

## A Two-Tiered Method for Identifying Trends in Media Framing of Policy Issues: The Case of the War on Terror

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*Research on media framing of policy issues has flourished. Yet the varied approaches to conceptualizing and operationalizing issue frames that make this literature rich also hinder its advancement. Here, we document the benefits of a two-tiered method: the first level accounts for issue-specific frames, while the second level tracks frames that generalize across issues. For this study, we draw on generalizable frames from prospect theory (loss vs. gain frames) and social identity theory (self-referential vs. other-referential frames). We discuss the theoretical merits of a two-tiered approach, arguing that it should yield compound insights greater than the sum of its parts. Applying this method to newspaper coverage of the war on terror, we find a strong trend at the generalizable level: media framing of the war shifted over time from a predominant use of “fear” (self-referential loss) frames to an increasing use of “charity” (other-referential gain) frames. Our approach further reveals that the fear frames used in the lead-up to the Iraq War were not driven by issue-specific frames related to terrorism or weapons of mass destruction as we might have thought, but rather by frames related to the anticipated threats to U.S. troops. This study sharpens our understanding of how framing of the war evolved, but more broadly it suggests that a two-tiered approach could be applied both within and across policy issues to advance our understanding of the framing process.*

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Research has documented the societal and political effects of media framing, that is, the media’s presentation of an issue from one perspective to the exclusion of alternative perspectives (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993; Hänggli, 2012; Jacoby, 2000).<sup>1</sup> For example, the classic study by Nelson and colleagues shows how people’s policy attitudes toward a proposed Ku Klux Klan rally differ depending on whether news coverage discusses the rally as an issue of free speech or as an issue of public safety (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). In a world of 24-hour news coverage and instant information, the phenomenon of framing may play an increasingly important role in politics as media sources try to find a way to cut through the chatter and get their stories heard (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 2002; Massanari & Howard, 2011; Takeshita, 2006). Moreover, how an issue is framed in the news can evolve in systematic and observable ways over time, often prompting shifts in public and/or policy response to the issue (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Baumgartner, De Boef, & Boydston, 2008; Carmines, Gerrity, & Wagner, 2010; Downs, 1972; Gruszczynski &

Michaels, 2012; Riker, 1996; Schattschneider, 1960; Skocpol, 1992; Slothuus, 2007; Straus, 2011; Vliegenthart & Roggeband, 2007). Yet, to date, few concrete methods allow researchers to track the evolution of frames used in policy debates both within and across issues over time. We work toward filling that gap.

The method we offer traces “big-picture” shifts in media framing through the use of a two-tiered coding system, composed of an issue-specific coding scheme and, overlying this, a generalizable coding scheme that can be applied to nearly any policy issue. The framing literature boasts a number of important studies developed around coding news coverage of a given policy issue based on frames that are unique to that issue (e.g., Baumgartner et al., 2008; Berinsky & Kinder, 2006; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Gerrity, 2010; Pollock, 1994; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013; Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997). Additionally, scholars have offered generalizable coding approaches to capture overarching frame dimensions of particular cognitive and social significance (e.g., Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Iyengar, 1991). These alternative approaches—issue-specific and generalizable—hint at different conceptions of framing within the literature.

We aim to reconcile these different levels of framing analysis by suggesting a combined approach with compound benefits. Our two-tiered approach allows for the identification of latent generalizable trends in framing that issue-specific coding systems would miss, while also linking these generalizable trends to the underlying substantive shifts in framing unique to each issue. Using this approach, researchers can test generalizable hypotheses (i.e., those that transcend specific policy issues) about the framing process—and its effects on public opinion and public policy—while remaining grounded in the context of each issue discussion.

The example issue we examine here is the war on terror.<sup>2</sup> Our issue-specific frame coding accounts for the different topical dimensions of the war: democratization, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and so on. Different policy issues would obviously consist of different issue-specific frames. The death penalty, for instance, includes topical framing dimensions such as morality, efficacy, fairness, and mode of execution (Baumgartner et al., 2008).

Layered over this issue-specific frame coding is a generalizable frame coding scheme meant to apply to virtually any policy issue. Many generalizable framing paradigms exist and could be employed (we discuss a few of these below); we advocate the use of any two-tiered coding approach grounded in theory. That said, for the second tier we propose a generalizable frame coding scheme that is especially well suited to studies spanning multiple policy issues. The generalizable scheme we use combines two key framing paradigms: (i) gain versus loss (drawn from prospect theory) and (ii) self versus other (drawn from social identity theory). We focus on these paradigms because there are good reasons to expect that major shifts in frame selection for most policy issues over time will likely occur along (but not be limited to) these two dimensions.

We use newspaper coverage of the war on terror to demonstrate how our two-tiered method can be applied. We find that issue-specific frames about the war varied over time as different events pushed different topical discussions forward. Yet these issue-specific framing observations on their own do not tell a clear story of whether

framing of the war *trended* over time. To understand how and why framing of the war may have shifted in patterned ways over time, we need to examine the issue-specific and generalizable frame data together. In this case, our two-tiered coding method reveals that, in the lead-up to the Iraq war, news coverage increased the use of “fear” frames—the combined use of loss frames (portraying the war in terms of realized or potential loss) and self-referential frames (portraying the war in terms of how it affects Americans)—but not in the way we might have thought based on criticisms of the media’s fear-mongering (Altheide, 2006, 2007; Barber, 2004; Bonn, 2011; Bonn & Welch, 2010). At the issue-specific level, these fear frames were primarily not driven by reminders of 9/11, nor by a focus on the threats of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism more broadly. Rather, underpinning these generalizable fear frames were issue-specific frames focused predominantly on the potential danger to deployed soldiers. In findings such as this one, our proposed two-tiered coding method yields insights that neither tier alone could provide. These insights hold implications for understanding broader patterns of media framing dynamics, which in turn might drive patterned responses by citizens and policymakers.

Based on the payoff of the two-tiered coding method in the case of the war, we offer this method as one that can aid in the examination of media framing dynamics across a broad range of policy issues. We recognize that framing dynamics will of course differ across issues as focusing events (Birkland, 1997; Birkland & Lawrence, 2009; Lawrence 2001), exogenous punctuations (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2010), and other developments take place; we do not attempt to identify the mechanisms that drive framing dynamics here, nor do we add to the aforementioned work documenting the significant effects that framing dynamics can have on public opinion and public policy. Rather, drawing on this literature, we posit that in order to understand the dynamics of any given policy debate in the news, we must look to both issue-specific and generalizable framing.

### **A Two-Tiered Method for Measuring Framing**

Agreeing to a single definition of framing, a single level of analysis, and a single best coding scheme for a research endeavor is a hard enterprise in its own right. What might be gained by adding the complication of measuring framing at two levels? We argue that a two-tiered method can help scholars better understand the framing process beyond the additive insights we would gain from either coding level alone. Moreover, this approach allows for direct comparisons across issues, potentially providing significant future contributions to our understanding of the process of framing more broadly. For example, as we begin to explore framing dynamics using this approach, we expect that, as with Downs’s (1972) issue attention cycle, we may discover that systemic forces are at play in the ebb and flow of generalizable frames in news coverage of a given policy issue over time. What we provide is an improved two-tiered method—grounded in theory and applicability—for tracing trends in framing within and across issues.

The current framing literature illustrates several different ways to conceptualize and measure frame type (Chong & Druckman, 2007), which fall generally into two main styles of approach. The first type of approach involves constructing issue-specific frames equating to second-level agenda-setting attributes, which in turn can be categorized within topical dimensions of the issue at hand. Framing scholars recommend deductively identifying an initial set of second-level agenda-setting frames to create a coding scheme that is then inductively tested and refined (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007; Tankard, 2001). Many scholars have followed this pattern, identifying frames unique to issues like the death penalty (Baumgartner et al., 2008), the women's movement (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997), poverty (Rose & Baumgartner, 2013), abortion (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002; Gerrity, 2010), obesity (Lawrence, 2004), and AIDS (Pollock, 1994). We use the same approach here, and the details of our issue-specific coding scheme for the war on terror are discussed in the Application section below.

