

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

**The politicians, the press and the people: The contested dynamic of framing Canada's Military Mission in Afghanistan**

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Media and Communication of the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, September 2017

## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

This research's classic content analysis ( $n = 900$ ) critically investigates the mediated dynamic of framing Canada's military mission in Afghanistan between 2006-2011. This study found that while journalists overwhelmingly indexed their stories to elite sources, they frequently fact checked the media frames sponsored by government and military leaders. Journalists used elite criteria to evaluate and critique the media frames sponsored by military and government leaders. Most of the coverage of the conflict was hegemonic, episodic and event-oriented rather than thematic and contextual. While Canadian journalists frequently fact checked official claims of improving security, for instance, the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan lacked broader critical appraisal. The abundance of fact checking by news professionals did not challenge hegemonic interpretations about the war, the military and Canadian foreign policy, raising questions about journalism's normative role in Canadian democracy.

This research also presents the findings of a population-based survey experiment ( $n = 1,131$ ) aimed at testing the potential influence of fact checking and media discourse surrounding the news coverage of Afghanistan. This experiment found no statistically significant influence of fact checking on news consumers, suggesting journalists may wish to re-think how they challenge the media messages of officials. This study argues that the news media's practice of fact checking – coupled with an abundance of episodic coverage – does not offer audiences sufficient information to make considered decisions about issues and events. This research found that Canadians' attitudes about their country's military role in Afghanistan are best understood as a confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many people for their help — and support — with this thesis.

This research was supported with the financial help of the London School of Economics and Political Science and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

I wish to acknowledge the kind mentoring of my supervisors, Dr. Bart Cammaerts and Professor Charlie Beckett. Additionally, I want to thank Ellen Helsper for her guidance concerning my population-based survey experiment.

I want to especially thank Bart for his academic rigour and unwavering commitment to critical scholarship. Bart's generous spirit — and friendship — meant a lot to me over the last four years. His *chill* nature made the perfect match to my decidedly *less relaxed* personality. He challenged me to think differently — and critically. In the end, I am so grateful for the academic journey of the last four years.

I also wish to thank Nick Couldry, Goran Bolin of Sodertorn University, Stockholm, and Andreas Hepp, from the University of Bremen, for their continued efforts to nurture friendship and collaboration between PhD researchers and senior scholars of media and communication in Bremen, Stockholm and London through the Brestolon network.

Thank you also to the LSE library and its staff, especially Heather Dawson. I also want to extend my gratitude to the Media and Communication Department's helpful and kind administrative support, James Deeley, Nicole Garnier, Cath Bennett and Michael Ethridge. Additionally, I wish to thank Alex Chalis for copy editing my thesis.

I must extend special thanks to the folks at Vox Pop Labs, Clifton van Der Linden, Gregory Kerr and Gregory Eady, for their help with my population-based survey experiment.

I would like to thank my colleagues, friends and family Fabien Cante, Paula Kiel, Anthony Kelly, Ruth Garland, Meagan Zurn, Svenja Ottovordemgentschenfelde, Angelos Kissas, Nora Kroeger, Karen Darmon, Olivier Driessens, César Jiménez-Martínez, Peter Carroll, Fiona Campbell, Charlotte Lamont, Susie Sourwine, Geordie Raine, Kelly Kehn, Lynn Woods Strang, Jim Strang, Patrick McCurdy, Helen Charles, David Common, Jay Bertagnolli, Helen Henderson, Kent and Lia Morley, Suzanne Vickers, Jason Doupe, Travis Doupe, Michelle Denny, Nicole Kruppi, and Terry Arseneau, Judy Sletto, Christy, Renee, Cailey and Abby Stark, Ryan, Reid, Emmit, Melanie and Sharleen DeCillia, Sean Cullen and Fay Coleby for their kindness and unfailing support.

Finally, I cannot express (here) the profound gratitude I feel for my family, Tracy and Andy

Sletto. Thank you for your patience. Thank you for wholeheartedly embracing the *adventure* of doing a PhD in the United Kingdom.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

### Abbreviation / Acronym

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defence
CA	Content analysis
CAD	Canadian dollar
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CTV	Canadian Television
Col.	Colonel
ELM	Elaboration likelihood model
Gen.	General
GMG	Glasgow Media Group
ISAF	International Security Force
KAF	Kandahar Airfield
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
MP	Member of Parliament
MRQ	Main Research Question
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDP	New Democratic Party
np	no page
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
Pvt.	Private
RAS	Receive accept sample model
UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States of America
U.K.	United Kingdom
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

## Map of Afghanistan



(Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan 2008: 41)

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.0. Introduction

“I don't quite understand this worship of objectivity in journalism. Now, just flat-out lying is different from being *subjective*” – Hunter S. Thompson (as quoted in Hahn 1997: np; italics in original).

This story — like so many about Afghanistan — begins on a rugged old road in the countryside. Under the scorching midday summer heat, I stood next to an ephemeral riverbed, part of an intricate irrigation system of wadis fed by the Arghandab River. A handful of Afghan and Canadian soldiers shoveled gravel, building up the approach to a new bridge they were constructing in the village of Makuan. Dozens of Afghan villagers looked on, smiling, seemingly pleased to see their *bombed out* bridge being fixed. It seems almost absurd now — but I was there to tell a story about Canadian soldiers fixing the bridge. Rewind a week earlier and Canadian soldiers were fighting with Taliban insurgents near this village west of Kandahar City, the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban. During that battle, dubbed “Operation Medusa”, I was embedded with the Canadian artillery. (The military’s mythical illusion of decapitating their enemy’s head never really materialized.) Standing there, a week later in Makuan, I wondered if some of the munitions fired by the soldiers I was with seven days earlier had landed near the farmland where I had come that day to report for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). I also feared — although I did not express it publicly — that I was nothing more than a propagandist for the Canadian military at that moment.

On that day, in the summer of 2006, I travelled with Canadian Forces 20 kilometres west of Kandahar City to hear the military *brag* about its development work. The public affairs officers who pitched the story to me promised it would be a ‘great way’ to show off the Canadian military’s efforts to *win hearts and minds* and convince Afghans to reject the Taliban and embrace Hamid Karzai’s fledgling government in Kabul. I was skeptical — but it was a chance to get out *behind the wire* of the Kandahar Airfield (KAF). All the journalists at the KAF were keen to *leave the wire* and do some *real* reporting.

It was grape season — and my radio report from that day highlighted the farmers' need to get their crops to the nearby markets in Kandahar City. My story *clipped* Canada's Captain John Angus who was eager to make sure the villagers gave credit to 'the Canadians' for fixing the bridge destroyed in the recent battle. "This is why we're here... [for] the betterment of the average Afghan citizen," Canadian audiences heard him say in my radio story for CBC Radio's, *World Report* (CBC 2006b: np). I was cynical about the military's development efforts. For my mind, so many of the earnest officers, such as Captain Angus, seemed to be talking out of both sides of their mouths. In one moment, they were extolling the notion of building trust through building bridges. Seconds later, the emphasis turned to the cold and clinical calculus of killing Taliban fighters. In the months leading up to Canadian Forces deploying to Kandahar, Canada's top general, Chief of the Defence Staff General Rick Hillier, famously labeled the Taliban "detestable murderers and scumbags" (Hillier, as quoted in The Globe and Mail 2005: np). I *hope* my radio report from that hot summer day telegraphed some of my skepticism about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan<sup>1</sup>. I concluded by stressing that while the Canadian soldiers may have impressed some of the villagers in Makuan, the insurgents could return moments after the military pulled out, "destroying all their good deeds and undermining their good intentions" (CBC 2006b: np).

Without question, the Conservative Government of Stephen Harper and the Department of National Defence strategically marketed Canada's combat operations in the southern Afghanistan province of Kandahar (2006-2011) as part of a noble effort to: (1) make Afghanistan safe; (2) rout terrorists; (3) help women and children; (4) provide micro finance to Afghans; (5) clear land mines; (6) support the democratically elected government; and (7) police the war-torn nation (Government of Canada 2008a). An investigation by *The Canadian Press* uncovered that the Conservative government "systematically script[ed] the words it wanted to hear from the mouths of its top diplomats, aid workers and cabinet ministers in 2007-08 to divert public attention from the soaring double-digit death toll of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan" (Blanchfield and Bronskill 2010: np). Moreover, a report commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs concluded that the Harper government's public comments about the war were

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<sup>1</sup> Canada's combat military role in Kandahar, Afghanistan ran from 2006-2011.

