

**The PMP principle and the Contest over Political Waves:
Media Access for Oppositional Voices in the U.S. and Israel**

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One of the primary questions in the field of political communication is the extent to which the news media in Western countries provide sufficient time and space for oppositional forces to be heard. Given the fact that the news media in these countries serve as the major venue for public discourse, the amount and range of access given to political challengers can be considered a critical component in assessing the health of the democratic process.

A good deal of research in this field looks at this issue using a dynamic approach; the extent to which governments dominate media discourse varies over time and political circumstance. One of the most obvious examples is when countries are confronted with crises, especially if they are being attacked or threatened (Bennett and Paletz, 1994; Entman, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 1997). Another important factor has to do with the level of elite consensus in support of a government policy (Bennett, 1990). When the news media are covering stories that fall inside what Hallin (1986) labeled the sphere of legitimate consensus, journalists feel little need to bring opposing viewpoints. Oppositional forces receive much more access and validation when a policy has entered the "sphere of legitimate controversy" (see also, Bennett, 1990).

In this paper we wish to look at another variable that should prove helpful in explaining cross-national differences in media access for political challengers: the nature of the party system in a given country. We will argue that the greater the number and ideological span of political parties in a country the more oppositional voices will be heard in the mainstream news media. The notion will be explored by examining the contest over political waves in two countries with polar opposite party systems: the United States and Israel.

The Political Contest Model and the PMP Principle

The political contest model (Wolfsfeld, 1997, 2004) argues that the best way to understand the role of the news media in any political process is to look at the competition over the media as part of a more general struggle for political control. The theory attempts

to move away from more media-centric approaches in political communication by emphasizing the ways in which the political environment has a dominating influence on how the news media cover political actors and events. The political contest model is also a more "actor-oriented" approach in that it attempts to better understand how different types of political actors compete for time, space, and legitimacy in the news media and the effects this can have on the political process.

One central component of the model is the Politics-Media-Politics principle (PMP): *The influence of the news media in most political processes can be seen as a cycle in which changes in the political environment lead to changes in media performance that then lead to subsequent changes in the political process.*¹ A useful rule to follow in these matters is to start by looking at a particular political context, then attempt to understand how political actors and journalists interact within that situation and how this affects the construction of news stories. The final and most difficult step is to try to understand if and how the resulting stories have an influence on the political process.

It is important to emphasize that, despite the emphasis on political factors, the role of the news media in the PMP cycle is not a passive one. The news media have their own professional interests that have major effects on the construction of news stories. They do not only *reflect* political realities they also *actively translate* them into news stories that are both interesting and culturally resonant. Journalists have strong motivations to include oppositional voices in any news story about government actions and policies (Althaus, 2003; Bennett, 2003; Bennett and Livingston, 2003; Cook, 1996; Entman, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Reich, 2006; Sparrow, 2006). There are at least two explanations for this. The first is that conflict over government actions and policies makes the news more interesting. Second, most Western journalists take their role as government watchdogs seriously and view criticizing authorities as a professional obligation. Thus, there is good reason to believe – in

¹ This principle was developed in *Media and the Path to Peace* (Wolfsfeld, 2004) and was not present in the original presentation of the political contest model (Wolfsfeld, 1997).

contrast to the notion of "hegemony" – that one will always find a considerable proportion of oppositional voices in every democratic press. The more interesting questions have to do with how the number and range of oppositional voices tends to vary when comparing countries and issues.

In this paper, it will be helpful to reformulate the PMP argument so as to emphasize cross-national differences rather than changes over time: *Cross-national differences in the role of the news media in most political processes can be best understood by examining how variations in political environments affect media performance which in turn leads to different types of effects on politics.* We are especially interested in long-term structural and cultural differences among political environments rather than those that are better attributed to specific domestic or international events.

The most obvious example of this principle has to do with the the level of democratic government in different countries. The greater the extent of democratic institutions and norms in a given country the more the news media will give voice to oppositional actors and positions. The number of democratic institutions would be considered a structural factor while democratic norms should be considered a central element in a country's political culture. The willingness of the news media to give voice to political challengers will – at the very least – allow more members of the public to be exposed to these views. The fact that political challengers are given voice in the news media can also have other influences on the political process. It often enables them to mobilize more supporters, can lower the public legitimacy of the government or even force the government to change its policies. All of these would also be examples of the third – but not necessarily final – phase of the PMP cycle.

As noted, in this paper we wish to examine a different aspect of the political environment: the nature of the party system.

Party Systems and Oppositional Voices in the Media

In his now classic work Sartori (1976) distinguishes between three types of party systems. Two-party systems (e.g., the United States and United Kingdom)² are characterized by a small ideological gap between the parties as each attempts to appeal to the general public. Moderate pluralist party systems (e.g., Germany, Belgium and most of the Scandinavian countries) are characterized by a small number of political parties with relatively small ideological distances between the extreme parties which translates into low or moderate polarization.³ The final type is polarized party systems (e.g. France, Israel and Italy) that are characterized by a high number of parties and a large ideological distance between the extremes.⁴ Polarized party systems usually have "anti-system" parties that hold belief systems that do not share the values of the political order within which they operate (Sartori 1976, p. 133). Examples would include the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement and during some of the years, the Italian Communist party (PCI) (Abedi, 2002; Capoccia, 2002), or the ultra-religious and Arab parties in Israel (Goldberg, 1992; Neuberger, 1997).