The second type of approach involves developing a generalizable coding scheme, where each category can be applied to multiple issues. Generalizable coding schemes can take many forms. Iyengar's (1991) distinction between episodic and thematic frames is a perfect example. In our own work examining issue framing in presidential debates, we categorize candidates' statements according to a set of frame dimensions that generalize across policy topics, including morality, legality, economic cost, efficacy, and patriotism (Boydstun, Glazier, & Pietryka, 2013). Additional examples of generalizable coding schemes include Takeshita and Mikami's (1995) distinction between system-level and individual-level frames (applied, for instance, to the 1993 Japanese elections) and the distinction between substantive frames and strategy frames, which Cappella and Jamieson (1997) use in looking at U.S. election coverage and Strömbäck and Dimitrova (2006) employ in comparing U.S. and Swedish election coverage. Chyi and McCombs (2004) similarly code from a high level of abstraction when they track space (ranging from individual to international) and time (past, present, and future). Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) find that both the public and the media draw on a few central themes (including divisions of protagonists into "us" and "them") in understanding a wide variety of policy issues. Underscoring the importance of such research, scholars like McCombs and Ghanem (2001) and Reese (2007) have increasingly called on the field to focus on generalizable frames that are able to move from one agenda to another.

Our proposed coding approach builds on this prior research by applying the same logic of tracking frame paradigms that are broadly applicable. Unlike these past studies, however, we focus on the benefits that generalizable coding procedures can deliver when utilized *in conjunction with* issue-specific coding procedures. Understanding the framing of an issue at both large-grained and fine-grained levels should yield the most accurate insights into the issue itself. Moreover, this two-tiered approach, especially if applied across multiple policy issues, may unlock important clues about the framing process, in turn giving us greater purchase in understanding dynamic patterns in media framing, as well as the precise causes and political consequences of such framing.

Thus, our primary goal is to illustrate the advantages of a two-tiered framing approach over previous single-tiered approaches that focused exclusively either on issue-specific frames or on generalizable frames. Within the two-tiered approach, several options exist. For instance, in our study of the war on terror we used content analysis only at the first level, with issue-specific frames assigned categorically to generalizable frames (i.e., we coded the issue-specific codes into generalizable ones). Other researchers may prefer to content-analyze each text for the presence of both issue-specific and generalizable frames. Additionally, researchers may have good theoretical reasons to utilize one of the generalizable framing paradigms mentioned above either in addition to or instead of the generalizable paradigms we employ. For example, a comparison of local and national media attention to gay marriage might especially benefit from using episodic versus thematic frames at the generalizable level. That said, we draw on prospect theory and social identity theory to advocate the use of two types of generalizable frames with broad applicability: gain-based/loss-based and self-referential/other-referential.

Why employ these generalizable frame paradigms in particular? Inevitably, some attributes of an issue, when raised, will be remembered more readily than others (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001; McCombs & Smith, 1969). We believe these two generalizable dimensions—gain versus loss and self-referential versus other-referential—are likely to be especially useful to framing scholars for four main reasons. First, they reflect major distinctions regularly made by journalists. Second, they reflect psychological distinctions made by news consumers. Third, they can be applied to a number of different policy issues. And fourth, they have significant implications for political behavior and policy outcomes. Other generalizable framing paradigms may meet some or all of these same criteria, or other key criteria not mentioned. Our purpose here is primarily to illustrate the benefits of using generalizable frames *in conjunction with* issue-specific frames. Yet the reasons above are strong points in favor of using these framing paradigms in particular, as we discuss in more detail for each paradigm below.

#### *Gain-Based versus Loss-Based Generalizable Frames*

The first generalizable frame categorization we use draws on Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory. In a highly simplified application of their theory, we distinguish media frames that present an issue by focusing on the presence or promise of gain from those that present an issue by focusing on the presence or threat of loss (or neither) (e.g., Levy, 1996; McDermott, 1998; Tversky & Kahneman, 2000). Below, we outline four key reasons that this framing paradigm is especially appropriate as a generalizable approach.

First, journalists tend to focus on high-stakes political, economic, and international issues (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2010) because they view these high-stakes issues as especially newsworthy (Bennett, 1996; Gans, 2004; Schudson, 2003). When there is a lot on the line, the difference between potential gains and potential losses

is stark, and reporters and editors are likely to give the story high priority. Thus, not only do journalists regularly sort the world into stories framed in terms of gain versus stories framed in terms of loss (Soroka, 2006), but they are also on the lookout for stories that lend themselves to loss framing, even if reporting those stories means exaggerating the risks (Bomlitz & Brezis, 2008). As the nightly news adage goes, "If it bleeds, it leads." All else being equal, journalists prefer to report negative stories, and loss-based stories in particular, because these stories tend to bring in more readers (Sheafer, 2007).

Thus, the second reason the distinction between gain-based and loss-based frames is a useful one: frames based on loss elicit powerful psychological reactions from news consumers (Fiske, 1980; Hansen & Hansen, 1988; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; Soroka & McAdams, 2010). In prospect theory terms, losses loom larger than gains (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Levy, 2003). Building on these findings, there is evidence that news outlets can attract a greater readership by playing on the emotion of fear (Gans, 2004; Iyengar, 1991, 1996). Consider the reporting behavior of the media after the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl incidents, as studied by Gamson and Modigliani (1989). The imagery of radiation detectors, pulsating red graphics, and mushroom clouds all played to the public's fear of current and potential future loss.

Third, the gain framing versus loss framing distinction is useful because of its wide applicability across issues. For instance, healthcare reform could be framed in terms of coverage equality (a gain in quality of life) or in terms of government interference (the loss of personal freedom); the death penalty could be framed in terms of fairness (a gain for society) or in terms of effectiveness at preventing crime (losses, either suffered or avoided, in the form of crimes that capital punishment is designed to punish and deter).

Fourth and finally, experimental evidence across disciplines has shown that gain and loss frames can prompt significantly different individual-level responses to the same issue (Eibach & Purdie-Vaughns, 2011; Ledgerwood & Boydston, *in press*; McDermott, 2004; Miller & Krosnick, 2004; Roszkowski & Snelbecker, 1990; Rothman & Salovey, 1997). Specifically, prospect theory illustrates the tendency towards risk aversion when presented with a situation described in terms of gain, compared with risk acceptance when the situation is described in terms of loss—even when the facts of the situation remain identical. There is even evidence from prospect theory to indicate that whether gain-based or loss-based framing is used can impact policy outcomes, both foreign and domestic (Perla, 2011; Vis & van Kersbergen, 2007). De Vreese and colleagues, for example, find that framing European Union expansion (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006) or the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (De Vreese & Kandyla, 2009) as a risk (a loss-based frame) instead of an opportunity (a gain-based frame) produces a significantly lower level of support. Thus, the frames that the public receives in the news—whether about terrorism or healthcare or global warming—may influence the types of policies they support, the candidates they vote for, and even public cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996).

*Self-Referential versus Other-Referential Generalizable Frames*

The second generalizable frame dimension draws on social identity theory to distinguish between self-referential and other-referential frames. Self-referential frames focus on how an issue affects the “self” or the “in-group,” whereas other-referential frames focus on the implications of an issue for the “other” or the “out-group.” The division of the world into self and other is one of the most fundamental and enduring characteristics of human interaction (Olweean, 2002); people naturally define themselves in terms of their relationships to social and cultural groups (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Again, we outline four reasons for employing this paradigm.

First, like gain/loss frames, self/other frames are regularly employed by journalists. By framing the news around its relevance to the public, news producers attract more consumers (McManus, 1994). Additionally, self-referential frames reinforce the journalistic values of proximity and relevance (Graber, 2000). Reporters and editors want to tap into the public mood, and one way to do so is to recognize the salience of personal consequences to their audience (Craft & Wanta, 2004). As thinking in terms of self and other is very much a part of basic human cognition (Decety & Sommerville, 2003; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Ochsner et al., 2004), news reporters have good reason to align their stories along these dimensions.

Thus, the second major reason that tracking self/other frames adds to our understanding of broader framing trends is that these frames elicit strong reactions from media consumers. Psychology and sociology journals hold literally hundreds of studies documenting the self/other distinction and in-group bias (e.g., Ruffle & Sosis, 2006; for a review, see Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Evidence from psychology suggests that, for almost any issue, the initial human response is to ask “How does this affect me?” This inward-looking predisposition is well documented in topics ranging from emergency response (Walsh, 2010) to child sexual abuse (Sgroi, 1982) to changes in the workplace (Allcorn & Godkin, 2011; Lorenzi & Riley, 2002) to news consumption (Gastil & Dillard, 1999) and beyond. The need to identify with an in-group is so strong that such identification occurs even when the differences between self and other are superficial or arbitrary.<sup>3</sup> In-group considerations are particularly important to news consumers in times of crisis, when “the prospect of personal consequences may outweigh extensive media coverage when it comes to identifying concerns” (Craft & Wanta, 2004, p. 461).