“too American”, suggesting that government and military officials instead use phrases such as “rebuilding, restoring, reconstruction, hope, opportunity, and enhancing the lives of women and children” in an effort to persuade Canadians to support the conflict (Woods 2007: np).

Amidst all the war *marketing*, I worried my reporting was too easily accepting of government and military leaders’ media framing of the war. The American news media’s failure to properly interrogate George W. Bush’s trumped up threats in 2002/2003 surrounding Iraq’s so-called Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) left me (and some of my colleagues) cynical about the Canadian government and the military’s pretext for involvement in Afghanistan. I was tormented by fears of *pulling my punches* and *trumpeting* official talking points. But other journalists did not seem to share my concerns. One of my colleagues, whom I spent lots of time with in Kandahar, newspaper columnist Christie Blatchford openly — and proudly — admired Canadian soldiers serving in Afghanistan between 2006-2011. The veteran columnist wrote vividly and affectionately about Canada’s military men and women. Accused by her critics of *cheerleading* for Canadian soldiers and the war (Solga 2009: np), Blatchford’s dispatches from Kandahar were often poetic, as in this example describing the repatriation ceremony for Private Robert Costall after he was killed in battle:

“The young Canadian man who died in service of his Afghan counterpart was sent off home last night.

Into the warm and deceptively benevolent spring night — with songbirds, confused by the lights in the big hangar optimistically called Taliban’s Last Stand, chirping as thousands of army boots moved with surprising quiet onto the darkened tarmac — his casket was borne to the flight line in one of the LAVs, or light armoured vehicles, so beloved of the Canadian infantry, his pallbearers arriving in another.

Two rear doors opened and Pte. Costall was on his way to the waiting ramp of a great grey Hercules C-130.

Piper Master-Corporal Callum Campbell played the lament.

Canadians, and soldiers from eight other nations, saluted their fallen comrade.

All the way home to Canada, escort officer Sergeant Bill Grady, of 7 Platoon, was with the young man’s body.

Robert Costall was never alone, not for a minute.

When it was all over, Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope, the commanding officer of the Canadian battle group known as Task Force Orion, looked skyward and pointed.

“Orion,” he said, of the bright and beautiful constellation above” (Blatchford 2006: np).

Blatchford’s focus was clearly on the soldiers. I am not critical of her emphasis. As a columnist, Blatchford was upfront about her admiration for Canadian soldiers. Her father, after all, served in the Canadian Forces (Blatchford 2007a). Blatchford was clear about her agenda: She wanted to tell soldiers’ stories. She wanted to document their duty to serve and their actions on the battlefield. She aimed to make their service and sacrifices meaningful. These are laudable goals, arguably. As a reporter for a public broadcaster — someone who is expected to never editorialize — I worried that embedding left me with a tunnel vision that only allowed me to tell one side of the story. I feared my audience was only getting a very narrow — hegemonic — view of what was going on in Afghanistan.

I also wondered about the impact of all the news media’s coverage of Afghanistan on Canadians. Public opinion about Canada’s combat operations in Afghanistan changed considerably in the first year. It shifted dramatically between when I first went to Kandahar in the summer of 2006 and when I returned the following summer. In 2001, Canadians were overwhelmingly supportive when Canadian soldiers first went to Afghanistan as part of the United States-led invasion to overthrow the Taliban (Boucher and Nossal 2015). Support was also high for Canada’s military contribution to the UN-led mission to stabilize the capital of Kabul between 2003-2005 (Saideman 2016). While initially supportive of Canada’s military role in Kandahar starting in early 2006 (The Strategic Counsel 2006a), public opinion soured during Canada’s *stepped up* combat operations in southern Afghanistan (CTV 2007: np).

I wondered during my first trip to Afghanistan if Canadians would accept seeing their soldiers do something other than peacekeeping internationally. I was curious about the impact of dead soldiers on Canadians’ attitudes towards the war. This thesis reflects my intellectual journey from that bridge in the baking heat of Kandahar’s summer to the considerably cooler temperatures of Houghton Street at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). This research attempts to sort out the influences of government and military leaders’ messages about the war in Afghanistan on journalists and the public. I use a content analysis (*n*

= 900) to assess the shaping power of various factors on news content and a representative population-based survey experiment ( $n = 1,131$ ) to assess the potential influence or *effects*<sup>2</sup> of media messages (and, in particular, journalistic fact checking) on Canadians' opinions towards their military and Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan.

The goal of this chapter is to provide both an introduction and a roadmap for this thesis. As well, this introduction also sets the table, *per se*, for understanding the justification for this research and its contribution to media and communication scholarship. This introduction begins by outlining why the news media offer an important site for understanding Canada's military role in Afghanistan — and a springboard for this work's attempt to explain how the news media may have shaped Canadians' opinions towards the conflict. In conjunction with this, I outline the theoretical tensions this study aims to address. I also foreshadow the research questions this study wants to answer. After that, I sketch the necessary context required to understand this research. Admittedly, this introduction offers more history than most media and communication PhD research. But the short *history lesson* I offer surrounding Canada's military interventions in Afghanistan helps set up this research's arguments concerning media discourse and its potential impact on citizens. With the background for this study established, I also detail numerous caveats or limitations surrounding this work. Finally, I offer a brief sketch of the coming chapters. This introduction begins, though, with the theoretical debates this research explores.

## 1.1. The News Media and Public Attitudes About Afghanistan

Canada's media were the site of significant public debate about Afghanistan — and this study examines them “as both an agent and a venue” with an eye to understanding how journalistic practices *may* “contest the ways in which we think and talk about policy issues” (Kosicki and Pan 1997: 8). As Gitlin (2003 [1980]: 9) rightly explains, the media are “a significant social

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<sup>2</sup> The influence or *effects* of the news media, of course, remain a contested concept in media and communication scholarship (Corner 2000; McQuail 2005). Audiences are not passive receivers of media messages. I expand on the debate about reception – and position this research in relation to that argument – in my coming theory chapter.

force in the forming and delimiting of public assumptions, attitudes, and moods.” Furthermore, to better understand normative conceptions of media, war coverage “should not be seen as a special case of how the media works” but a chance to take a close-up look at “many of the things that happen in peacetime” (Williams 1992: 158; see also Carruthers 2000). Academic assessments of the news coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan have concluded that journalists failed to serve Canadian audiences effectively (Bergen 2009; Maloney 2015). Considerable research, especially in the U.S. context, suggests that journalists frequently fail to live up to their normative *watchdog* role during times of war, often acting as nothing more than *stenographers*, echoing and amplifying, uncritically, the media framing of military and political leaders (see, for example, Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Massing 2004; Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2006; Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston 2007).

Fletcher, Bastedo and Hove (2009: 925) concluded that the Canadian government’s “information transmission” about the war in Afghanistan succeeded. Little scholarly attention, however, has focused on the actual media messages available to Canadians during the conflict. If content is instrumental to understanding the potential influence of media and how the news might “exert their own unique shaping power” (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 4), then it follows that researchers investigate the actual content to interrogate what role (if any) Canadian journalists played in the *information transmission* Fletcher and colleagues (2009: 925) describe. This study responds to this academic deficit, concluding that Canadians did not receive uncontested media messages sponsored by government and military leaders. Canadian journalists fact checked the media frames offered by officials about the war in Afghanistan. But, as this work argues, fact checking only goes so far and does not represent a truly counter-hegemonic expression (Pratt 2004).

This research explores three theoretical tensions in journalism scholarship concerning: (1) indexing; (2) journalistic fact check; and (3) the implications of fact checking for normative conceptions of the news media (monitorial and collaborative). This study offers evidence critiquing the indexing hypothesis (Bennett 1990) and support for an events-driven argument concerning counter-framing by journalists (Baum and Groeling 2010a; Speer 2017). This study argues that while journalists overwhelmingly indexed their stories to elite sources, they frequently fact checked the frames sponsored by government and military leaders, thereby

offering a degree of counter-framing. Unlike some research (Baum and Groeling 2010a; Baum and Groeling 2010b) that contends elites have considerable shaping power at the start of wars — and journalists require time to begin challenging the claims of political actors — this research also posits that because of the growing practice of fact checking, journalists can sometimes challenge elite media frames about war from the onset of conflicts.

