities' position. McManus (1994) argues that this is caused by market forces curtailing the news on local channels. News is the local channels' primary source of profit and, therefore, investors and owners – who see the news as a commodity – have significant interest in its content and prefer to exchange adversarial reporting with deference to the authorities' position. An institutional explanation to this argument views the limited resources as the

reason for this difference in local reporting. Local journalists tend to depend on easily accessible sources and to heavily rely on routine news channels such as press releases, wire services and other local television or newspapers in their area (Berkowitz, 1987; Kaniss, 1991). This is especially true when covering international news stories, where there are very few foreign correspondents and limited direct access to sources.

The deference to government' position is supported by our data. Figure 3 shows that While US officials appeared in almost half of the local news stories, they appeared on just more than a quarter of all network news stories (Pearson χ^2 (1, N=316) = 11.535, p=0.01).¹⁶ Coverage of government statements supporting Israel was significantly higher on local news with twenty two percent of all local news stories including at least one government statement supporting Israel, compared to only eight percent of all network stories. This difference, illustrated in Figure 4, is statistically significant (Pearson χ^2 =13.575).

[Figures 3 & 4 about here]

Finally, we examine the argument put forward by Eliasoph (1998) that the notion of balance reporting is not as strong as in network television. To assess this argument we use our code sheet to analyze all messages of the President (N= 37) and the Secretary of State (N= 40) during the same time period (thirty items were coded by two coders for reliability tests, showing at least .84 Cohen's kappa).¹⁷ All but one of the US government messages and statements defined Hezbollah as the aggressor and its attacks as the main problem in the conflict. By using these statements as the primary focus of the local news, the local news coverage is inevitably more supportive of Israel.

¹⁶ While local news gave relatively more room to US officials than network news, the results are different when examining the appearance of Israeli officials in the news. Israeli officials appeared on 24 percent of all local news stories about the war, as well as on 27 percent of all the network news stories covering the war.

¹⁷ Available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.whitehouse.gov> and <http://www.state.gov>

Conclusion

Local news coverage is the main source of information for most Americans and, thus should be considered as a key factor in shaping public opinion about national and international events. Despite this fact, most studies of media and public opinion examined only national – cable or network – television news. This is partly explained by the scant access to data on local television. Nonetheless, as our evidence shows, the differences between the local and network newsrooms are significant. This, we argue warrants a closer look at the sources from which Americans receive their information about events of national interest.

We argue that the importance of local news is key for understanding the information Americans receive about foreign events. On those issues the public is, to a great extent, in the hands of the media to frame their understanding of the events. Our regression analysis of the August 2006 Pew survey reveals that the news source matters. After accounting for existing explanations about Americans' support towards Israel and controlling for the usually suspected demographic factors, each news source was still a significant predictor of public support for Israel's actions.

Our examination of the local news coverage of the War in Lebanon during the summer of 2006 showed that coverage on local news was different than network news. The four framing functions were significantly more supportive of Israel in the local news, compared to network news. We suggest that this can be explained by the characteristics of local news room and the consequential proximity of the local news report with the declared position of the US government. The framing on local news tended to echo US government position, thus supporting Israel's actions during the war. Network news, on the other hand, gave room for challenging voices thereby producing frames which were less supportive of Israel's actions. Institutional problems, such as lack of resources and a short supply of beat journalists, as well as a different type of journalism culture –

one that is not accentuating on balance, debate and a desire for objectivity –all may explain the differences presented here between local and network news.

The local newsroom seems to lack the ability and will to challenge government's official position and tend to accept it. Yet, journalists have a crucial function in maintaining a wide and diverse public sphere. It is their duty to be suspicious of official sources and to allow access to different, challenging view points, thereby, fostering a genuine debate that provides the knowledge necessary for citizens to make up well informed decisions. Journalists' practice becomes even more important when reporting on foreign affairs, where citizens rely almost exclusively on their tales.