Third, the self/other distinction is widely applicable and can be used to categorize media discourse on issues as diverse as gay rights (e.g., “marriage equality benefits the ‘other’ of gays and lesbians” vs. “marriage equality reinforces liberty for all Americans”) and federal taxes (e.g., “taxes help keep the roads you drive on safe” vs. “taxes provide support for AIDS orphans in Africa”). Gamson and Modigliani’s (1989) work on the nuclear issue is one potential arena for application. NIMBY, or “not in my back yard,” is a powerful frame on the topic of nuclear power and one that is firmly rooted in considerations regarding self.

Fourth and finally, whether an issue is framed in terms of implications for the self or for the other can have major consequences. For instance, Lang and Lang (1983)

found that when Watergate was framed as a “caper”—a political sideshow only affecting the president—the public was not very interested in the story. When it was framed as a national scandal affecting the entire country, public opinion shifted and Nixon resigned the presidency. Similarly, Ghanem (1996) shows that in crime reporting, the distance of the crime from the reader has a significant effect on how the reader reacts to the information. Tracking the conditions under which self-referential frames are more likely than other-referential frames to be used in media coverage can reveal a great deal about the framing process and the forces that shape national debates.

In summary, we believe the generalizable framing dimensions of gain/loss and self/other have advantages over other generalized coding schemes in helping framing studies talk directly to each other. These generalizable paradigms are certainly not the only ones that could be used in the two-tiered framing approach we advocate, but they are theoretically and pragmatically appropriate to use in most issue studies and travel especially well across issues.

### Applying a Two-Tiered Framing Approach to the War on Terror

Casual observers of the news could give us a basic idea of what media coverage of the war on terror looked like during its first five years. They could tell us, in very broad terms, how media framing of the war shifted over time—how the initial focus on terrorism and airplane security gave way at some point to a discussion about weapons of mass destruction, which in turn gave way to the gruesome detailing of the Abu Ghraib scandal, which eventually gave way to talk of troop surges and reconstruction, and so on. But are there any empirical trends in these changes? Here, we apply our two-tiered framing method to the specific case of the war, linking the broad-grained trends in generalizable framing with the issue-specific frames underpinning these trends. The result is a more precise understanding of the framing process as it played out in news coverage of the war, helping to pave the way for future work comparing framing dynamics across issues.

#### *Data*

We use data collected from a random sample of *New York Times* (NYT) front-page stories (N = 2,512) and *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) abstracts (N = 871)<sup>4</sup> on the war on terror between September 12, 2001 and December 31, 2006.<sup>5</sup> This extended time period allows us to identify long-term trends in framing. The stories<sup>6</sup> in our sample were coded at two levels: first, each story was read and manually coded according to the *primary* frame employed, based on our issue-specific codebook for the war on terror; second, each story was automatically tagged (through simple Stata syntax) according to whether its issue-specific frame was (i) based in the domain of gains or losses and (ii) self-referential or other-referential.<sup>7</sup> A discussion of how we made these coding decisions and what they looked like in practice follows in the next two sections.

### *Identifying Frames Specific to the War on Terror*

To track the issue-specific frames employed in newspaper coverage of the war, each story was given a single frame code corresponding to a unique issue-specific coding scheme developed for this project.<sup>8</sup> This coding scheme included 315 frames, representing a nearly exhaustive set of all frames that could be used, theoretically, in framing the war; for instance, “war on terror as a preemptive line of defense,” “women’s rights in venue,” and “safety and availability of troop equipment and supplies.” These 315 frames consist of frames raised deductively through extensive discussion among our coding team and with expert colleagues, as well as frames identified inductively in examining a large random sample of news stories (including television transcripts and stories in multiple newspapers beyond the *NYT* and *WSJ*) prior to solidifying the coding scheme. In fact, not all frames we identified in theory were utilized in coding our actual dataset. Of the 315 codes originally developed, 96 were never used by either newspaper in the sample we analyze here. Thus, our analysis is based on the 218 codes that were utilized.

We clustered these 315 theoretically possible issue-specific frames into 12 major issue-specific frame dimensions: September 11, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, human rights and criminal abuses, democratization and freedom, civil unrest, soldiers, civilians, reconstruction, government, economic cost, and prisoners/detainees. Most of these dimensions were fairly obvious aggregate categorizations of the individual frames we identified, but we only solidified the dimensions after extensive coding trials. For practical purposes, in the coding process the 12 dimensions (as with their component issue-specific frames) were treated as being mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories of discussion about the war.

We expect that, as with the prior framing studies discussed earlier, tracking these issue-specific frames will provide insight into the media’s use of frames and how these frames have changed over time. In the case of the war specifically, these framing behaviors are particularly important because framing undoubtedly has had some influence on Americans’ perceptions of the war (Edy & Meirick, 2007; Traugott & Brader, 2003) and even on the direction of American foreign policy regarding the conflicts (Entman, 2004; Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005).

### *Identifying Generalizable Frames*

In order to track the generalizable frame dimensions employed, we categorized the issue-specific frames, first as gain-based or loss-based (or neither) and second as self-referential or other-referential (or neither). We based these categorization decisions on theoretical discussion among the research team as well as on test coding of sample television and newspaper stories, thus again employing a mixed deductive/inductive approach. By assigning our issue-specific frames the gain-versus-loss and self-versus-other categorizations before coding the actual news stories, we allowed the coders to focus exclusively on the issue-specific frames without needing to consider the parallel (and potentially more confusing) question of how to code each

story according to the generalizable frame categorizations. Again, other contexts might justify the use of content analysis at both the issue-specific and generalizable frame levels.

More specifically, we categorized (most of) the 315 theoretically possible issue-specific frames into the two generalizable frame dimensions by considering (through discussion and test coding) whether each frame primed readers to consider the war *primarily* from a domain of “gains” (either achieved or missed) or “losses” (either suffered or avoided) or neither and, likewise, *primarily* from a “self” perspective (i.e., U.S. interests) or an “other” perspective (i.e., non-U.S. interests) or neither.<sup>9</sup> For instance, one gain-based frame we might see is “Fighting terrorism abroad will keep us safe here at home.” In this frame, fighting terrorists overseas is something to be hopeful about—it will lead to safety. An example of a loss-based frame is “Fighting terrorism is costing money that could be better spent at home.” This second frame makes the cost of the war paramount, bringing loss to the forefront of readers’ minds, as opposed to gain. To provide another example, the frame “Promoting democracy will provide the USA with more stable allies” was categorized as a self-referential frame. By contrast, the frame “Democratization improves the status of women in the Middle East” was categorized as other-referential.<sup>10</sup>

Table 1 shows our generalizable coding scheme through a two-by-two categorization of the self/other and gain/loss dimensions with examples of specific frames in the war debate that fall into each category. These examples are not exhaustive, but they do illustrate what media messages can look like when the generalizable framing categories intersect. When these two generalizable frame dimensions are combined, they produce what we can conceptualize as four important types of framing cues. Specifically, when loss-based and self-referential frames are used together, the message is generally one of fear, as a focus on the threat of personal loss is likely to prime the emotion of fear in those exposed to the frames (Camerer, 2005; Mercer, 2005), potentially affecting policy preferences (De Vreese & Kandyla, 2009; Gadarian, 2010). In the same way, gain-based and self-referential frames generally communicate a message of hope; gain-based and other-referential frames tend to communicate a message of charity; and loss-based and other-referential frames can be thought of as communicating a message of shame.