Yet, while some may argue that fact checking represents a form of watchdog or accountability journalism (Jones 2009; Dobbs 2012), this research argues that because news professionals frequently use elite criteria (Ettema and Glasser 1989, 1998) to challenge the media frames of officials, this practice does not represent a true challenge to hegemonic forces. Dominant interpretations of war in the news media are, arguably, further exacerbated by the predominance of episodic coverage. Canadian journalists may have challenged official claims of improving security, but because so much of their reporting focused on events, the coverage lacked context and critical appraisal of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. This, in turn, raises theoretical questions about journalism's supposed monitorial role in democracy (Christians et al. 2009).

Critical scholarship is also left to wonder if the news media's fact checking actually has an impact on audiences. This work also intervenes in the theoretical debates concerning public support for war — and the potential impact of media messages in the formation of those public attitudes. The data from this work's content analysis served as a launching pad for testing the potential impact of fact checking and media messages on Canadian audiences. This research provides some empirical and theoretical insight into the debate about the efficacy of fact checking. Moreover my conclusion makes a number of recommendations for future research to better test fact checking's impact on audiences. As well, I included a number of recommendations aimed at how journalists can avoid, sometimes unwittingly, perpetuating hegemonic interpretations of war.

As I mentioned before, Canadians' support for the military mission dropped quickly in the first 12 months of the conflict (The Strategic Counsel 2006b). What happened? What led Canadians to switch from support to opposition? Indeed, public support for war is not a *blank cheque* (Gartner 2008). There is little agreement on what individuals "rely on when forming their

attitudes toward war" (Gelpi 2010: 88). Some scholarship suggests citizens *rally around the flag* at the onset of conflict (Mueller 1970, 1973). Other scholarship suggests the body bags returning from the frontline turns the public off war (Larson 1996; Berinsky 2007). Alternatively, we must also wonder if events on the ground — the perception of success or failure — also shapes the public's opinions about conflict (Kull and Ramsay 2001; Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2006). Perhaps, though, people listen to what elites say about war, as other scholarship suggests (Zaller 1992; Berinsky 2007).

This study argues that Canadians' opinions about the conflict in Afghanistan are best understood as a confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge (Gamson 1992). This work adds evidence to the argument that attitudes about war are largely influenced by domestic factors, especially ideological orientation and partisanship (Gaines et al. 2007; Jacobson 2008; Berinsky 2009). Moreover, this research suggests political communication scholarship should pay more attention to the role that emotion plays in forming political attitudes, especially about war (Fletcher et al. 2009; Fletcher and Hove 2012).

This study additionally explores the theoretical conflict concerning the impact of journalistic fact checking on audiences (Skurnik et al. 2005; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Pingree 2011; Graves 2016; Nyhan et al. 2017). This work's population-based survey experiment ( $n = 1,131$ ) questions the efficacy of the current configuration of journalistic fact checking, whereby journalists usually dispute or challenge the veracity of political actors' claims. In line with other scholarship (Skurnik et al. 2005; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Nyhan et al. 2017), this research's data suggests that fact checking in news does not overcome people's predispositions and the power elites have to influence public opinion (Zaller 1992; Berinsky 2009).

To be sure, as the coming theory chapter stresses, there is a big difference often between the intended message of the news media and what active audiences take away from those messages (Livingstone 1993, 1996, 2000; McQuail 2005). My project seeks to open up the connection between news media messages and their potential impact on audiences. "Research which rests on content analysis alone," argues Philo and Berry (2004: 98-99), "leaves the researchers in the position of having to assert what the audience would be likely to understand from the news." The first half of this research maps the news content — and media framing — available to

Canadians about the war in Afghanistan. This study attempts to offer insight into how actual news media content — rather than fabricated treatments dreamed up by researchers and administered in laboratories — may have shaped Canadians' attitudes towards combat operation in Kandahar. It also seeks to test the potential efficacy of fact checking in the news media. This study combines audience research with a robust content analysis in order to capture the full extent of media production and their potential influence(s). The coming pages offer some historical context to help situate this research.

## **1.2. A Brief History of Canada's Military Interventions in Afghanistan**

“There will be some who want to cut and run, but cutting and running is not my way and it's not the Canadian way.” — Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, March, 2006 (CBC 2006a: np).

“Quite frankly, we are not going to ever defeat the insurgency.” — Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, March, 2009 (Foot 2009: np).

Not since the Korean War did Canadians soldiers fight and die in such great numbers as witnessed in southern Afghanistan between 2006-2011<sup>3</sup>. Undoubtedly, Canada's military intervention in Afghanistan was a difficult and even agonizing experience. Many Canadians had an emotional response to the conflict (Fletcher and Hove 2012). Canadian Forces, of course, have deployed in dangerous peacekeeping operations in Rwanda, Haiti, Cyprus, Croatia and other places since the Korean War. As a founding member of NATO, Canadian soldiers also served on the *frontline* of the Cold War in West Germany. But the war in Afghanistan represented something decidedly different than what most Canadians were familiar with. It had been generations since Canadian infantry soldiers took to the battlefield in large numbers like they did in Kandahar. The deployment saw a battle group of more than 2,000 soldiers continually fighting a fierce war between 2006-2011 against Taliban insurgents in the volatile southern Afghan province of Kandahar (CBC 2009). Between 2001 and 2014, more than 40,000 Canadian soldiers served in Afghanistan (Government of Canada 2017). The human losses were substantial — and proportionally higher than other NATO countries (Gross Stein and Lang

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<sup>3</sup> This synopsis of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan draws from Saideman's (2016) historical account.

2007). In the end, 160 Canadians lost their lives, 1,000 soldiers were wounded and the conflict cost more than \$20 billion (CAD) (Saideman 2016).

While this research focuses on Canada's combat operations in Kandahar between 2006-2011, Canadian Forces have been deployed four times since 2001 to Afghanistan in different locations and for different purposes. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in America, Canadian Forces were part of the U.S.-led invasion to overthrow the Taliban between October 2001 to July 2002. Canadian soldiers were also deployed as part of the UN-sanctioned stabilization force based in the Afghan capital of Kabul between 2003-2005. Between 2006-2011, Canada took on its toughest assignment, assuming a combat and reconstruction and development role in the volatile region of Kandahar. For many Canadians, this period is synonymous with their country's military role in the South Asian country. After Kandahar, Canada's military role transitioned to training the National Afghan Army in Kabul between 2012-2014 (Government of Canada 2017).

Two competing narratives explain how Canada ended up in Kandahar (Saideman 2016). In the first account, a *dithering* Liberal Party Prime Minister Paul Martin delayed making a decision about Canada's *inevitable* participation in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), allowing other alliance nations to choose easier — less dangerous — regions of Afghanistan to stabilize (Saideman 2016). In the second competing historical account, posited by Gross Stein and Lang (2007), Canada's military brass *hoodwinked* Martin's government into taking on the volatile region of Kandahar.

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was decidedly unpopular in Canada (EKOS 2003). Despite fears of damaging U.S.-Canada relations for years, Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien insisted that Canada would not participate in the invasion of Iraq without UN Security Council support (Freeman 2013). Two years later, the new Liberal prime minister, Paul Martin, rejected Canada's participation in the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programme shielding North America, even after U.S. President George W. Bush had pressured Canada to join the U.S. missile programme while visiting the country in 2005 (CBC 2005). *Spurning America twice* left many officials in Ottawa believing that Canada needed to “up the ante” on the international stage to placate its most important ally and trading partner for not participating in Iraq (Cooper 2009: 366). Canada's top military officials believed that rejecting the BMD necessitated Canada

stepping up to do “something that the Pentagon really valued” in Afghanistan, especially when the Americans were stretched so thin holding off a growing insurgency in Iraq (Gross Stein and Lang 2007: 181). Michael Kergin, the former Canadian ambassador to Washington, summed up the thinking of many in Canada’s foreign affairs and defence community:

“There was this sense that we had let the side down... and then there was the sense that we could be more helpful, militarily, by taking on a role in Afghanistan... We could make a contribution in a place like Kandahar” (Kergin, as quoted in Gross Stein and Lang 2007: 181-82).