The limitations of our study, however, should be noted. Our data of local news include only the Chicago Market, which may have had a unique framing of the event. Moreover, our study is based on one particular event, the 2006 Lebanon war, which may have been a unique event in its coverage and framing. Other international events may show different outcomes. Nonetheless, the findings here suffice to argue that when examining media coverage of foreign events, scholars should acknowledge the important differences media outlets may have. Most significantly, scholars should consider the unique coverage of the local newsroom.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1: Two Pew Question of Public Support for Israel's Military Actions in Lebanon

Question	Response
<p><u>Q65f1:</u> Do you approve or disapprove of the military action Israel has taken in Lebanon?</p>	<p>(1) Approve – 342 (47%) (2) Disapprove – 240 (33%) (3) DK/Refused – 149 (20%)</p>
<p><u>Q66f2:</u> What do you think about the way Israel is responding in the current conflict with Hezbollah militants in Lebanon? Has Israel gone too far, not gone far enough, or has Israel's response been about right?</p>	<p>(1) Gone too far – 184 (28%) (2) Not far enough – 124 (16%) (3) About right – 337 (43%) (4) DK/Refused – 130 (17%)</p>
<p>Dependent Variable – Approve Israeli Actions (two questions combined; dropping DK/Refused)</p>	<p>(0) No – 424 (35%) (1) Yes – 803 (65%)</p>

Table 2: Support for Israel's actions in Lebanon

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Basic Model		Television Model	
Born Again	0.356** (.171)	1.43	0.328** (.175)	1.39
Support Israel	1.598*** (.162)	4.95	1.622*** (.167)	5.01
Follow the News	0.291* (.163)	1.34	0.337** (.167)	1.40
Republican	0.706*** (.167)	2.03	0.580*** (.171)	1.79
Male	0.277* (.161)	1.32	0.308* (.165)	1.36
Age	0.0649 (.088)		0.049 (.089)	
White	0.595*** (.219)	1.81	0.610*** (.224)	1.84
Education	-0.0570 (.087)		-0.082 (.089)	
Newspapers	0.124 (.304)		-0.089 (.255)	
Internet	0.0421 (.347)		-0.244 (.317)	
Television	0.169 (.259)			
Local TV			0.666* (.370)	1.95
Network TV			-0.502* (.269)	.61
Cable: Fox			.602 (.315)	1.83
Cable: CNN, MSNBC, CNBC			-0.548 (.244)	.58
_cons	-1.472*** (.47)		-1.073*** (.461)	
<i>N</i>	943		943	

Note. Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 3: Attitudinal differences among the four television groups

	Approve Military Actions in Lebanon			Sympathize with Israel in the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians:		
	yes	no	N	yes	no	N
Local News	70%	30%	102	38%	62%	151
Network News	59%	41%	269	49%	51%	341
<u>Cable:</u>						
Fox	87%	13%	208	73%	27%	236
CNN, MSNBC, CNBC	60%	40%	264	53%	47%	320
Total	65%	35%	1227	53%	47%	1506

Table 4a: Air time (in seconds) of war coverage in Network and local news broadcasts

	Air Time				
	N	Average	Maximum	Minimum	SD
Network	208	133	238	21	40
Local	108	82	193	14	47

Table 4b: Position of the story in Network and local news broadcasts

Position of story in the broadcast	Network (%)	Local (%)
Lead story	21	6
First ten minuets	65	53
Remaining of the broadcast	14	41
	100	100
	N=208	108

Table 5: Definition of the problem in Network and local news coverage

Problem	Network (%)	Local (%)
Israeli attacks	53.2	40.2
Hezbollah attacks	46.8	59.8
	100	100
	N=188	82

Note. Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=270) = 3.829$ ($p=0.050$)

Table 6: Responsibility for the problem in Network and local news coverage

Responsibility	Network (%)	Local (%)
Israeli	53.8	37.2
Hezbollah	46.2	62.8
	100	100
	N=186	78

Note. Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=264) = 6.049$ ($p=0.014$)

Table 7: Solution to the problem in Network and local news coverage

Solution	Network (%)	Local (%)
Disarmament of Hezbollah	31.1	46.4
Hezbollah not disarmed	68.9	53.6
	100	100
	N=74	69