Examining broad shifts in the frame paradigms used in an issue debate while also having access to the specific frames driving those changes should allow us to see how and why generalizable trends in framing unfold, in turn laying the groundwork for more rigorous hypothesis testing in the future. For instance, what arguments might drive a shift in media use of hope versus fear frames? Tracking issue-specific frames allows us to identify whether the shift is driven by an increase in coverage of democracy promotion, by news about additional coalition partners contributing troops and supplies, or by reports of battlefield successes. Our two-tiered approach thus allows us to see the frames at work behind the scenes of broad changes. As with Downs’s (1972) issue attention cycle, it is likely that systemic forces are at play in the rise and fall of the generalizable frames that the media employs over time. Although we do not test a specific causal story in the case of the war on terror examined here, we do illustrate how the two-tiered coding approach can yield

**Table 1.** Generalizable Frame Types with Example Arguments

|      | Self-Referential  | Other-Referential  |
|------|---|--|
| Gain | <p><i>Hope Frames</i></p> <p>Fighting terrorism abroad will keep the United States safe on the home front</p> <p>Spreading freedom will give the United States more democratic allies</p> <p>There is no better economic investment than fighting to keep America safe and secure</p> <p>The best way to keep the United States safe is to withdraw</p> <p>The patriotism of the American people will help us recover</p> <p>Improvements in intelligence will make the country safer</p>   | <p><i>Charity Frames</i></p> <p>Fighting terrorism to keep the world safe is America’s duty as the world’s leader</p> <p>The United States can bring democracy and peace to the Middle East</p> <p>U.S. troops fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq are making us proud—they’re winning the war on terror</p> <p>The best way to help the Iraqi people is to withdraw</p> <p>Pakistan needs the help of U.S. intelligence to improve border security</p> <p>The women of Afghanistan are happy to have more freedoms</p>                                       |
| Loss | <p><i>Fear Frames</i></p> <p>If we don’t fight terrorists abroad, we will be forced to fight them on U.S. soil</p> <p>WMDs are a threat to the U.S. and the world—we don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud</p> <p>Too many U.S. soldiers are being killed</p> <p>The war is costing too much money, taking resources away from needs at home, and putting the U.S. economy at risk</p> <p>The September 11 attacks weren’t prevented because of intelligence failures</p> <p>The hubris of the United States makes us less secure</p> | <p><i>Shame Frames</i></p> <p>Without U.S. intervention, Iraq will destabilize and other Middle Eastern countries will suffer</p> <p>The torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib is an embarrassment to the U.S.</p> <p>Life for the citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq is worse now than it was before the United States invaded</p> <p>The United States has no right to impose its form of government on foreign nations</p> <p>Drone attacks are resulting in civilian casualties</p> <p>The Iraqi people are less secure now than they were under Saddam</p> |

*Note:* The table above offers only a few examples of the many frames (exhibited here through specific arguments) within each generalizable frame category.

insights into framing that are greater than the sum of its parts and can help the literature build towards a theory of framing trends that cross-cuts specific policy issues.

### Findings

In this section, we begin by analyzing issue-specific frames for the war on terror, then present data on gain versus loss frames and self versus other frames, and finally drill back down to the issue-specific level to examine key examples of why and how media framing changed and which frames were behind the trends we identify in gain/loss and self/other frame usage.

We present our findings at the quarterly level of analysis, as is appropriate given the pace of news coverage of an ongoing policy issue like the one at hand; other units of temporal analysis might be more appropriate for other cases. Here, we count quarters not by the traditional monthly divisions (January–March, April–June, etc.)

but instead as elapsed time from September 11, 2001. Thus, Quarter 1 runs from September 12, 2001 to December 11, 2001, and so on.<sup>11</sup>

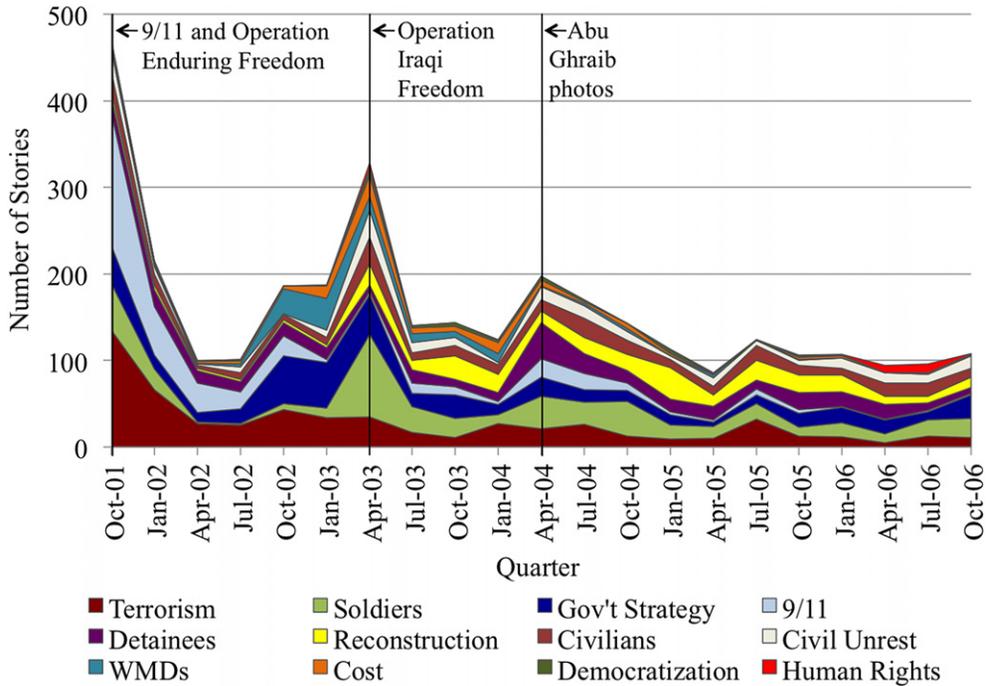
For the issue-specific frame dimensions we present our findings calculated as total stories, but for the generalizable dimensions (loss/gain and self/other), we present the data as the *net* use of loss-based and self-referential frames. That is, for loss-based frames, we calculate a Net Loss measure by taking the total number of stories with a loss-based dominant frame in each quarter, and from this number subtracting the total number of stories with a gain-based dominant frame in that same quarter. Similarly, for self-referential frames, we calculate a Net Self measure by taking the number of stories with a self-referential dominant frame minus the number of stories with an other-referential dominant frame for each quarter. This presentation of the data allows the reader to track the relative strength of the media signals sent to the public.<sup>12</sup>

### *Frames Specific to the War on Terror*

Starting with the issue-specific categorizations, Figure 1 presents the total amount of sampled news stories on the war, distributed by quarter across all 12 of the broad frame dimensions described above (thus, Figure 1 captures all 218 utilized issue-specific frames within their respective dimensions).

Figure 1 presents a complex picture of media coverage of the war. It is difficult to extract any real trend or pattern from this figure, which offers a visual representation of the many frames the media used that is quite dizzying, even at this broad quarterly level and focusing on the 12 issue-specific dimensions rather than the 218 individual frames. The major trend that is readily apparent is the decrease in overall attention over time. This detailed look at the frames used to discuss the war also illustrates the importance of events in influencing frame selection. Figure 1 contains lines marking three major events in the history of the war: 9/11, the deployment of troops to Iraq, and the breaking of the Abu Ghraib scandal. We see spikes in overall attention during these times, as well as some shifts in the specific frames that are used to discuss the war. For instance, there was a major bump in the soldiers dimension at the initiation of Operation Iraqi Freedom and a discernible increase in the detainees dimension at the time the Abu Ghraib photos were released. We also see an increase in government strategy frames through the fall of 2002, owing in large part to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and myriad discussions about what to do regarding Iraq.

Figure 1 also reveals some less intuitive findings about the use of frames over the course of the war. For instance, some may recall weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) to have been prevalent in the discussion in the lead-up to the deployment of troops to Iraq, along with many stories about 9/11 and reminders of the terrorist attacks (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005). While the WMD dimension did experience its highest usage during the fall of 2002 and the spring of 2003, it by no means dominated news coverage. And the 9/11 frames had almost entirely diminished by the two first quarters of 2003—the time leading up to and including the deployment of troops to Iraq. Thus, tracking the use of specific frames helps us get a sense of what



**Figure 1.** Media Framing of the War on Terror by Issue-Specific Frame Dimension, 2001–06.

Source: Dataset of sampled *New York Times* front-page stories and *Wall Street Journal* abstracts.

Note: Observations are displayed at the quarterly level (counting from September 12, 2001). In each figure presented, the x-axis ticks mark the first full month in each quarter. Thus, the first quarter period, which lasts from September 12 through December 11, 2001, is marked as October 2001. The figure above shows all 12 issue-specific frame dimensions (capturing all 218 utilized individual frames) in order of the overall amount of coverage received in the dataset. The layers in the figure correspond with the legend items reading left to right, top to bottom, from the terrorism dimension, which received the most stories, to the human rights frame, which received the fewest. N = 3,337 stories.

the war debate was like over time and the relative gains in attention each dimension made, or failed to make, in response to events. Without data at this fine-grained level, we might be persuaded by pundits and politicians with 20/20 hindsight, either critical of or supportive of the policies at the time. What these data cannot do on their own, however, is tell us whether these topical shifts in framing corresponded to broader framing dynamics, and they certainly cannot be used to identify any trends that might help us understand the framing process across issues. For that, we turn to the second tier of our coding scheme: generalizable frames.