Oppositional Voices in the News

There are a number of reasons for believing that the number and span of political parties will have an influence on the extent to which oppositional voices are heard in the news media. The first has to do with simple logistics. Whatever journalists are assigned to the legislative "beat" in multi-party systems they have immediate access to representatives from a wide range of parties (Cook, 1994). In addition, although smaller parties may have less impact on politics they often provide more drama especially those that take more radical

² In Sartori's (1976) model, the number of parties stands for the number of "relevant parties", which is usually lower than the total number of registered parties.

³ Party system polarization has been measured in various ways (e.g., Abedi, 2002; Hazan, 1997; Sani and Sartori, 1983), but it is generally represents the ideological distance between the most extreme parties on the left-right continuum. This is many times partially measured via an analysis of party platforms (e.g., Hazan, 1997).

⁴ It is important to note that according to Sartori (1976) and many other scholars (e.g., Abedi, 2002; Goldberg, 1992), party systems are not static, and consequently over time a country may move from one category to another.

positions. Journalists working in a two or even three party system, on the other hand, would have to make a special effort to find sources from other political parties.

Parliamentary debates that take place in countries with polarized party systems are likely to be more contentious than those in two party systems and this too should influence the amount of oppositional voices that are heard in the media. When there are only two or three political parties discussing an issue their need to speak to the general public will lead to a more moderate type of rhetoric. The election of more radical parties, on the other hand, will lead to more intensive forms of debate. The strategic need for the use of militant rhetoric is also rooted in these parties' need to compete with the other parties for public attention. This dynamic is likely to be especially important when there are many different parties competing for the limited amount of media coverage available. An important maxim in political communication is that if you're not considered especially important, you should at least try to prove that you are interesting (Cook, 1998; Sheafer, 2001; Wolfsfeld, 1997, 2004).

Finally, as the number of political parties grows it almost always leads to a creation of a coalition government. It is true that those parties who join a ruling coalition have a certain amount of common interests. Nevertheless, anyone familiar with coalition politics knows that some of the fiercest arguments can be found *within* a governing coalition. This is important because some of these oppositional voices are Ministers with political power and thus they have better access to the news media than those political parties who can be found in the formal opposition.

This last point is well developed in Bennett's (1990, p. 106) original formulation of the indexing hypothesis in which he argued that the news professionals tend to "index" the range of voices and viewpoints expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic. This hypothesis is generally well supported by empirical analyses (Alexseev & Bennett, 1995; Bennett, 1990; Zaller & Chiu, 1996), although other evidence and limitations

can also be found (Althus, 2003; Althaus, Edy, Entman, & Phalen, 1996; Entman, 2004; Livingston & Eachus, 1996).

It is important to consider whether the stated hypothesis about the effects of party system on oppositional voices in the news is consistent with indexing hypothesis. The answer to that would depend on what was considered "mainstream government debate". If this includes all elected political parties (including anti-system parties) then the two approaches are compatible. The argument could be made that the news media still index the range of official debate, but the range of that debate simply expands in other countries. Consider for example Cook's (1994, p.105) comments about how French journalists reacted to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait: "The French journalists did what they habitually do; they turned to reactions from notables and spokespersons from each of the various parties, from the Communists on the left to the National Front on the right." The source selection of the American journalists was very different, focusing on the "Golden Triangle" of key newsbeats in Washington (i.e., the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon).

It makes more sense however, to confine the notion of mainstream debate to major political parties and this would call for a serious revision of the indexing hypothesis. More importantly, the major thrust of the indexing approach has to do with the fact that the public is not being exposed to a wide range of voices and viewpoints. The argument being made here is that in many countries this is simply not the case. In addition if extra-parliamentary challengers were in a position to raise major issues onto the public agenda from time to time, this too would run counter to the indexing hypothesis.

It is important to emphasize that the hypothesized effect on media's willingness to provide access to oppositional voices is not restricted to the formal political leadership in a country. In other words, the greater the number and span of political parties the more we would expect the news media to be open to all dissenting voices, including those coming from extra-parliamentary actors. The very fact that the news media dedicate time and space to

a wider range of perspectives should provide more opportunities for different types of actors to gain access. While not all political positions will be treated with an equal amount of legitimacy, the existence of more extremist parties should also increase the overall span of what are considered legitimate voices. Some supporting evidence to this hypothesis can be found in previous studies (e.g., Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Sheafer, 2005; Wolfsfeld, 1997).