Former Prime Minister Martin, himself, confirms that many military and foreign affairs officials were convinced that Canada had “to do something in order to repair the relationship in terms of both Iraq and BMD. I didn’t agree” (Martin, as quoted in Gross Stein and Lang 2007: 182). Martin’s chief of staff, Tim Murphy, called Canada’s participation in Afghanistan “something we had to do more than something we wanted to do” (Murphy, as quoted in Cooper 2009: 363). Gross Stein and Lang (2007) argue Canada’s Chief of Defence Staff Rick Hiller, used his artful skills of persuasion to win over Martin and his cabinet to take on the tough deployment of sending troops to Kandahar to, in part, impress American military leaders.

As well, Canada’s military leadership may have also pushed the tough combat deployment in Kandahar in hopes of shattering the so-called *peacekeeping myth*<sup>4</sup> (Saideman 2016). Gross Stein

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<sup>4</sup> In the minds of many Canadians, peacekeeping is linked with the country’s military. National surveys in Canada consistently rank UN peacekeeping as a “top priority” for Canada’s military, with some polls even placing the role above North American security and patrolling the country’s Arctic (Koring 2012: np). Peacekeeping is, undoubtedly, linked with Canadian Forces in many Canadians’ minds (Martin and Fortmann 1995; Munton and Keating 2001; Munton 2003; Granatstein 2007; Roussel and Boucher 2008). Notably, Morton (1990: 5) called peacekeeping “the only thing that the public thinks the military are any good for.” In 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government committed \$450 million (CAD) and as many as 600 troops to future UN peacekeeping missions (Brewster 2016). Some historians discount connections between Canadian Forces and peacekeeping, calling it a *peacekeeping myth* (Granatstein 2007; Maloney 2007). This research does not attempt to settle the historical debate over the so-called *peacekeeping myth*. In order to make this study’s argument, however, it is necessary to highlight the symbolic power of peacekeeping in many Canadians’ minds.

and Lang (2007: 196) argue, “[t]here is little doubt” that senior defence officials wanted to blow up “the myth that the Canadian Forces were primarily peacekeepers.” In his memoir, Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hiller makes clear that he hoped Kandahar would help Canadian Forces shed the peacekeeper label:

“Everyone who wore a uniform had experienced a cultural revolution. We were proud to wear our uniforms, but we also had confidence in who we were — warriors first and foremost, able to do any task — with a first responsibility to finish tough, often violent tasks when Canada needed them done... The immense frustration at the ignorance of so many who labeled us “only” peacekeepers had disappeared” (Hillier 2010: 493-94).

Hillier and other military leaders surely knew that deploying to the volatile region of Kandahar would test Canadian Forces — and challenge traditional notions that Canadian soldiers only keep the peace. But it is unclear if the politicians who authorized the mission knew what they were committing to in Afghanistan.

With little understanding of the tough multi-year fight ahead of it, Canada “slid into a war” in Afghanistan in 2006 (Gross Stein and Lang 2007: 289). Prime Minister Paul Martin instructed Canada’s top soldier: “We do peacekeeping and reconstruction and win hearts and minds” (Martin, as quoted in Gross Stein and Lang 2007: 191). In their historical account of how Canadian troops ended up fighting a war in Kandahar, Gross Stein and Lang (2007: 186; italics in original) stress that military officials rarely spoke about an “*insurgency*” when pitching the proposed mission in Kandahar to politicians. Notably, during his tour of the country to garner Canadians’ support for the coming mission in Kandahar, Defence Minister Bill Graham did not call Canada’s upcoming military role in Afghanistan a war — and he did not link the conflict to the U.S-led *war on terror* (Miller 2010).

“Our role is quintessentially Canadian: we are helping to rebuild a troubled country and we are giving hope for the future to a long and suffering people. This is a clear expression of Canadian values at work” (Graham 2005: np).

Reflecting on the his decision to send troops to Afghanistan in 2007 after leaving power, Paul Martin insisted he had no idea that Canadian Forces would have to be engaged in such intense fighting (Gross Stein and Lang 2007). While the Liberal Government of Paul Martin may not have known what it was getting into in Afghanistan when it gave Canadian Forces the green light to deploy to Kandahar, it was another government that took over the handling of the mission.

Afghanistan, in many ways, shaped Stephen Harper's premiership. It became "a defining feature of his government" (Gross Stein and Lang 2007: 232). Harper's Conservative Party won a minority government on January 23, 2006, replacing Paul Martin's Liberal minority government (CBC 2006c). The next day, the prime minister-designate stressed his commitment to Canadian soldiers being deployed to Kandahar, saying:

"We will continue to help defend our values and democratic ideals around the globe — as so courageously demonstrated by those young Canadian soldiers who are serving, and who have sacrificed, in Afghanistan" (Harper, as quoted in Kirton 2006: 37).

Soon after, Harper made a surprise trip — his first overseas as prime minister — to Afghanistan to visit Canadian troops. Afghanistan became "Mr. Harper's war", owning it both symbolically and instrumentally (Bratt 2007: 5). Throughout 2006, the war in Kandahar intensified. Thirty-six Canadian soldiers died (Government of Canada 2017), making it abundantly clear that Canadian Forces were not, in fact, peacekeeping in Afghanistan.

The new minority Conservative government championed the war as part of Canada's international duty (Government of Canada 2008a). Ultimately, though, the Conservative Government's decision-making about Afghanistan was heavily influenced by the "dynamics of domestic politics instead of foreign policy imperatives" (Boucher and Nossal 2015: 59). Public opposition to the military mission grew quickly, with a majority of Canadians — and especially the Québécois<sup>5</sup> — opposing the war by late 2006 (The Strategic Counsel 2006b). When the Conservatives could not suppress public concerns, the minority government "sought ways to limit the potential political damage" (Boucher and Nossal 2015: 60). On May 17, 2006 the Conservatives initiated an emergency debate in the House of Commons about extending the military mission in Kandahar to 2009 from the initial end date of February 2007 (Parliament of Canada 2007). The vote was close — 149 to 145 (The Toronto Star 2010). The Conservatives won the vote with the help of 30 Liberal MPs. After this vote, Canada's Parliament was increasingly split over the question of Afghanistan. Eventually, the nationalist Bloc Québécois

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term Québécois and Quebecers interchangeably to denote all people (English and French-speaking) who live in the province of Quebec.

and the left-leaning New Democratic Party demanded that Canada pull its soldiers out of Afghanistan immediately.

In 2007, Harper began publicly suggesting that the military mission in Afghanistan should be extended to the end of 2011 (O'Neill and Mayeda 2008). In a speech to Australia's Parliament the prime minister noted the increasing public opposition to the war in Afghanistan — but vowed not to walk away from the troubled South Asian country (Reuters 2007). Aware of the growing public unease with the war, Harper appointed an independent panel of eminent Canadians, chaired by former Liberal Party cabinet minister John Manley, to investigate the military mission and make recommendations (Globe and Mail 2007). The panel's report in early 2008 recommended extending the stay of Canadian Forces in Kandahar if NATO sent more troops and specialty helicopters to help Canada's combat operations (CBC 2008b). Manley's report gave Harper "the political cover necessary to convince enough Liberals to vote for an extension" (Saideman 2016: 47). To that end, Harper accepted the thrust of the report written by the former Liberal deputy prime minister. Harper even later accepted the Liberal Party's recommendations that the military mission focus on: (1) training the Afghan Army; (2) beefing up security for reconstruction efforts; and (3) continuing development efforts in Kandahar (CBC 2009). Soon after, in May 2008, the Conservatives and Liberals teamed up in the minority Parliament once again to extend Canada's combat operations in Kandahar until the end of 2011 (Woods 2008), effectively taking the combat mission off the political agenda (Boucher and Nossal 2015). Harper, arguably, also used the parliamentary debates as cover to hide from the unpopularity of the war in Kandahar. In a minority Parliament, resolutions extending Canada's military mission in Afghanistan could be blamed on both the Liberals and the Conservatives. To be sure, public opinion definitely soured quickly on Canada's military mission in Afghanistan (CTV 2007). Because much of the coverage of the conflict came from journalists embedded with Canadian Forces, the coming pages offer a brief synopsis of the Canadian embedding process.