### *Gain-Based versus Loss-Based Frames*

First, we examine the use of gain-based versus loss-based frames over time, recalling that we now shift from looking at overall numbers of stories to *net* values. In Figure 2, which traces our Net Loss measure, we see that immediately following 9/11, frames from the domain of loss dominated the discussion.

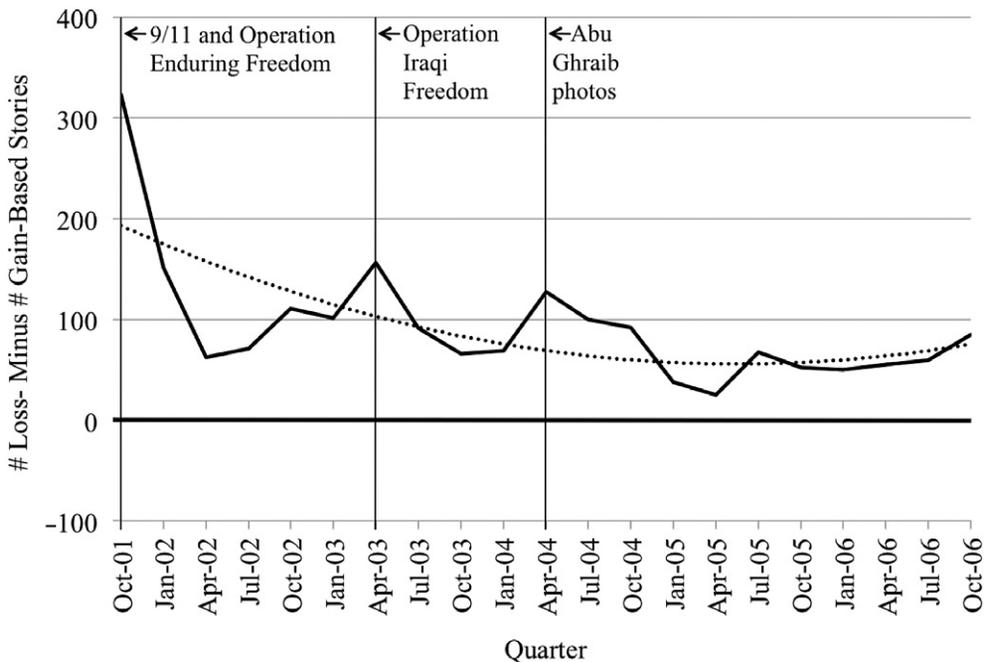


Figure 2. The Shift from Loss to Gain.

Source: Dataset of sampled *New York Times* front-page stories and *Wall Street Journal* abstracts.

Note: Observations are displayed at the quarterly level (counting from September 12, 2001). In each figure presented, the x-axis ticks mark the first full month in each quarter. Thus, the first quarter period, which lasts from September 12 through December 11, 2001, is marked as October 2001. The figure above shows the Net Loss focus of news coverage, as measured by the total number of sampled *NYT* and *WSJ* stories with a dominant loss-based frame minus the total number with a dominant gain-based frame. N = 3,209 stories.

However, we also see a dramatic decline in loss-based frames in the quarters following 9/11; in the third quarter after the attacks, the net number of stories using a loss-based frame dropped to less than 20 percent of their height immediately after 9/11. Some of this decline is due to the overall drop in attention to the war on terror as time from the 9/11 attacks moved forward, but the polynomial trend line in Figure 2 illustrates a real decline in the use of loss frames relative to gain frames. And, again, it is the relative *strength* of the signals sent to the public that we care about; the level of attention matters.

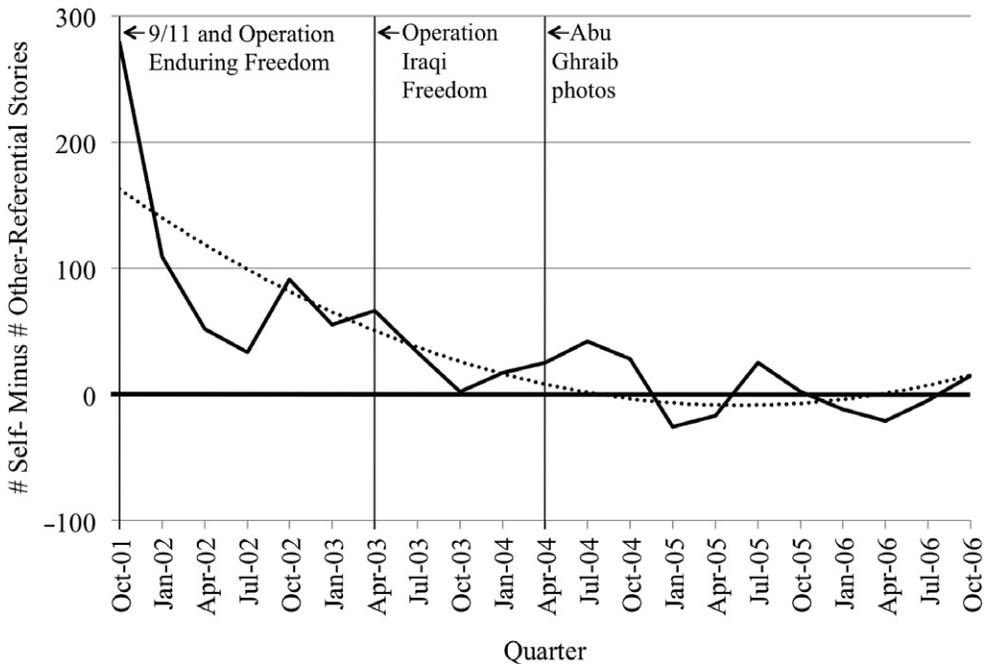
Thus, the data indicate a real change in the type of frames that the media used over the course of the war on terror. Early on, much of the coverage was based on the prospect of loss—headlines like “Malls Are Tightening Security as the Holiday Rush Begins” (Kaufman, 2001) focused the public’s attention on potential threats at home. Just a year later, however, the type of frame employed was quite different. For example, this November 2002 headline is based on the prospect of gain: “Nation-Building: The Return of America’s Postwar Generosity” (Dao, 2002). Thus, Figure 2 tells us that the public received more signals about loss immediately following 9/11 (e.g., dangers of holiday shopping), but that the media gradually shifted the manner

of portrayal, eventually employing more gain-based frames (e.g., potential benefits of nation building).

Interestingly, we do see loss frames increase at the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom as news stories focused on the potential loss of life for troops and civilians. Loss frames increased again at the release of the Abu Ghraib photos with coverage of the loss of freedom, dignity, and even life for detainees and the loss of reputation for the United States. Events certainly influence the media’s choice of frame types, but overall, the trend we identify was bigger than just topical events. The trend was clearly downward; loss-based frames are dominant early on, but their relative use decreased with time.

*Self-Referential versus Other-Referential Frames*

Turning next to the use of self-referential versus other-referential frames over time, we see a similar trend displayed in Figure 3. The Net Self series indicates that citizens were exposed to a much higher number of stories using a self-referential



**Figure 3.** The Shift from Self to Other.

Source: Dataset of sampled *New York Times* front-page stories and *Wall Street Journal* abstracts.

Note: Observations are displayed at the quarterly level (counting from September 12, 2001). In each figure presented, the x-axis ticks mark the first full month in each quarter. Thus, the first quarter period, which lasts from September 12 through December 11, 2001, is marked as October 2001. The figure shows the Net Self-Referential focus of news coverage of 9/11 and Iraq, as measured by the total number of sampled NYT and WSJ stories with a dominant self-referential frame minus the total number with a dominant other-referential frame. N = 3,209 stories.

perspective immediately following 9/11. This inward focus is to be expected—9/11 represented the first mass casualty attack on the United States since Pearl Harbor.