Contests over Political Waves

This study deals specifically with the competition over the news media in political waves. Political waves can be defined as sudden and significant changes in the political environment that are characterized by a substantial increase in the amount of public attention centered on a political issue or event (Wolfsfeld, 2001, 2004; Wolfsfeld and Sheafer, 2006). The focus on the political environment distinguishes this approach from related issues concerning "news cycles" or "feeding frenzies" (Sabato, 1991) that often focus exclusively on media behavior without regard to the larger political context. Here too we are advocating moving away from a "media-centric" approach to these issues.

Political waves represent important opportunities for broad political debate. Thus the "Columbine massacre" in which two Colorado high school students murdered twelve students and a teacher led to a wide public debate about gun control and the surprising first round victory of La Pen in the 2002 French election led to a wide ranging debate about the threat of the far right in France and in Europe.

The news media play a number of critical roles in political waves (Wolfsfeld, 2001). First, they are the major sources for amplification of the wave. Editors have the power to either raise or lower the volume of political waves and this helps determine the amount of influence such events can have on the political process. The news media are also major agents for providing narrative frames for waves. Most Western media framed the La Pen victory in negative terms and expressed concern for the rise of the extreme Right in Europe.

Finally, the news media also provide a temporal structure for waves by deciding when the story is over.⁵ When a doctor performing abortions is killed in the U.S., for example, it will inevitably lead to a wide ranging public discussion about abortion. Once editors decide that the story is "over", the media will move on to other issues.

In attempting to assess the number of oppositional voices that take part in a wave, researchers need to take into account which types of waves are more conducive to public debate. Compare of example the difference between a natural disaster such as an earthquake and a decision about whether to allow praying in public schools. While actors who are opposed to the government may very well criticize its performance in dealing with the earthquake, there can be little doubt that issues having to do with religion and state are more likely to lead to wide spread conflict. It is important to distinguish then between conflictual waves – which have to do with ongoing cleavages within a country – and non-conflictual waves.

The significance of examining the extent to which oppositional voices are allowed access during waves is rooted in the fact that these major events are the ones most likely to remain in the collective consciousness and most likely to have an effect on longer-term political processes. The relative domination of officials in these public debates will be critical in determining how such waves are framed.

The Comparability of Israel and the U.S.

When selecting countries to include in the analysis, comparative studies have three main approaches. First, the “most similar” systems strategy compares countries that are similar on the main variables of interest (Collier, 1993; Lijphart, 1971; Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Hallin and Mancini (2004), for example, adopt this strategy by limiting their selection of countries to North America and Western Europe. They argued that they were “dealing

⁵ _____ In rare cases the news media can also establish when a wave begins by revealing something unknown in the general political environment. In the vast majority of cases however they react to critical events initiated by others. We shall have more to say about this point later on.

with systems that have relatively comparable levels of economic development and much common culture and political history.” Second, the “most different” systems strategy is “based on a set of cases which are highly diverse and among which the analyst traces similar processes of changes” (Collier, 1993, p. 111; see also: Przeworski & Teune, 1970). And third, research adopts a combination of the most similar and most different strategies. This combination is useful because many times countries that are closely similar on certain variables are sharply different on others (Collier, 1993). A comparison of Israel and the U.S. falls within this last approach. On the one hand, the media systems of both countries are quite similar (Caspi and Limor, 1999; Peri, 2004). On the other hand, their political systems are most different, and this could provide a reasonable explanation for how similar news assumptions lead to different forms of coverage. Indeed, the U.S. and Israel represent two of the most opposite cases in Sartori’s (1976) typology presented above, with the U.S. being the prototype of a two party system having low internal ideological polarization, and Israel, which normally has no less than a dozen parties in the Knesset, the prototype of the polarized pluralist system.⁶

Methodology

This comparative analysis was conducted in Israel and the U.S. and is based on a content analysis of news articles that appeared in the three major national newspapers in each country, in three years over the last twenty years (1984, 1990 and 2000). The year 1984 was selected because that was the most distant year for which we were able to collect newspaper data electronically. The other two years were then added to provide a significant amount of distance between the three periods. The analysis had two major steps. First, identifying and classifying all of the political waves that took place during each year in both countries. Second, analyzing the news items that appeared in those waves, looking, among other things, for the types of actors

⁶ The U.S. and Israel as most different cases can also be found in Lijphart’s (1999) somewhat different typology. While the U.S. is the prototype of a Majoritarian-Federal regime, Israel represents a clear Consensus-Unitary regime, which is characterized, among other things, by a multi-cleavaged society. Such a society is characterized by a large number of internal disputes and conflicts.

appearing in each wave, and for the positions each expressed (supporting the government, opposing, or neutral/mixed).