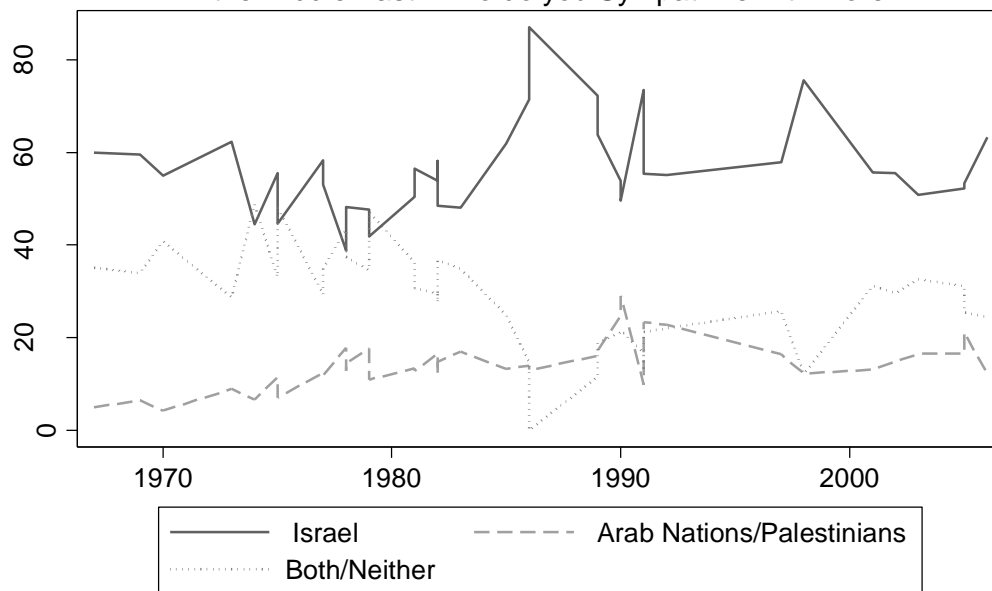
Note. Pearson $\chi^2(1, N=143) = 3.529$ ($p=0.06$)

Table 8: Average Newscast breakdown of Local News during the 2004 campaign

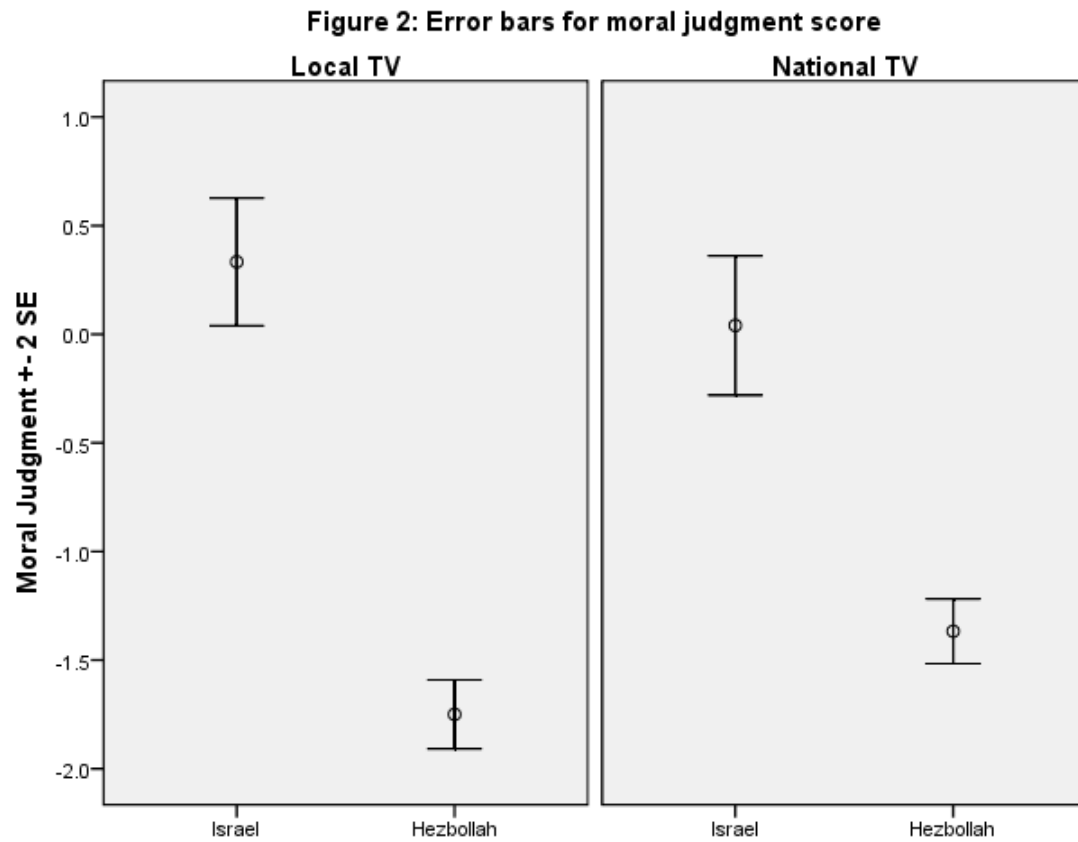
News category	Breakdown of broadcast during the 2004 election campaign	Percentage of all news time
Advertising	8 min. 51 sec.	29.5
Sports and Weather	6 min. 21 sec.	21.2
Elections	3 min. 11 sec.	10.6
Crime	2 min. 34 sec.	8.6
Local Interest	1 min. 56 sec.	6.4
Teasers, intros, music	1 min. 43 sec.	5.7
Health	1 min. 22 sec.	4.6
Other topics	1 min. 12 sec.	4.0
Unintentional Injury	55 sec.	3.1
Business/ economy	47 sec.	2.6
Iraq and Foreign Policy	38 sec.	2.3
Government (non-election)	28 sec.	1.6