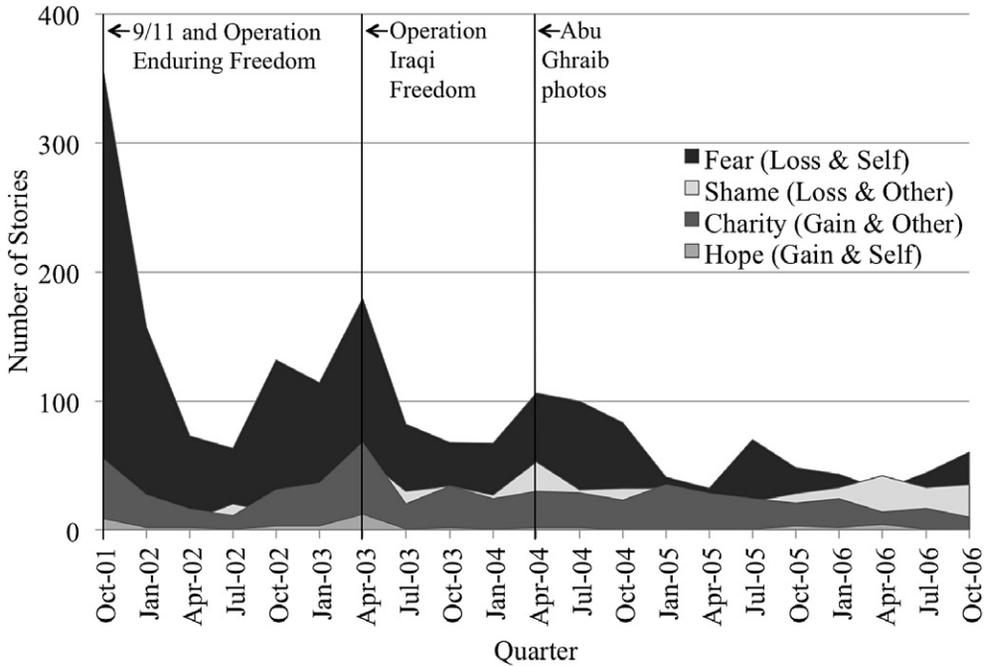
Yet self-referential frames also decline over time. As the war wore on, the media began to report on the war from different angles, including ones that took into account the impact on other countries and citizens. The polynomial trend line in Figure 3 shows a trend of declining use of self-referential frames over time. Whereas in the early days after the September 11 attacks every corner of the country was looking inward, the coverage in the news began to move beyond stories that persisted in presenting self-referential frames, like the *NYT* story focused on economic interests within the United States, headlined “Airline Bailout Encourages Other Industries to Lobby for Government Assistance,” (Wayne, 2001) to include more stories that took the perspective of the other (i.e., non-U.S. interests) into account. For instance, just over a year after 9/11, news headlines displayed thoroughly other-referential frames like “German Chancellor Wins Parliament Vote to Extend Afghan Troop Presence” (Landler, 2002). The focus had shifted from being almost exclusively about the United States and U.S. interests to include a more diverse reporting of international interests. In particular, we see declines in self-referential frames in the months after the initiation of Operation Iraqi Freedom and in the months after the first elections in Iraq. By the end of the series, it appears as though other-referential frames had gained parity with self-referential frames. Instead of receiving news with a much greater number of self-referential stories, by 2004 the public began seeing a much more balanced use of self versus other frames.

#### *Linking Issue-Specific and Generalizable Frames*

What have we gained by combining the first tier of issue-specific frames and the second tier of generalizable gain-versus-loss and self-versus-other frames in our two-tiered approach to coding framing? At the issue-specific level, we—like many framing scholars before us—have gained insight into the way that framing evolved and responded to events in a particular case of interest. At the generalizable level, we have been able to identify broad trends in media framing over time—trends that were not apparent from issue-specific data alone. Now, by combining these two approaches, we can get a closer look at exactly how and why framing trended in this way.

It is difficult to capture our generalizable findings overlaid with our issue-specific findings in a single figure. Looking exclusively at issue-specific frame data is complicated enough, as we saw in Figure 1. Yet we can see how the two tiers of our coding approach inform one another by comparing across graphs and by drilling down into the dataset.

In Figure 1, we showed a stacked area graph of all 12 issue-specific frame dimensions. In Figure 4, we offer a corresponding stacked area graph, but this time using the four combinations allowed by our two-by-two categorization of the generalizable frames, as presented in Table 1: hope (gain and self), fear (loss and self), charity (gain and other), and shame (loss and other).<sup>13</sup> While much of what we saw in Figure 1 may seem like noise, Figure 4 shows that there is meaningful order to the



**Figure 4.** Media Framing of the War on Terror by Generalizable Frame Dimension, 2001–06.

Source: Dataset of sampled *New York Times* front-page stories and *Wall Street Journal* abstracts.

Note: Observations are displayed at the quarterly level (counting from September 12, 2001). In each figure presented, the x-axis ticks mark the first full month in each quarter. Thus, the first quarter period, which lasts from September 12 through December 11, 2001, is marked as October 2001.  $N = 3,209$  stories.

chaos. The issue-specific frames used in the aftermath of 9/11 were not evenly distributed across the gain/loss and self/other dimensions; instead, these frames were predominantly fear frames—self-referential frames drawn from the domain of loss. This finding supports the claim by some that the media was playing on and amplifying the fears of the American public in the wake of the September 11 attacks (Altheide, 2006; Barber, 2004; Bonn & Welch, 2010), a conclusion that would not have been apparent if we only had Figure 1 to consult.

Figure 4 also shows that, as time moved on, other-referential frames based on both gain (charity frames) and loss (shame frames) became more common. We know from Figure 3 that the relative use of self-referential frames declined over time. Yet Figure 4 shows us that—unlike the discussion of self—the increasing other-referential frames were based on *both* gains and losses (potential or realized) for the other. In fact, self-referential frames from the domain of gain (hope frames) were used so rarely as to be difficult to identify in Figure 4, but other-referential frames from the domain of gain (charity frames) constituted between 10 and 20 percent of all stories towards the end of the series. These trends in the signals the public received from the news would not be identifiable without the use of a generalizable coding scheme.

By combining both levels of our two-tiered method of frame categorization, we can dig into the underlying dataset to reveal more insights into framing dynamics during this important time. What issue-specific frames were behind the increase in charity frames during the lead up to the Iraq War and what issue-specific frames made up the fear frame category?

Figure 4 shows that in the lead-up to and execution of Operation Iraqi Freedom, there was a significant spike in news stories that utilized both loss-based and self-referential frames. These stories—about both personal risks and potential losses—are what we consider fear stories.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the lead-up to the Iraq War was characterized by very few fear stories that utilized frames in the 9/11 dimension. While the media coverage during this time has been accused of general fear-mongering (Altheide, 2006), our coding scheme illustrates that the spike in fear frames in early 2003 was much more about soldiers (43 percent of frames) than it was about reminding the country about 9/11 (1 percent of frames), detailing the dangers of WMDs (8 percent of frames), or even emphasizing the threat of terrorism (18 percent of frames). Only by combining both tiers of our coding scheme do we see that, while the level of fear in the news reporting continued to increase, the issue-specific frames underpinning these fear stories shifted toward a particular emphasis on soldiers' welfare.

The generalizable codes also show us that, during the time of increasing fear before the start of the Iraq War, there was also an increase in stories that utilized gain and other-referential frames together. What did these charity stories look like? In the lead-up to the Iraq War, they were mostly about working with other countries (28 percent of frames). The charity stories became more varied by the quarter beginning with April 2003, with 10 percent about stopping human rights abuses committed by Saddam's regime, 12 percent about establishing government stability, and 8 percent about the prospects for democracy. This increase in gain-based and other-referential (i.e., charity) stories revealed by the second tier of our coding scheme is important itself. However, only by utilizing the two tiers together can we see that, while the charity stories before the deployment of troops to Iraq were driven by a focus on international cooperation, the focus of the charity frames shifted to the impact of the military mission on the people and country of Iraq in early 2003.

## Discussion

These results identify some clear trends in the media's framing of the war on terror and also raise interesting questions about the framing process more broadly. In the case of the war on terror, our two-tiered coding scheme illustrates the topical frame shifts of the war, the media's practice of drawing much more heavily from loss-based and self-referential frames early on, and a contextualized look at why these major changes took place. Although we do not test the causal mechanisms of the changes in gain/loss and self/other frames over time in this paper, past literature suggests that these cues are of consequence to citizens.

Why does it matter that the media covered the war—and perhaps covers other policy issues—by initially using a predominance of self-referential and loss-based

frames? Research on prospect theory clearly demonstrates that when individuals are in the domain of losses—a placement that can be influenced by framing—they are more risk-accepting. Thus, as we consider the consequences of framing public policy in these ways, it may not be a stretch to say that the loss-based coverage following the September 11 attacks made the public more willing to accept what might otherwise be seen as risky foreign policy ventures in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The personal and political impact of loss-based frames may be even greater when the loss, either suffered or potential, is to the in-group. Research across disciplines and from social identity theory in particular has demonstrated that people naturally define themselves in terms of their relationships to social and cultural groups. When news stories are framed in terms of the in-group, they become more meaningful to news recipients. Citizens in a media environment saturated by self-referential stories may see the issues addressed in those stories as more important than they otherwise would. The war on terror was at the top of the nation's collective mind during the time we examine here, including during the 2004 presidential election.<sup>15</sup> The media framing of the conflict in primarily self-referential terms had potentially far-reaching consequences for the election and for public policy.