Identifying and Classifying Political Waves

The operational definition of political waves is similar to the one presented in a previous analysis of political waves in Israel (Wolfsfeld and Sheaffer, 2006). A content analysis was conducted in the three most popular Israeli national newspapers, *Yediot Aharonot*, *Ma'ariv* and *Ha'aretz*, and in three leading U.S. newspapers having a national distribution, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USAToday*, in search of political waves for the specified time periods. The search was guided by the following operational criteria: (1) during the first week of a wave at least one article concerning the news story must appear on the front page of at least two of the three newspapers; (2) it must appear on at least three different days; (3) at least two additional articles concerning the wave must appear in the inside pages of each newspaper for at least twice during that week. Research assistants first identified continuing stories on the front pages of each newspaper during a whole week; then they had to verify that a similar news story appears in the other newspapers in that country during the same week; and finally, they had to make sure that additional relevant news stories can be found in the other pages of the newspaper's central news supplement.

This process has resulted in more than 200 such weekly "episodes" in each country during the three periods. One researcher and a research assistant then collapsed related episodes into a single wave. For example, any election related episodes during the U.S. presidential elections in 1984 and 2000 were collapsed into the "election" wave of the specific year. This task was done separately by the researcher and the coder for all episodes. The agreement between them was perfect. The resulting numbers of waves in the U.S. are, 19 in 1984, 15 in 1990 and 14 in 2000. In Israel the numbers of waves are, 12 in 1984, 24 in 1990 and 25 in 2000. Examples of some of the waves that took place during that period include U.S. elections in 1984 and 2000, the

buildup in preparation toward the first Gulf War in Iraq in 1990, the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 and Israel's continuing struggle with the Palestinians.

Next, each wave was coded for the origin/initiator of the wave. The key was to consider which person, group or event was responsible for the initial triggering event. This could be a governmental or other official actors (e.g., the U.S. government negotiations with China in 1984), some institutional opposition (e.g., elected representatives taking oppositional acts, such as an Israeli Minister who initiated talks with the PLO in 1990, although this was prohibited by law and by the Prime Minister), other challengers (all the non-official actors, such as experts, worker unions and terrorists), foreign actors, the media, routine events (e.g., elections in the U.S. in 1984 and 2000), and unplanned or event-driven (e.g., a Concord crash in the U.S. in 2000 and the death of the Syrian leader Hafez Assad in 2000, which caused a political wave in Israel).

Waves were also coded for the level of cultural and ideological conflict associated with the wave topic (low or high). A conflictual wave was defined for coders as "an issue or event that is linked to an existing ideological, political, and/or cultural conflict within the country." In order to insure reliability, only two categories were used (0,1), in a similar manner to the one done in a previous analysis of waves (Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2006). The coding instructions are based on the major issues of conflict in each country. The U.S. issues are almost all taken from Gans (1979): issues of race, economic strata, gender, and ideology. We also added an "isolationist-interventionist" cleavage concerning how much the U.S. should or should not intervene in outside crises. The Israeli issues are based on Horowitz and Lissak (1992) and include nationality, ideology, race and religion. For example, the elections (1984 and 2000) and the intervention in Iraq (1990) were coded as conflictual issues in the U.S., while a political crisis in the coalition government (1990) and the question of withdrawing from Lebanon (2000) were coded as conflictual in Israel. The U.S. government legal steps against Microsoft in 2000 led to a non-conflictual wave in the U.S., while the visit of the Pope in Israel in 2000 was considered a non-conflictual wave in Israel.

A reliability test was conducted by comparing the student's coding decisions with those done by one of the authors for all the waves. This has resulted with a Scott's $pi = .85$ for the initiator category, and a Scott's $pi = .80$ for the conflict category. Disagreements were discussed and agreed upon by the student and both authors.

Oppositional Voices in the News during Political Waves

The focus of this study is on the positions presented by actors in political waves. To analyze this, it was necessary to fully analyze complete waves. The amount of work required to content analyze all articles from all waves would have proven an impossible task and thus we decided to simply choose a heterogeneous collective of waves from each country (9 in the U.S. and 19 in Israel, see appendix) in order to examine the types of voices that were heard in varying political circumstances.⁷ The selection was based on finding waves that varied in terms of whether they were conflictual or not, their overall size (in terms of amount of news articles) which types of actors initiated the wave, and whether it was a domestic or international wave.

After the selection of waves, coders were instructed to find and analyze all wave-related articles in the news, from the beginning of the wave through the end of the year it began. The sample included every third day in which the newspaper was published. To limit the size of the analysis, it was decided to analyze articles in only two newspapers in each country, *Yediot Aharonot* and *Ha'aretz* in Israel and *The New York Times* and *USAToday* in the U.S. Note that in both cases, one is a broadsheet (*Ha'aretz* and *NYT*) and one a popular paper (*Yediot* and *USAToday*). Coders used search words for each wave, and they searched for articles using electronic archive (Lexis in the U.S. and the *Yediot's* archive in Israel). The search for articles in *Ha'aretz* was done manually, because of a lack of access to an electronic archive of this newspaper. The sampling strategy produced an extremely large number of articles that were

⁷ While it would have been preferable to have an similar number of waves analyzed in both countries, it proved much more time consuming to find students in Israel with sufficient knowledge of U.S. politics to do the coding. This, in turn led to major gaps in the expenses associated with coding the two sets of data. Nevertheless, examining nine very different waves with an extremely large number of news articles associated with each wave provides a robust comparison with the Israeli data.

coded. Overall, 4,190 articles were selected and coded in Israel (3,060 of them in conflictual waves and the rest in non-conflictual waves) and 1,502 in the U.S. (1,035 of them in conflictual waves and the rest in non-conflictual waves). Given the size of this corpus, we are confident that we have a representative sample of all of these major public debates.