### **1.3. Canadian Journalists Embed with Canadian Forces**

In line with Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) model, institutional factors such as embedding can shape and frame news content. Canadian journalists embedded with the military in Kandahar lived, slept, ate and were in harm's way with Canadian Forces (Potter 2014). The practice

influenced the news coverage produced by Canadian journalists (Bergen 2009). My previous research (DeCillia 2009) offers some tentative conclusions about the impact of embedding on Canadian journalists who covered the conflict, including:

1. Canadian journalists were keen to tell stories about Canada's first *real war* in decades and the *brave* men and women fighting it;
2. Embedded journalists were on guard after no WMD were found in Iraq, making them skeptical of Canadian officials' *spin* about the war in Afghanistan;
3. Canadian journalists were particularly cynical about the Harper Government's framing of the war given the acrimonious relations between the new Government and the news media; and
4. Journalists in Afghanistan possessed a strong normative compunction to fact check the media frames used by government and military leaders about the war (DeCillia 2009: 30-35).

Canadian journalists were not subject to censorship, *per se*, in Afghanistan. The military did not vet journalists' stories before publication and all conversations with Canadian Forces were on-the-record (Henderson 2006). Journalists agreed to certain conditions in order to be embedded with the military, including not revealing future troop movements<sup>6</sup>. As well, reporters were prevented from disseminating any information that commanders in Kandahar "restricted for operational reasons" (Lamarche 2013: np). Journalists, not surprisingly, complained that the military used that restriction pell-mell to the point where it "became like a moving yard stick throughout the whole war" (Lamarche 2013: np). While there was no censorship, there was discursive implications as the coming theory chapter explains. Having situated the context of this research, I wish to now offer a few brief comments about the limitations of my study.

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<sup>6</sup> Canadian Forces' media embedding program guidelines are available at:  
<http://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/291/286/banville.pdf>

## 1.4. Some Caveats

“Social science,” emphasizes Sayer (1992: 2), “has been singularly unsuccessful in discovering law-like regularities.” Scott, (1990: 4), notably, contends “...there is no satisfactory way to establish definitively some bedrock reality or truth behind any set of social acts.” To be sure, the observations and metrics employed by social scientists remain fallible. Moreover, all researchers are inherently biased, of course, because of their cultural experiences and worldviews. Recognizing that my comprehension of the social production is, indeed, liable to error because of this, I also concede that my construction of that reality can also be defective. I believe the best means of coming to some sort of understanding of our social world is to triangulate theory and method. This study is positioned as decidedly critical — and also understands that reflexivity, “with no place for [an] absolutist mind”, is required in order to interpret and understand both the media coverage of Afghanistan and its *potential* influence on Canadians’ attitudes towards the war (Hamelink 2008: 3).

This study’s content analysis ( $n = 900$ ) reduces words to numbers. Admittedly, it is reductionist, compressing news content to only a text and eliminating powerful images and sound from its corpus. To be sure, there is rich data to be mined in visual representations of war (Zelizer 2002; Butler 2009; Matthes 2009). This study’s primary focus, however, examines the potential impact of government and military leaders’ media frames on journalists. As a result, I focused on textual over visual representations. While classic content analysis offers an efficient means to characterize a representative sample of news coverage, it does not offer the rich descriptive detail that discourse analysis provides (Gill 1996). My methods chapter addresses how I attempt to overcome these deficits. Moreover, my conclusion details a number of critical reflections on my methods, their limits, and recommendations to overcome such deficiencies in future research.

As the coming theory chapter makes clear, the influence of media messages remains a contested intellectual terrain. Moreover, reducing complicated political opinion formation to quantitative results is also problematic (Lewis 2001). Habermas (1974 [1964]) argued that surveys are too reductionist and prevent the full formation of ideas in the public sphere. Bourdieu (1979) famously asserted that there is no such thing as public opinion. Then, of course, there is a

Foucauldian (1991 [1977]) interpretation of surveys which sees the method as a controlling and disciplinary mechanism.

To be sure, trying to ascertain how Canadians feel about a military mission that ended six years ago is not without its limitations. Initially, I had hoped to conduct focus groups to supplement the deficiencies associated with my population-based survey experiment ( $n = 1,131$ ). Time and resources prevented this from happening. Nevertheless, this research's audience experiment data offer insight into what factors likely shaped Canadians' attitudes about the war in Afghanistan. This study's results, as I will argue in my conclusion, offer a solid starting point for further qualitative research.

With concerns about the efficacy of surveys in mind, this research makes careful knowledge claims about the impact of news media and fact checking and their potential influences on audiences. I also offer supplementary evidence and scholarship to back up my knowledge claims with a mind to triangulating theory and evidence to make cautious — and nuanced — knowledge claims. In my two findings and discussion chapters, for instance, I provide numerous examples and other quantitative and qualitative data to bolster my probabilistic claims and arguments. Moreover, my analysis is grounded in Gamson's (1992) contention that media messages *may* play a part in how individuals form political attitudes — but popular wisdom and experiential knowledge can also play a crucial (and often defining) role. Despite these limitations, I do believe that the combination of a content analysis and a population-based survey experiment does offer some important insights into the nexus of news media discourse and audience reception.

## 1.5. Conclusion and Roadmap

Back on that hot day back in 2006 in the village of Makun I worried about being a *cheerleader* for the Canadian Forces. I was apprehensive about being spun — and, in turn, spinning the Canadian public. Firstly, this thesis asks what Canadian journalists did with the media framing offered to them by government and military officials. It also wonders how journalists themselves, framed (or counter-framed) the war. It also questions the efficacy of fact checking.

Secondly, this research is curious about what it all — government and military messaging and news media coverage — meant for Canadians' political opinion formation about the conflict in Afghanistan. Did what politicians, military personnel and journalists say about the war even matter? Moreover, did the fact checking by journalists influence audiences? Perhaps, though, Canadians' political predisposition played a bigger role than what government and military leaders said — and what journalists did with their words.

This thesis uses a classic content analysis to determine what government and military officials said about the war — and how journalists reacted to that media framing. The method offers an effective means for identifying and classifying media phenomena such as indexing, framing and fact checking (Hallin 1986; Bennett 1990; Entman 1991; Bennett et al. 2006, 2007; Baum and Groeling 2010a, 2010b; Porpora, Nikolaev, Hagmann 2010; Speer 2017). Secondly, this research used a population-based survey experiment (Mutz 2010) to examine how Canadians' predispositions (Gamson 1992; Zaller 1992; Western 2005; Berinsky 2009) and media messages may have influenced attitudes towards the war in Afghanistan. This experiment also provides some insight into how audiences react to fact checking in news coverage of conflict.

In Chapter Two, I offer a synthesis of theory that helps to: (1) explain the factors that can shape news content; and (2) conceptualize how audiences may be influenced by the news media. The first half of the coming chapter interrogates the rich literature surrounding news content production. Numerous conceptual frameworks (see, for example, Gans 1979; Gitlin 2003 [1980]) shed light on how media content gets shaped. This study is anchored in Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of influences model, formally known as the hierarchical influences model, as a conceptual starting point for understanding and testing how indexing, framing and journalistic practices influenced the news and analysis about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. This work also attempts to *link* news content with its potential influence. The second part of the theoretical chapter outlines how individuals develop political attitudes (sometimes) through a process of combining media messages with popular wisdom and experiential knowledge (Gamson 1992).

Chapter Three, *Research Methodology*, outlines my rationale and procedures for conducting a content analysis and a population-based survey experiment. Chapter Four, “*But it is not getting any safer*,” details and analyzes this work’s key empirical findings from its content analysis. Chapter Five, *Putting it All Together*, outlines and interprets this study’s data concerning its population-based survey experiment. Chapter Six, *Conclusion*, provides a synthesis of this work’s findings along with a number of critical reflections about theory and methodology. The conclusion also offers some suggestions about future research — and several recommendations for journalists concerning fact checking. With a mind to situating this research’s methods and empirical findings theoretically, the forthcoming chapter turns to this study’s conceptual underpinnings.