Perhaps most significantly, these trends matter because of the promise two-tiered coding schemes hold for building the framing literature across policy issues in the future. Although we believe the two coding tiers we use here work well in tandem, our generalizable coding schemes (gain vs. loss and self- vs. other-referential) can be applied to other issues. Likewise, one could certainly apply another generalizable scheme, such as episodic versus thematic frames, to the war on terror, linking it with the first-tier issue-specific frames in order to gain additional insight into the framing trends behind the coverage of this important topic. We encourage scholars to think about their own efforts to track framing and the compound benefits that a two-tiered coding scheme can provide. The insights we gain into framing trends over time, and which frames underlie these trends, go beyond those we would have gained by using either frame coding tier alone.

For colleagues interested in employing a two-tiered scheme, we recommend beginning with the design of the codebook and the coding process. The appendix includes a sample from the codebook used for this study. If coding at the issue-specific level has already been completed, it may be possible to apply a generalizable coding scheme *post hoc*, as we did in the case of the war by "coding the codes." For instance, in the study of framing of the capital punishment debate by Baumgartner et al. (2008), frames about the effectiveness of the death penalty to deter crime would be coded as self-referential and loss based, frames about the potential of innocent defendants on death row would be coded as other-referential and loss-based, and so on.

The use of this two-tiered coding scheme across policy issues will also allow scholars to determine if the trends we identify in the war on terror—whereby media framing shifted from loss toward gain framing and from self-referential toward other-referential framing—are unique to the war or are more generalizable to other crisis issues. It is certainly possible that these framing trends are driven by particular

developments in this particular war, but it is also possible that they are driven by a “framing attention cycle” similar to Downs’s (1972) issue attention cycle, potentially characteristic of media coverage of crisis issues more generally. The two-tiered coding scheme we utilize for this research travels well across substantive issues and thus provides a method for future research to investigate this and other questions.

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## Notes

1. We follow Gamson and Modigliani’s (1987) definition of a frame as a “central organizing idea or story line” that serves to contextualize a policy issue or debate (p. 143).
2. We use the term “war on terror” (or hereafter “the war”) for simplicity, recognizing that the phrase is itself a prime example of framing (see Reese & Lewis, 2009, for a discussion of how this label was coined by the administration and adopted and internalized by the press and public; see also Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986).
3. The ease with which artificially constructed groups bond together and identify in contrast with “the other” has been repeatedly demonstrated with controlled experiments, beginning with the work of Tajfel and colleagues (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971), who pioneered the modern field of social identity theory. See also Ruffle and Sosis’s (2006) work on in-group preferences even among the most cooperative-minded groups.
4. See Note 11 below about the total sample size used in our analyses.
5. We utilize the *NYT* because, despite some arguments that it has a liberal bias (Fritz, Keefer, & Nyhan, 2004; Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Kuypers, 2006) most studies show that the *NYT* is the single best indicator of national media trends. The *NYT* agenda continues to drive the agendas of other newspapers (national and local), of network and cable television, and even of Internet news (Althaus, Edy, & Phalen, 2001; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002; Soroka, 2002; Van Belle, 2003; Winter & Eyal, 1981; but for competing evidence see Woolley, 2000; see also Druckman, 2005). As it is such a prominent media outlet, an examination of the coverage provided by the *NYT* is an important exercise itself. However, in order to bolster the validity of our study, we supplement our *NYT* analysis with analysis of the *WSJ*—a paper perceived to have a conservative slant (Page, 1996). At the quarterly level, the number of *NYT* and *WSJ* stories on the war correlated at 0.905. *NYT* and *WSJ* coverage was also positively correlated within each of the 12 frame dimensions, ranging from 0.114 for the cost dimension (with a relatively small N of 107 stories in this dimension) to 0.933 for the September 11 dimension (N = 389). When weighting by the number of stories in each frame dimension, the average correlation is 0.655. Moreover, although not included in analyses here, the net tone of coverage (positive stories minus negative stories) correlated at 0.705. Because of these high correlations and to maximize the sample size, we combine the *NYT* and *WSJ* observations in our analysis. See the supporting information on the lead author’s website (<http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/boydstun>) for more details.

6. In LexisNexis, *WSJ* articles are not included in their entirety but instead are summarized in brief abstracts, usually the equivalent of 1–3 sentences in length. Coders used these abstracts to assign a single issue-specific frame to each *WSJ* abstract capturing the primary frame conveyed. For the *NYT*, coders used both the headline and entire content of each article to assign a single issue-specific frame for the primary frame conveyed. We call the *NYT* articles and *WSJ* abstracts stories, collectively.
7. Two experienced coders coded all the stories in this dataset according to the issue-specific frames described below. A random sample of 100 stories shows intercoder reliability measures as follows: at the 2-digit level (i.e., 12 issue-specific dimensions), agreement = 92 percent, Cohen's kappa = 0.908, and Krippendorff's alpha = 0.908; at the 4-digit level (i.e., 218 employed issue-specific frames), agreement = 82 percent, Cohen's kappa = 0.801, and Krippendorff's alpha = 0.801.
8. Example codebook sections appear in the Appendix. The complete codebook is available on the lead author's website (<http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/boydston>).
9. Specifically, the authors worked in isolation to categorize the 315 frames by loss/gain and self/other dimensions and then compared notes. With only a dozen or so exceptions, the categorizations were identical, and these exceptions were decided after careful discussion. Twenty-three issue-specific frames could not be categorized at the general level, such as frames focused on the motivations of various political actors, leaving 292 theoretically possible issue-specific frames categorized at the generalizable level. The full codebook of issue-specific frames, each tagged according to the loss/gain and self/other generalizable frame dimensions, is available on the lead author's website (<http://psfaculty.ucdavis.edu/boydston>).
10. Thus, stories were automatically coded by generalizable frame dimension based on their issue-specific frame. Although this automated categorization held the potential for individual stories being categorized incorrectly at the generalizable level, in practice we found very few such instances. For instance, nearly every story primarily framed in terms of WMDs was done so with strong implicit if not explicit regard to the global threat WMDs represent (namely, including a threat to the United States). Having assessed this pattern in our test coding, we were confident in automatically categorizing stories primarily framed in terms of WMDs as self-referential (and loss-based). However, stories mentioning WMDs but framed primarily around another frame involving threats to non-U.S. populations were automatically categorized as other-referential along with all the other stories with that frame. For example, a story framed around Saddam Hussein's human rights abuses before the war (e.g., gassing the Kurds) was categorized under the human rights dimension at the issue-specific level and, thus, was automatically categorized as other-referential at the generalizable level.
11. Because the final quarter of our analyses ends on November 12, 2006, our analyses exclude the final stories of 2006, leaving us with a total N of 3,356. Of these, 19 stories were uncodable (had no discernible frame), leaving us with a total of 3,337 stories presented in Figure 1. Figures 2–4 present data for all 3,209 of the stories categorized in an issue-specific frame that could also be categorized according to gain/loss and self/other. For ease of interpretation, the x-axis of each figure shows the first full month of each quarter period.
12. For instance, a quarter with 50 loss-based stories and 50 gain-based stories has a Net Loss of 0 (as does a quarter with 5 loss stories and 5 gain stories). At the same time, this approach accounts for the importance of the overall levels of attention. A quarter with 100 loss-based stories and 20 gain-based stories has a Net Loss of 80, whereas a quarter with 10 loss-based stories and 2 gain-based stories (the same proportional use but at a much lower frequency) has a Net Loss of 8.
13. Note that the total number of stories represented in Figure 4 is less than in Figure 1. Not every issue-specific frame fit the generalizable framing categories, and the data in Figure 4 present only those stories in those frames that could be categorized as both self/other and loss/gain.
14. While loss frames lend themselves to feelings of fear, the gain/loss dimension is orthogonal to positive and negative affect. Stories about avoided losses, for example, may prompt feelings of relief. Yet stories that are loss-based as well as self-referential tend to be laden with fearful overtones; relief comes when we have avoided an alternative outcome that was to be feared.
15. The Policy Agendas Project's coding of monthly Gallup polls allows us to estimate the percentage of Americans who identified the war (and related defense issues) as "the most important problem facing the nation" in 2004 (see <http://www.policyagendas.org>). For May through November, this value averaged 30 percent and was the top issue named (the economy was second with an average of 26 percent).