The unit of analysis was the news item. All of these items were manually coded by a group of trained coders. Different coders coded the U.S. and Israeli items, but they used identical coding categories and were trained by the two researchers. There were two main coding categories: the first was the type of actors that appear in the news item. Coders were allowed to list up to three major types of actors that appeared in the article (e.g., government representatives and other officials, nonpartisan organizations, foreign actors) from a list of actors that was presented in the coding book. The second category was the position expressed by each of these actors (i.e., supporting the government, opposing the government and neutral or mixed).⁸ Nine trained coders, all BA and MA students at the social science and the international school at the Hebrew university, conducted the content analysis. The training process was rather long, including multiple meetings during which many items were coded. At its end, an inter-coders reliability test was conducted on 60 coding units. This has resulted with a Cohen *Kappa* no lower than .73 for the type of actors,⁹ and a Cohen *Kappa* no lower than .75 for the position of the actor. These are moderate but acceptable levels of agreement.

Results

The Initiation of Political Waves

⁸ _____ It is important to emphasize at this point that coders analyzed full-text news content and not proxy data such as The New York Times Index (e.g., Bennett, 1990). Althaus, Edy, and Phalen (2001, 2002, see also Althaus, 2003) have found that such proxies overstate the amount of support for the administration contained in news discourse.

⁹ _____ Later, in the analysis of each item during the actual coding, coders wrote down the names or exact title of each of the three actors. At the end of the analysis, an additional coder compared these names/positions with the coding of the type of actors, making sure that the coding is accurate. This no doubt substantially increased the accuracy of the coding.

The analysis begins by examining the initiators of the various waves in the two countries. This type of breakdown provides us with information about a number of important issues. First, it provides us with a first look at some of the differences between the United States and Israel. To what extent are oppositional forces in the two countries capable of initiating major political events? While initiation of an event does not guarantee control over the story line, it can provide important advantages in promoting frames (Wolfsfeld, 1997). The analysis also generates insights about the proportion of major stories that are unplanned by any of the actors who were studied. Regina Lawrence (2000) as well as Bennett and Livingston (2003) have argued that there have been an increase in "event-driven news" and that such a development have the potential to reduce the level of government domination of the news media. Finally, it is important to look at the number of waves that were initiated by the news media themselves. If we were to find a significant number of political waves that were initiated by the news media in the two countries, such a finding would represent a serious refutation of the PMP principle. The results can be found in table 1, and includes all of the waves identified in the two countries.

[Table 1 about Here]

The first question has to do with the proportion of waves initiated by the governments in the two countries. If one starts by looking at only this percentage the results appear to contradict our basic assumption. Looking over the three different years that were studied one finds a higher percentage of government initiated waves in Israel (37%) than in the U.S. (20.3%). On the other hand, we couldn't find a *single* political wave in the United States that was initiated by the oppositional political party and in two out of the three years no extra-parliamentary challengers were able to initiate any political waves. In Israel, on the other hand, one finds a number of political waves that are initiated by either the oppositional party (6.9%) or by an extra-parliamentary challenger (13.8%). Such waves were initiated, for examples, by Israeli worker unions in 1984 and 2000, and by homeless people in 1990.

The situation in the United States, it turns out, is somewhat more complicated than one might have thought. The majority of political waves are not initiated by either the government *or* the opposition. The largest proportion of waves is sparked by events abroad and an extremely high percentage is classified as routine events. An example of a foreign wave is the tension between Libya and the UK in 1984, while examples of routine events are elections and debates about the U.S. budget.

One way to think about this is to suggest that oppositional actors in the U.S. are the lowest groups on the media totem poll. They not only have to compete with government spokespeople for attention but also with foreign actors and routine events. In any case however, it is far more important to look at the proportion of oppositional voices that appeared in these news stories which will be detailed below.

One of the most powerful findings from this first analysis was the lack of a single political wave in either country that was initiated by the news media. This provides an important support for the PMP principle because it reinforces the assumption that the news media react to political events rather than initiate them. The lack of media initiative also casts doubt on journalists' ability to serve as independent watchdogs of government policy. It is true that providing space for oppositional perspectives provides an alternative means of fulfilling this function. Press independence, however, also requires the ability to initiate major investigative stories that embarrass the government in power. It would seem that the often cited example of Watergate was a rare exception to this general rule.¹⁰

Oppositional Voices in Political Waves

The next breakdown looks the amount of oppositional views expressed in each country in the course of the various waves that were analyzed in depth. A distinction is made between conflict waves – that deal with ongoing controversies – and non-conflict waves. As

¹⁰ Some might argue that even Watergate began as a political initiative by outside political actors (including "Deep Throat") who wanted to bring President Nixon down.

discussed above, we assumed that oppositional actors would be especially likely to participate in conflictual waves. Figure 1 presents the average number of supporting, dissenting, and neutral/mixed voices heard in each country.