## Chapter Two: Shaping the news content that *shapes* the pictures in our heads

### 2.0. Introduction

“The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event. That is why, until we know what others think they know, we cannot truly understand their acts... Our opinions cover a bigger space, a longer reach of time, a greater number of things, than we can directly observe. They have, therefore, to be pieced together out of what others have reported and what we can imagine” (Lippmann 2004 [1922]: 7, 43).

The story of this chapter happens in two acts. I begin by exploring how numerous macro, meso and micro-factors shape news content. The second part of this chapter scrutinizes how media messages (or frames) potentially influence audiences. Frames, to be sure, exist in different locations — communicator(s), text(s), receiver(s) and culture(s) — and at different times. I imagine framing at two different stages: (1) frame-building; and (2) frame-setting (D'Angelo 2002; de Vreese 2005). Frame-building involves numerous components and circumstances — ideological, cultural, institutional and individual — that influence or frame the news content journalists produce (Tuchman 1978a; Gans 1979; Snow and Benford 1992; Shoemaker and Reese 2014). Frame-building, for instance, can include newsroom policies or politics or external values such as ideology. Frame-setting, on the other hand, comprises the processing influence of frames on audiences and represents a complex mechanism entailing both the “interaction between media frames and an individual’s prior knowledge and predispositions” (de Vreese 2005: 52). Cappella and Jamieson (1997: 47; *italics in original*) stress that frames can potentially “activate knowledge, stimulate stocks of cultural mores and values, and create context within which what are typically called media *effects* are produced.”

It is also helpful (to follow the two key threads of this chapter) to imagine frames as both independent and dependent variables (Scheufele 1999). The first part of this chapter critically examines numerous social and structural (Shoemaker and Reese 2014), individual (Tuchman 1978a) and organizational (Gans 1979) factors that shape or determine news content. The second section of this theoretical chapter then turns to evaluating frames at the audience level as an independent variable (Kahneman and Tversky 1984; Gamson 1992; Pan and Kosicki 1993) that may (or may not) influence political opinions. This theoretical chapter seeks to set up this

research's empirical attempt to bridge that scholarly gap. But first, the following section addresses frame-building (or frames as a dependent variable) before moving on to this chapter's review of frame-setting (or frames as an independent variable).

## 2.1. Shaping News Content

In this first section, I offer both an overview of the various theoretical conceptions that potentially shape news content — and my argument for focusing on three factors. With a mind to situating this work's methods and empirical findings theoretically, the coming pages sketch useful analytical tools for understanding the factors influencing the news content that Canadian journalists produced about the war in Afghanistan. To be sure, numerous scholars (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Tuchman 1978a, 1978b; Gans 1979; Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Gitlin 2003 [1980], to name only a few) have offered various micro, meso and macro conceptualizations of the factors that shape news production. Debates about the forces influencing news frequently get reduced to arguments about structure versus agency. Herman and Chomsky (2002 [1988]), for instance, argue that ideology plays a crucial role in shaping the mostly hegemonic news content journalists produce. The other school of thought (Schlesinger and Tumber 1999 [1994]; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Potter and Baum 2010: 455; Porpora et al. 2010; Speer 2017) rejects notions of assembly line passivity on the part of journalists passing along elite messages, arguing news professionals have considerable agency and important framing or shaping power over news content.

In addition to the scholarship that investigates factors that shape news, Bourdieu's field theory (1980, 1998, 2005) remains a popular conceptual framework in media and communication scholarship for understanding the journalistic field and the structures and agents that shape news content (see, for example, Benson 1999, 2004, 205; Perreault and Stanfield 2018). Bourdieu's thinking and methodology provide an often useful analytic for sorting out the cultural and economic capital that can shape news. Following from Weber and Durkheim, Bourdieu focuses on the increasing differentiation of specialized spheres in our modern world. The social world, in Bourdieu's conceptualization, consists of many space and sub-spaces (or fields), such as institutions, social groups or workplaces. The real, in this way of thinking, is fundamentally

relational, meaning that social existence is marked by “one’s differences vis-à-vis others in an ongoing process that is enacted for the most part unconsciously without strategic intention” (Benson and Neveu 2005: 3). Fields, which Bourdieu defined as the social space where “various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field,” have a profound shaping power on the social world (Bourdieu 1998, 40–41). Bourdieu, in fact, described the field as a game of sorts. “What players can do and where they can go during the game,” writes Thomson (2014: 66), “depends on their field position.”

“Any social formation is structured by way of a hierarchically organized series of fields (the economic field, the educational field, the political field, the cultural field, etc.), each defined as a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy... Each field is relatively autonomous but structurally homologous with the others. Its structure, at any given moment, is determined by the relations between the positions agents occupy in the field” (Bourdieu [Johnson] 1993: 6).

Position, according to Bourdieu, is determined by economic, social and cultural capital. Players with more capital have more advantages.

“Positions can be plotted on a field by amassing a set of data about the type and volumes of capital held by agents (institutions and individuals): for example, data about an individual’s social origins, educational level institution attended, social networks, memberships and affiliations, employment, place of residence and so on” (Thomson 2014: 70).

Individuals navigate and interpret fields with embodied — and shared — dispositions (or habitus). Each field has its own rules and logic (Hackett 2006). Individuals enter into each field with the sum of their economic, cultural and social capital, prescribing their position in the field. Each field has its own rules, shared understanding (or what Bourdieu termed doxa). In the journalism field, routines and practices, such as news values and ethics, represent a doxa or shared beliefs.

Everyday practice is fundamental to understanding the social dynamics of journalism. It is through practice that journalism’s field is constructed and social actors are conditioned by their position in the field. Moreover, power relations:

“may be manifested or even constituted, within the everyday routines and ethos of workaday journalism — a conception which implies the productivity and power of journalism, and the potential agency of journalists as social actors, without seeing it as

entirely free-floating or self-determining” (Hackett 2006: 7).

Individual action is shaped by both agency and the “structuring structure” of habitus that “organizes practices and perception of practices” (Bourdieu 2010 [1984]: 166). Habitus, with respect to journalism, involves an understanding of the “journalistic game” (Willig 2013: 18). Field theory, when used to understand journalism, examines both the interactions amongst news professionals in their own field and the field’s reciprocal actions with other fields such as politics (Benson 2004). On the field, a game ensues when journalists attempt to transform or preserve the field (Bourdieu 1998: 40-41).

Capital — or resources — is crucial to understanding journalists’ position within their field. Bourdieu’s work focuses on three manifestations of capital: cultural, economic and social (Benson and Neveu 2005). With respect to the news media, cultural capital is best understood as personal assets (education, background, titles or awards). Economic capital, in the news media, is often judged through factors such as audience reach — ratings, circulation and advertising revenue. Social capital encompasses both the tangible and intangible resources journalists possess because of their relationships or social networks. A journalist, for instance, with more followers on Twitter, arguably, has more social capital than a journalist with fewer followers.

Journalists, in Bourdieu’s understanding, can both preserve and alter their field. As social actors, journalists strategize and struggle to preserve or reshape their field. When studying the journalistic field it is, therefore, necessary to know who is playing in the field and what is the sum of her/his capital. Moreover, an examination of the field must also scrutinize the doxa that constructs and codifies the play of news professionals in the field (Benson and Neveu 2005). What, for instance, do journalists find newsworthy on a regular basis? What ethics shape their practices? Media and communication scholars who use field theory also pay attention to the habitus of journalists on the field. That is, what personal and professional knowledge shapes how journalists play the game? With those questions in mind, field theory offers an analytical tool for understanding how journalists produce news content. Bourdieu urged social scientists to focus on three avenues of inquiry: (1) determine the field’s relationship with larger fields. In the case of journalism, the larger fields may be political or economic; (2) investigate the internal

structures — the doxa and habitus — of the field; and (3) explore the historical origins of the habitus of the dominant players in the field (Benson 2015).