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## Appendix: Description of and Samples from the War on Terror Codebook

In order to help others apply our two-tiered coding scheme in their own research, this appendix contains an abbreviated codebook for coding newspaper articles on the war on terror. This codebook illustrates both levels of coding we recommend.

The first level is the issue-specific information about the war. In our coding scheme, each news story is assigned a 4-digit code. The first two digits in this code reference one of the 12 dimensions of discussion regarding the war (e.g., terrorism = 02, soldiers = 07, reconstruction = 09, etc.) and the second two digits reference the specific message that is communicated (e.g., financial attacks on terrorists = 0211, troops injured or killed in combat = 0702, election challenges = 0963, etc.).

The second level of our coding scheme contains the generalizable codes we derived from prospect theory (gain vs. loss) and social identity theory (self vs. other). These codes were attached to the 4-digit codes from the first level before coding commenced. Thus, a coder reading a news article about spreading democracy as a preemptive line of defense would only assign a single 4-digit code to the article (0502—the first two digits representing the democratization and freedom dimension and the second two representing the specific information about democracy as a preemptive defense). The gain/loss and self/other tags were then automatically applied to each story based on the 4-digit code. Thus, coders did not have to make (sometimes complicated) decisions about whether a specific article was framing the issue in terms of gain versus loss or in terms of self versus other; they only had to think about the first-level codes.

It is not possible to include the entire codebook in this appendix, but we have included a few selections to give the reader an idea of one way to apply a two-tiered coding method. Included below are the following:

- A table of all 12 dimensions and their corresponding 2-digit codes (Table A1);
- By way of example, complete tables of codes for two dimensions: terrorism (02; Table A2) and democratization and freedom (05; Table A3).

**Table A1.** Dimensions of Debate

| Code | Dimension  |
|------|--|
| 01   | September 11   |
| 02   | Terrorism  |
| 03   | Weapons of mass destruction                          |
| 04   | Human rights and criminal abuses                     |
| 05   | Democratization and freedom                          |
| 06   | Civil unrest   |
| 07   | Soldiers   |
| 08   | Civilians  |
| 09   | Reconstructions                                      |
| 10   | Government   |
| 11   | Economic cost  |
| 12   | Prisoners/detainees held by United States and allies |

Table A2. Codes for Dimension 02 (Terrorism)

| Code | Coverage   | Gain/Loss  | Self/Other        |
|------|--|------------|-------------------|
| 0200 | General  | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0201 | Terrorism events <sup>a</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempted terrorist attacks</li> <li>• Terrorist planning and organization</li> <li>• General discussion of war on terror</li> <li>• Possible terrorist attainment of surface-to-air missiles</li> </ul>            | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0202 | War on terror as preemptive line of defense <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "We need to combat terrorism preemptively to keep the world safe"</li> <li>• "We cannot wait for threats to materialize"</li> <li>• "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud"</li> </ul> | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0203 | War on terror as America's duty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Fighting terrorism is our responsibility as the world's superpower"</li> </ul>   | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0204 | War on terror as moral or religious issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Fighting terrorism is God's will"</li> <li>• "Fighting terrorism is the right/just thing to do"</li> </ul>   | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0205 | Venue possibly or definitely harboring and/or supporting terrorists  | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0206 | Venue possibly connected to Al-Qaeda (in general)  | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0207 | Venue's role in the war on terror <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venue is a central front, or "ground zero," in the war on terror</li> <li>• "You are either with us or you are with the terrorists"</li> </ul>  | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0208 | Dealing with Saddam Hussein and personal supporters, including giving ultimatums, hunting for, and stripping of power  | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0209 | Dealing with Osama bin Laden and personal supporters, including giving ultimatums, hunting for, and stripping of power <sup>b</sup>  | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0210 | Dealing with other terrorists or potential terrorists (Taliban, Al-Qaeda, etc.), including giving ultimatums, hunting for, and stripping of power <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dethroning the Taliban</li> <li>• "We will make sure terrorists have no safe haven"</li> </ul>  | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0211 | Financial attacks on terrorists or terrorist suspects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggle to uncover bin Laden's financial network</li> <li>• Freezing of terrorist bank accounts</li> </ul>   | Loss-based | Self-referential  |

Table A2. Continued

| Code | Coverage   | Gain/Loss         | Self/Other       |
|------|--|-------------------|------------------|
| 0214 | Domestic security <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening borders</li> <li>• Heightening security at airports and museums</li> </ul>  | Loss-based        | Self-referential |
| 0215 | Bioterrorism concerns on U.S. soil <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smallpox</li> <li>• Anthrax</li> </ul>   | Loss-based        | Self-referential |
| 0218 | Terrorist motivations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious faith</li> </ul>  | Not categorizable |                  |
| 0291 | Characteristics of the United States that help in the war on terror <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kindness</li> <li>• Being a strong nation</li> <li>• Generic patriotic statements</li> </ul>                            | Gain-based        | Self-referential |
| 0292 | Characteristics of Saddam Hussein  | Loss-based        | Self-referential |
| 0293 | Characteristics of Osama bin Laden   | Loss-based        | Self-referential |
| 0294 | Characteristics of terrorists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "They have no conscience"</li> </ul>  | Loss-based        | Self-referential |
| 0295 | U.S. policymaking with regard to terrorism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patriot Act</li> </ul>   | Loss-based        | Self-referential |
| 0296 | Pace of handling the war on terror   | Loss-based        | Self-referential |
| 0297 | Blame with regard to terrorism   | Loss-based        | Self-referential |
| 0298 | U.S. intelligence with regard to terrorism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interrogation of terrorist suspects</li> <li>• Reports of newly gathered intelligence</li> <li>• CIA clandestine espionage operations</li> </ul> | Loss-based        | Self-referential |
| 0299 | Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Our dependence on oil leaves us vulnerable to terrorists"</li> </ul>   | Loss-based        | Self-referential |

<sup>a</sup>For 9/11, use code 0101.

<sup>b</sup>May also be used for early stories about attempts to expel bin Laden from Afghanistan.

Table A3. Codes for Dimension 05 (Democratization and Freedom)

| Code | Coverage  | Gain/Loss  | Self/Other        |
|------|---|------------|-------------------|
| 0500 | General   | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0501 | Democratization and freedom events  | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0502 | Spreading of freedom and democracy as preemptive line of U.S. defense <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Eliminating leaders will make the United States and the world a safer/better place"</li> <li>• "More democracies in the world give us more allies"</li> <li>• "Spreading democracy will bring stability in the Middle East, making the world (and thus the United States) a safer place"</li> </ul> | Gain-based | Self-referential  |
| 0503 | Spreading of freedom and democracy as America's duty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Answering the call of history"</li> <li>• "It is our responsibility as the world's leader to spread democracy/freedom"</li> </ul>  | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0504 | Spreading of freedom and democracy as moral or religious issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It is our God-given duty to spread democracy/freedom"</li> </ul>   | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0505 | Spreading of freedom and democracy as method of nation building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Democracy makes for more stable governments"</li> </ul>   | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0506 | Particular need for freedom and democracy in venue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morality of leaders</li> <li>• "The Taliban are unjust rulers and must be overthrown"</li> <li>• "Saddam Hussein is an evil dictator"</li> </ul>  | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0507 | What's best for the venue's people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Democratization and freedom will provide a better life for the venue's people"</li> </ul>  | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0508 | Women's rights in venue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Women's rights are/were being abused"</li> <li>• "Women are better off and have more freedom since occupation"</li> </ul>   | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0509 | Level of venue's gratitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The venue's people are very grateful, so we should continue to help them"</li> <li>• "The venue greeted/will greet us as liberators"</li> </ul>  | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0510 | "Terrorists/others hate our freedom"  | Loss-based | Self-referential  |
| 0511 | Civil liberties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Our civil liberties aren't being violated"</li> <li>• "We must sacrifice some liberties as an acceptable cost of fighting terrorism"</li> <li>• "The United States will not sacrifice civil liberties"</li> </ul>   | Loss-based | Other-referential |
| 0595 | U.S. policymaking with regard to democracy and freedom  | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0596 | Pace of addressing issues of democracy and freedom  | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0597 | Blame with regard to issues of democracy and freedom  | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0598 | U.S. intelligence with regard to democracy and freedom  | Gain-based | Other-referential |
| 0599 | Other   | Gain-based | Other-referential |