[Figure 1 about here]

The first phenomenon worth noting is that government positions do not dominate public debates in either country. This is especially true if one takes into account the extremely high number of mixed/neutral positions that are expressed during these waves. This finding provides important evidence that, contrary to some of the literature in political communication, the news media in both countries make a concerted effort to present positions that run counter to the official perspective.

We also find the expected differences between the two countries. The most important of these, as can be seen in Figure 1 is that the one hears many more dissenting voices in the Israeli press during a typical wave than in the U.S. Starting with conflict waves, we find that in the United States there are slightly more oppositional voices than supportive voices, but in Israeli one finds over *twice* as many dissident opinions than supportive ones in the typical wave.

The first thing one notices with regard to non-conflictual waves is the significant drop in both countries of the overall number of positions being expressed. As suggested, the news media have less need to turn to oppositional forces when the wave is not considered controversial. These waves also tend to be smaller and this leaves less space for oppositional actors to participate. The average conflictual wave in Israel included 306 articles while the average non-conflictual wave had 126 pieces. Conflictual waves in the U.S. generated an average of 259 articles while non-conflictual waves led to an average of only 93 articles.

The differences between the U.S. and Israel with regard to non-conflictual waves are somewhat less pronounced but the direction is consistent with the central hypothesis. In the American press one finds more supportive positions than opposing positions and in the Israel

media one finds the opposite situation. Thus, even when Israeli officials might expect they would have an easy time with the press, they still get more criticism than support.

The next analysis looks at the positions taken by different types of political actors in conflictual waves (Figure 2). A distinction was made between Government Actors and their Supporters, Oppositional Actors (both in an outside the legislature) and Third Parties (who had no clear political identification). One of the reasons for the hypothesized relationship between party system and the amount of oppositional voices is our belief that in polarized party systems many such opinions come from parties that are members of a coalition government. It was also hypothesized that other oppositional voices will receive a greater access to the news in polarized system of Israel compared to the two-party system in the U.S.. The results concerning the mean amount of supportive and oppositional positions expressed in conflictual waves in the two countries are presented in Figure 2.

[Figure 2 about Here]

The two most revealing results are those that have to do with the positions taken by government officials and those expressed by third parties in Israel. It is rather remarkable that even among government officials and their supporters one finds just as many people opposing the government as supporting it. This demonstrates one of the clear results of having a coalition government composed of a variety of political parties. One also finds virtually no third parties that provide support for the government: there are on average *eleven* times more dissenting voices than supporting ones within this group. While one can not discount the possibility that this reflects the increased willingness of those unhappy with government to speak out, at least part of this result has to do with Israeli journalists purposely searching for opposing opinions.

One finds a very different distribution of opinions amount the various actors in the U.S., although here too one finds quite a few actors identified with the government who express opposing views. Among government officials and their supporters one finds an

average of 54 opinions in favor of the government and about 33 against for the typical wave.¹¹ When third parties are represented they again present more opposing positions than supportive positions but the gap is considerably smaller than found in Israel.

The next analysis looks at the distribution of opinion with regards to non-conflictual waves. The results can be found in Figure 3.

[Figure 3 about Here]

Starting with the Israel, one finds that at least when it comes to non-conflictual waves, officials and supporters are more likely to support the official line. One also finds few appearances from oppositional actors in these news stories. Journalists assumedly have few reasons to turn to such sources, and the actors themselves have little motivation to speak. On the other hand, third parties are heard from quite a lot in these types of waves in Israel and once again one finds considerably more oppositional positions than those in support of the government. These outside actors are usually brought into the story because of their relevancy to the issue (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). In 1990, for example, the Soviet Union opened its gates for Russian Jews, allowing hundreds of thousands of them to leave for Israel. This event created a long political wave in Israel and many immigrant groups were extremely critical of how the government was handling the issue.

The situation in the United States with regard to non-conflictual waves is again very different than that in Israel. Official voices have tremendous advantages in framing these types of events. Their most significant advantage comes when they and their supporters are speaking, where the number of supporters found is four times the number of dissenters. Similar to Israel, on the other hand, the political opposition is not considered very relevant to these stories and this provides proportionally more space for the government. Finally, when it comes to third parties one finds more oppositional voices (20.6) than supportive voices (10)

¹¹ Perhaps the relatively small gap can be attributed to definitions of newsworthiness. People identified with the ruling party who present opposing views make for better copy than the (probable) majority from that party who support the administration

in the U.S. but again the gap is much smaller than in Israel. It is also worth noting that the average number of third party voices that are heard from in the U.S. is much lower than was found in the typical wave in Israel. This may be related to the more general finding concerning the greater openness of the Israeli media to a wider range of political actors.