Field theory is not without its limitations, though. Thomson (2014) identifies four problems with field theory:

1. The borders between fields are “fuzzy” or hard to distinguish (Thomson 2014: 77). Where does the field of journalism begin and end? Political journalism has a symbiotic relationship with government and politics (Capella and Hall Jamieson 1997; Street 2001; Meyers 2002; Louw 2005).
2. There are too many fields to assess at one time. In the case of journalism, there are four potential fields: (1) the field of power; (2) the broader field of economics and politics; (3) the news media field; and (4) the agents or journalists in the field. “Perhaps this are too many fields altogether!” (Thomson 2014: 77).
3. Field theory is deterministic. Change happens slowly — and is often top down. Cultural studies scholars have criticized Bourdieu for underestimating the radical potential of culture. As Benson and Neveu (2005: 3) stresses, field theory analysis frequently “produces more churn than change.” That is, the theory is better at foregrounding the repetition of social practice rather than any transformative phenomena.
4. It is hard to define the inter-field connections. According to Bourdieu, some fields are dominant, while others are subordinate. In the case of journalism, one must wonder if the news media are dominant over politics? Meyer (2002) convincingly argues that media has colonized politics. While widely debated, proponents of mediatization, in fact, contend that media logic shapes and frames political communication (Couldry and Hepp 2013).

Field theory proved a hard theoretical fit for this research’s agenda. At its heart, this research aims to investigate what journalists did with the political rhetoric (or media framing) offered by government and military leaders about Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan. Economic, social and cultural capital might, indeed, influence if news professionals fact check what officials say about war — but it may not. Also, it would have been difficult for this research, happening after the war ended, to assess the capital of journalists who covered the conflict. As well, most

journalists covering the war were, arguably, similarly situated in terms of capital. Canadian journalists share similar educational and social backgrounds (Chiu 2016). The two broadcasters — CBC and CTV — have similar audiences. At the time of the war, both the national newspapers at the time also had similar reaches, too. Capital, arguably, therefore, had very little to do with the routine and practice of fact checking.

It is also difficult to disentangle and differentiate fields during times of war. As Gramsci (1971) stresses, elites do not always represent a unified bloc. This research explores the differences between what government and opposition politicians said about the conflict in Afghanistan. Furthermore, embedding, with its potential for collaboration, also increases the fuzzy distinctions between the fields of journalism, politics and economics. Moreover, it is difficult to determine, using Bourdieu's original classifications, if the military is part of the sub-field of bureaucracy or politics. Plus, given the military's symbiotic relationship with military corporations, is Canada's Department of National Defence its own separate field or really just a part of the economic field as well?

As noted above, it is also theoretically difficult to sort out if what political actors and journalists do — how they perform on the field — can be understood against a backdrop of an institutional logic, which is neither purely political nor media focused. Both of these logics are produced together and exist as sedimentations within the fields. As well, for the purposes of this research, field theory offers an insufficient account of how power flows — and its productive quality (Foucault 1990). Field theory is also overly deterministic. The theory “dwells too much on the reproductive aspects of the field and not their change” (Thomson 2014: 77). What about contingency and agency? The theoretical approach I prefer — and outline in the coming pages — foregrounds the complexity of power relationships that are more mutable than Bourdieu's understanding of field, capital, habitus and doxa.

I organize my theoretical understanding of news production under the umbrella of Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of influences model. I must stress, however, that I use the model as an organizing or mapping tool. Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) model is a heuristic and not a theory. The model, contends Hackett (2006: 6), “should be evaluated on the basis of its utility

in raising questions and organizing research data, rather than its explanatory power as such.” I use the model as a typology to map and classify the three shaping phenomena of interest for this research. Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) model helped me categorize the macro forces — social system or ideology — meso forces — social institutions and media organizations — and micro forces — individuals, routines and practices — that might shape news content. As the coming pages make clear, I use other theory — Gramscis’s understanding of cultural hegemony; Bennett’s (1990) indexing hypothesis; and normative understandings of journalism’s role in democracy — to conceptualize the potential shaping influences delineated in Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) model. By means of a roadmap, I begin by offering a brief outline of Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) model, illuminating the mapping tool’s five levels. The purpose of this section underpins my justification for why three levels of Shoemaker and Reese’s five-level model are most useful for understanding this work’s empirical findings. After sketching the basics of the model, I explore how the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker and Reese 2014) offers a solid categorization system for examining this study’s research goals. From there, I transition to exploring, in greater detail, the theory that serves as my analytical tools for conceptualizing my study’s findings.

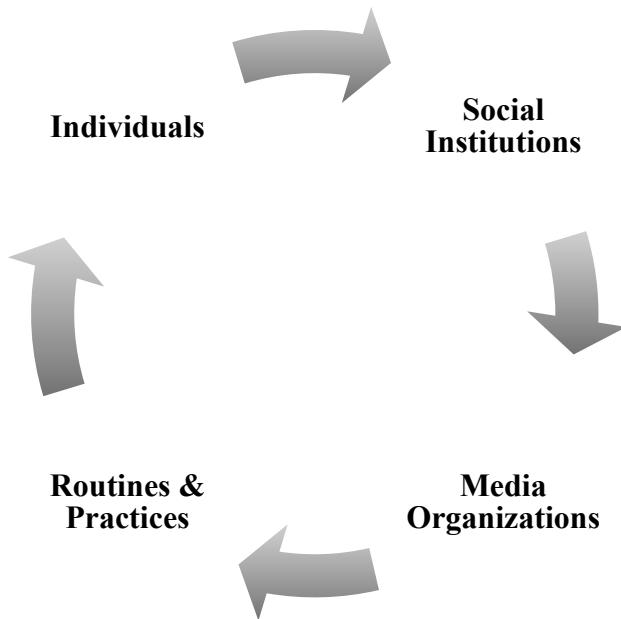
## **2.2. The Hierarchy of Influences Model**

The hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker and Reese 2014) offers a categorizing tool for understanding micro, meso and macro factors that influence news media production. Editorial decision-making, in this conception, occurs at five levels: (1) social systems; (2) social institutions; (3) media organizations; (4) routine practices; and (5) individuals (see Figure One below).

News content, according to Shoemaker and Reese (2014), gets shaped by a confluence of levels or an individual level. The authors imagine five shaping levels:

**1. Social System Level:** News content is influenced by larger forces such as ideology<sup>7</sup> “in the service of power” (see, for example, Thompson 1990: 7) and perpetuates the status quo (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979; Hallin 1986; Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Hallin 1994; McChesney 2002; Bennett et al. 2006, 2007; Castells 2009).

**Figure 1. Hierarchy of Influences Model (Shoemaker and Reese 2014)<sup>8</sup>**



**2. Social Institution Level:** News content gets shaped by the news media’s close relationship with institutions (think: government and business) This meso-level helps to reinforce or perpetuate dominant values articulated at the macro-level and inspire practices and routines at the micro-level (see, for example, Cook 2005, 2006; Sparrow 1999, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> A universal definition of ideology remains elusive. Bell (1960) influentially dismissed ideology. Non-Marxists — in a decidedly uncritical fashion — view ideology as merely a belief system. The traditional Marxist perspective of ideology, of course, views ideology as a false consciousness. Neo-Marxists divorced ideology from the super-structure and post-Marxists similarly deemphasized economic determinism and highlighted the contested dynamic of hegemony (Gramsci 1971). Akin to Cammaerts (2016), this thesis understands ideology as “discursive forms that construct a horizon of all possible representation within a certain context, which establish the limits of what is *sayable*” and what is debatable (Laclau 2006: 114; *italics in original*).

<sup>8</sup> Shoemaker and Reese (2014) depict their model as a concentric circles with individuals at the centre and the social system in the outermost ring. As Shoemaker and Reese (2014) concede, their model is not a real hierarchy. Moreover, as my coming critique argues, it makes more sense to envision the model as a circuit or system instead of a ranking system of media influences.