Source: The Lear Center Local News Archive, February 15th, 2005.

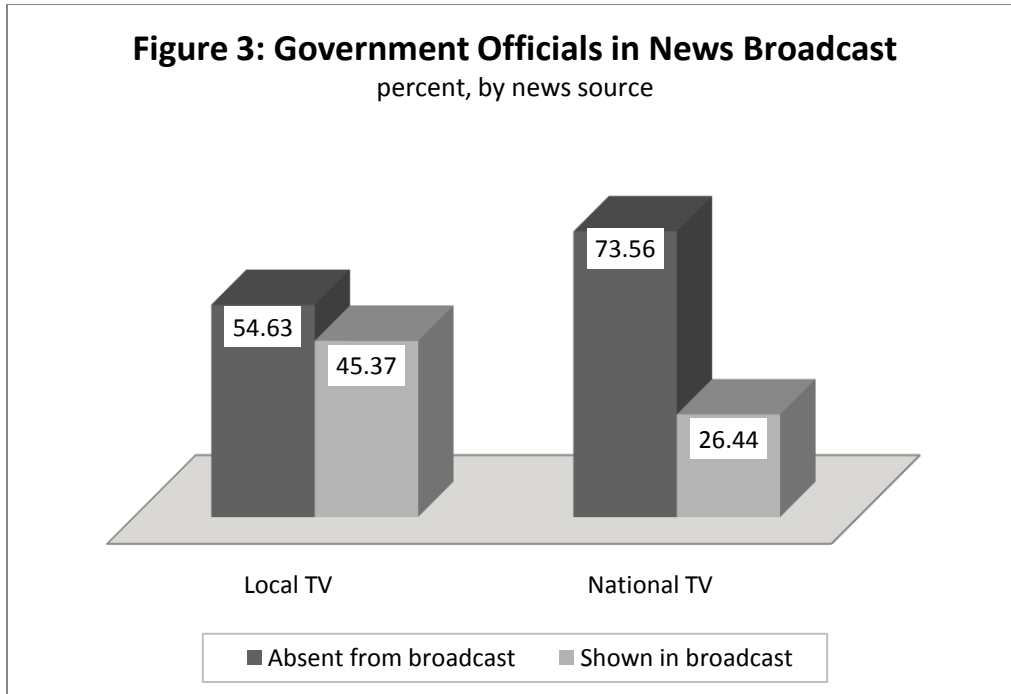
Figure 1: Public Attitudes towards Israel
In the Middle East: Who do you Sympathize with more?