Conclusion

It would seem that political leaders do not lead as comfortable life as many of us thought. At least when it comes to the truly "big" stories the news media in both the United States and Israel provide a significant amount of oppositional views. This is especially true in Israel where we found that in almost every possible situation those expresses critical views outnumber those presenting supporting positions. It should also be added that by far the most frequent type of news article about political waves was either neutral or balanced and this should be seen as an encouraging finding for the health of democratic discourse in both countries.

The major claim is that these differences can best be explained by the difference between the two party systems. Admittedly, we would need a far larger sample of countries in order to demonstrate a causal connection. However, reading such a massive number of news stories in both countries tells us that we are on to something. It makes little sense for Israeli journalists to only include opinions expressed by the "major" parties, especially when the size of these parties has significantly dropped in recent years. One of the most convincing findings that address this point has to do with the distribution of *government* opinions concerning conflictual waves. Even among those who supposedly identified with the various Israeli governments there were an equal number of supporting and dissenting positions being heard. This is undoubtedly related to the inherently problematic nature of coalition governments. The parties that join such a coalition continue to compete with one another especially when triggering events are linked to long-term disputes.

The results also provide important support for the PMP principle. The fact that Israel and the U.S. have extremely similar media systems but polar-opposite party systems leads us to believe that it is the political differences that ultimately lead – at the very least – to the Israeli public being exposed to a greater proportion of oppositional views. In addition, the fact that neither set of news media were able to initiate a single political wave demonstrates once again the reactive nature of the press. Finally, the different results found with regard to conflictual and non-conflictual waves in both countries also provides support for the PMP model. Changes in the political context (e.g. the appearance of a non-conflictual wave) non-conflictual wave) lead to variations in media performance (smaller news stories and less access for oppositional forces) which can have a subsequent impact on the political process (official frames will be more likely to dominate public perceptions about the wave).

Future directions for this research are relatively clear. First, as indicated, we need to replicate these results in a greater number of countries with different types of party systems. Second, we need to look closer at the actual *range* of opinions being expressed. While in this first study, we were satisfied with a dichotomous approach, it is critical to look at the extent to which more radical opinions are getting exposure. Finally, it will be extremely helpful to carry out case studies in different countries that look at these questions in "real time". Such a study would include in-depth interviews with journalists and political actors when the wave breaks as well as content analyses of the way the news media covered various waves. This would provide a much richer understanding of how politics influences the news media and if and how those interactions have a subsequent influence on the political process itself.

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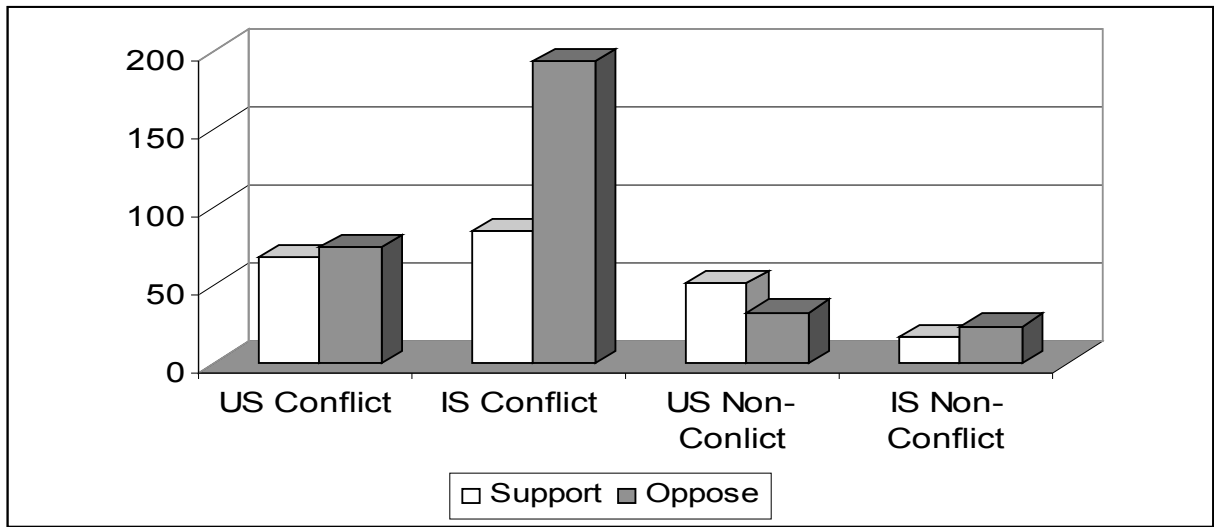
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Table 1

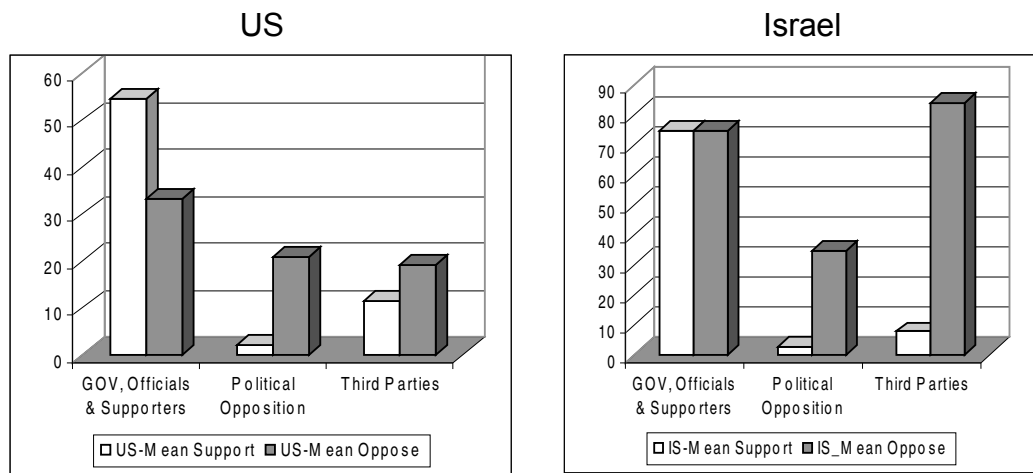
Initiators of Waves

		1984	1990	2000	Total
Total Number of Waves	US	19%	15%	14%	48%
	Israel	12%	24%	25%	61%
Gov & Officials	US	26%	13%	21%	20%
	Israel	42%	29%	40%	37%
Institutional Opposition	US	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Israel	8%	8%	4%	7%
Challengers	US	0%	0%	14%	4%
	Israel	16%	17%	8%	14%
Foreign Actors	US	37%	53%	29%	40%
	Israel	17%	17%	4%	17%
Routine	US	26%	26%	21%	25%
	Israel	8%	4%	8%	8%
Unplanned (Event-Driven)	US	10%	7%	14%	11%
	Israel	8%	17%	24%	18%
Media	US	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Israel	0%	0%	0%	0%



		U.S.	Israel
Non-Conflictual	Support	68 (9%)	84 (10%)
	Oppose	74 (10%)	193 (24%)
	Neutral/Mixed	574 (81%)	529 (66%)
	Total	716 (100%)	806 (100%)
Conflictual	Support	51 (20%)	17 (5%)
	Oppose	33 (13%)	24 (8%)
	Neutral/Mixed	167 (67%)	273 (87%)
	Total	251 (100%)	314 (100%)

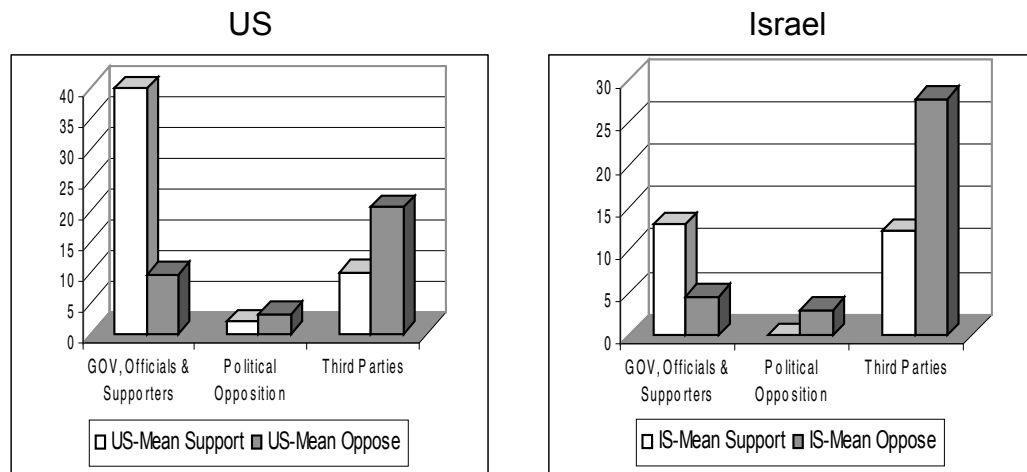
Figure 1. Position of actors in conflictual and non-conflictual waves. The bars represent the average frequencies of supporting and opposing comments per wave. The exact average values, including of the neutral/mixed positions, are presented below the graph, with the percentages in parentheses.



Parties	US-mean values			Israel-mean values		
	support	oppose	neutral	support	oppose	neutral
Gov	55	33	365	75	75	327
Opposition	2	21	107	3	34	52
Third	12	19	102	8	84	150

Parties

Figure 2. Position of actors in conflictual waves. The bars represent the average frequencies of supporting and opposing comments for each group of actors. The average is the total number of positions presented in conflictual waves by each group, divided by the total number of such waves.



	US-mean values			Israel-mean values		
	support	oppose	neutral	support	oppose	neutral
Gov	40	10	101	13	5	77
Opposition	2	3	3	0	3	6
Third	10	21	63	12	28	190

Parties

Figure 3. Position of actors in non-conflictual waves. The bars represent the average frequencies of supporting and opposing comments for each group of actors. The average is the total number of positions presented in conflictual waves by each group, divided by the total number of such waves.