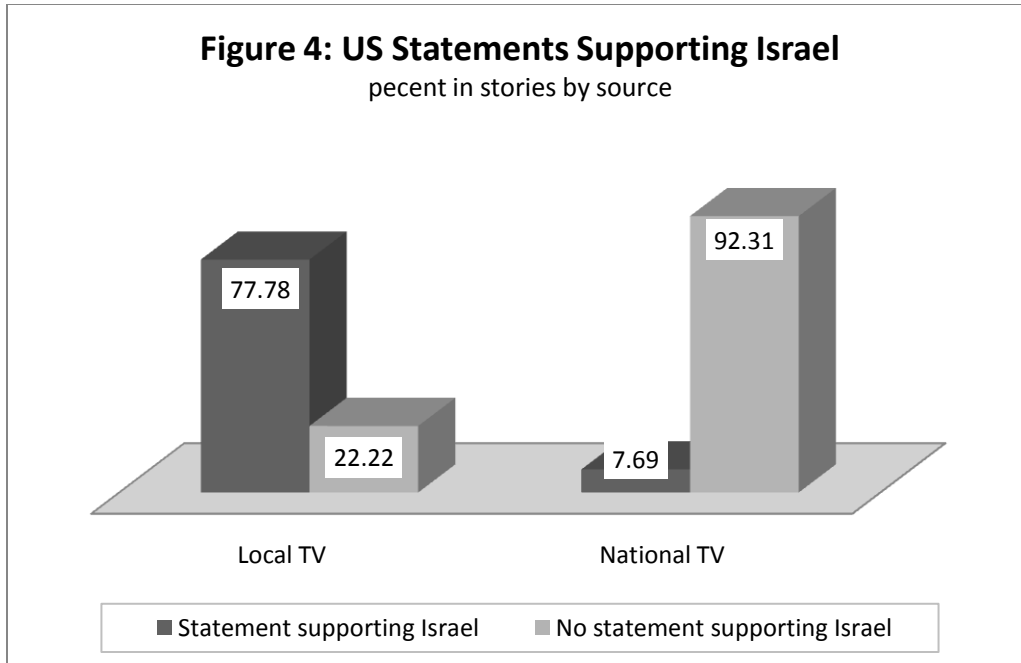
Data: 41 surveys from 1967 to 2007 by Gallup, Roper, ABC, CBS, NYT, Pew.



Note. Moral judgment frame function is measured on a scale between +3 (moral) and -3 (immoral). Error bars illustrate two standard deviations above and below the mean for the moral judgment frame.



Note. Bar graphs compare the percentage of newscasts that include US government officials between local and Network news.



Note. Bar graphs compare the percentage of newscasts that include US statements supporting Israel between local and Network news.

Appendix

A possible explanation to our results is that our findings are influenced by limitations of our data: the selection of the two Network news – ABC and NBC – and the absent local news videos during the first five days of the war.

Our first concern is, specifically, that examining Fox local newscast – commonly regarded as more ‘pro-Israeli’ – might have altered our results in favor of Israel. However, our results stayed consistent even when we tested the differences between local and Network news without including Fox news. Tables A1 to A3 show that there are almost no framing differences across local channels. In addition, we did not find any differences in the amount of US official appearances between the local channels.

Table A1: *Definition of the problem across different local newscasts*

Problem	NBC (%)	ABC (%)	Fox (%)	CBS (%)
Israeli attack	36.8	47.8	36.0	40.0
Hezbollah attack	63.2	52.2	64.0	60.0
	100	100	100	100
	N=19	23	25	15

Table A2: *Responsibility for the problem across different local newscasts*

Problem	NBC (%)	ABC (%)	Fox (%)	CBS (%)
Israel	31.6	40.9	35.0	41.2
Hezbollah	68.4	59.1	65.0	58.8
	100	100	100	100
	N=19	22	20	17

Table A3: *Solution to the problem across different local newscasts*

Problem	NBC (%)	ABC (%)	Fox (%)	CBS (%)
Disarmament of Hezbollah	50.0	43.8	50.0	40.0
Hezbollah not disarmed	50.0	56.3	50.0	60.0
	100	100	100	100
	N=19	22	20	17

Second, we tested our results looking at local and Network news during the same time period (July 17- August 16, 2006), thus dropping the first five days of Network reports. We expect that if any bias exists, it would only further support our results. During the first five days of the war Israel enjoyed an overwhelming support of both the international community and the American administration. Israel was seen as defending itself against brutal terrorist attacks. It is only after Israel retaliate using massive military force that the Israeli actions were criticized as disproportional. Indeed, altering the time period did not change our results. Our hypothesis was indeed sustained by altering the data accordingly.