3. **Media Organization Level:** News is shaped by the organization that produces it. Factors such as who owns the news organization, who works for it, its ambitions and objectives and its internal rules and ethics can all influence content (see, for example, White 1950; Tuchman 1978a; Gans 1979; Gitlin 2003 [1980]; Aday 2010).
4. **Routines and Practices Level:** Journalistic routines norms and practices (often inspired by normative conceptions of their role in democracy) shape news content (see, for example, Tuchman 1977, 1978a, 1978b; Bennett 1990; Hoyer 2005; Bennett 2012).
5. **Individual Level:** Personal characteristics such as gender, race, class, religion, politics, education, ambition and ethics influence the individual journalists who produce news content (see, for example, Gans 1979; Weaver et al. 2007).

At the individual and routines and practices levels, for instance, journalists' personal values and their practices such as fact checking can influence and frame the content they produce. Moreover, the corporations or institutions (organizational level) that journalists work for can also effect news media production. Journalists at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), for example, frequently produce different content than journalists who work for Rupert Murdoch's tabloid *The Sun* because of the different media organizations' agendas and policies.

At the social institution level, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) contend that the relationships the news media have with other institutions also molds content. Frequently viewed through a new institutionalism lens (Sparrow 1999; Cook 2005), the news media are conceptualized as a social actor. The content the news media produces, as a result, gets shaped and influenced by its interactions with other institutions such as the public relations industry. As well, the news media's propensity to locate its bureaus at sites of power such as stock markets and government institutions can shape the kind of content that gets produced. Other institutional shaping force such as regulation and libel laws also mold news coverage. The BBC's content, for example, is not only influenced by organizational factors, but is also shaped by regulatory requirements that news content be impartial and accurate (Ofcom 2017).

News content is also influenced by the social system in which it is situated. Critical media and communication scholarship (Hallin 1986; Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Hall 1989;

Entman 1993; Hallin 1994) link the shaping power of ideology to the production of news content. In this conception, the news media serve “a hegemonic function” by constantly echoing and amplifying dominant ideas and positions (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 81). Hallin’s (1986) seminal examination of the Vietnam War, of note, concluded that during the early years of the war, journalists largely concurred with the prevailing elite-held Cold War perspective about the conflict. Having sketched the essentials of Shoemaker and Reese’s model, I now turn to offering a critique of it — and my rationale for its use in understanding the phenomena that influence news content.

### **2.3. A Critique of the Hierarchy of Influences Model**

While some scholarship (Franklin et al. 2005) calls Shoemaker and Reese’s framework a fundamental approach in journalism studies, others (Nam-Jin 2004; Hackett 2006) are more critical of its conceptual capacity. In this chapter, I intend to argue that the model lacks theoretical rigour. It is, however, a helpful categorization tool for understanding this research’s questions about the macro forces, meso-level structures, and the micro pushes and pulls that shaped the news coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan (Hackett 2006). As I outlined in the introduction, this research is focused on understanding how the Canadian government and military officials framed the war in Afghanistan and how journalists reacted to those frames. Most of the coverage of the war emanated from journalists embedded with Canadian military forces. As I argue in this chapter, it makes sense to narrow my examination to three levels of the hierarchy of influences model: (1) social system; (2) social institutions; and (3) routines and practices. Without question, the other two levels (media organizations and individuals) also possessed a shaping influence on the content journalists produced about the war in Afghanistan. Yet it is beyond the scope of this research to analyze those influences.

Reese and Shoemaker (2016: 390) recently argued that their theorization “helps disentangle” the conjunction between individual-level forces such as journalistic routines and larger organizational and social forces that shape news production. With a mind to building theory, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) hope their model helps scholars draw connections in media and communication research. The pair also suggests that their conceptualization gives researchers a

standard means of understanding media shaping factors. Additionally, the authors contend their way of thinking about how news content gets produced addresses the American *theoretical exceptionalism* that imagines news professionals as the primary shapers of news content. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) also stress that their framework helps to highlight how understanding content is key to examining how the news media might shape public opinion (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). The authors encourage media and communication scholars to move beyond a propensity to view media messages as an independent variable that may (or may not) influence audience thinking or actions. Media content, according to the hierarchy of influences model, needs to be understood as a dependent variable that is potentially shaped by the five levels of independent variables in the hierarchy of influences model.

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) insist the model is not dependent on a positivist cause-and-effect understanding of media. The researchers argue their thinking allows for critical interpretations of how the media are both shaped by — and perpetuate — dominant meanings and systems. Most importantly, Shoemaker and Reese's model wisely encourages a multi-layered analysis and understanding of the reciprocity and associations between levels and their potential shaping power on news content. A news story, in this understanding, can be influenced (largely or minimally, or not at all) by individual attitudes, routines and practices — but it can also be shaped by the news organization it was produced within. What is more, its message can be both hegemonic and/or non-hegemonic because of the social system within which it was produced. In short, news media content is potentially the sum of one level or many levels of the hierarchy of influences model.

Reese and Shoemaker (2016: 406) urge researchers to view “linkages between levels... as interactive and multi-directional.” Shoemaker and Reese (2014), in fact, emphasize that the shaping power can flow in any direction and no one level is ultimately more powerful than the other four levels, clearly discounting the notion that the conceptualization is a hierarchy or ranking system. Lewis and Reese's (2009) interviews with journalists, by means of an example, concluded that news media coverage of the aftermath of the September 11 terror attacks in 2001 was influenced at two levels — the social (ideological) and the routines and practices levels. Journalists were reluctant to challenge the “war on terror” frame sponsored by the executive

branch of the U.S. government because it was unpatriotic — but they also refrained from labeling it a “so-called” war on terror because they considered that tag unprofessional. To be certain, the model helps illuminate how the influences on media content are multifaceted and consistently in flux. Yet, the framework is not without its drawbacks.

## **2.4. Overlap Between the Shaping Levels of the Hierarchy of Influences Model**

As I stressed earlier, it is not prudent to interpret the shaping of media content in isolation — but instead to adopt a multi-level analysis. Shoemaker and Reese (2014: 11) concede media and communication researchers cannot, of course, take every level into their account in their analysis — but it is imperative to examine and interpret “findings within the context of other levels.” The media sociologists note that research adopting their model as a framework frequently gets used to analyze shaping effects on one or two, and maybe even three, levels. Notably, Vos and Heinderyckx (2015) ambitiously scrutinized all five levels in their gatekeeping study, determining that news decision-making gets shaped at *all* levels. But rarely does scholarship move beyond interpreting more than three levels of explanation (Shoemaker and Reese 2014).

It is worth noting (as the coming pages will make plain) that some news media phenomena originate in more than one level. Indexing and framing, on the one hand, are a journalistic routine. News professionals, as a part of their everyday craft, turn to expert sources and frame their stories in a way that makes them relatable to their audiences. Yet at the social level of influences, journalists may adopt the view of the expert(s) or political actor(s) they use in their stories or commentary. “One of the key functions of the media,” contend Shoemaker and Reese (2014: 75), “is to maintain the boundaries within society, to define ideas and actions as either within the bounds of acceptability or as deviant and not politically legitimate.” Arguably, journalists frame their stories in hegemonic ways because they reliably turn to elite sources (Bennett 1990) — and they have been interpolated by the dominant ideology within which they live and work (Fowler 1991). Conversely, indexing and framing could originate at the organizational level. Journalists who work at Fox News, for instance, are likely to turn to more conservative-leaning voices than the more liberal voices that journalists who work for MSNBC

News may include in their coverage (Aday 2010). News organizations can also even dictate what types of frames journalists use.

Fairness and balance, to use another example, can arguably be thought of as a journalistic routine or practice. Yet, journalists' personal attitudes (a desire to be fair) can also compel them to seek out both sides of a story. Alternatively, at the individual level, a journalist could adopt an objective position in their coverage because he or she knows it might impress their boss and lead to recognition and possible advancement (Tuchman 1977). Furthermore, at the organizational level, editors can impose fairness and balance on reporters. Editors are, of course, notorious for demanding that reporters get reaction from the *other side* to balance stories. As well, on the institutional level, libel laws dictate giving those accused of wrong doing fair comment. Similarly, broadcasters such as the BBC are required by its national regulator and arms-length governing body to be fair and impartial. To be certain, there is overlap between the levels in the hierarchy of influence model.

## **2.5. Limitations of the Hierarchy of Influences Model**

Like most theory, there are limitations to (and critiques of) the hierarchy of influences model that Shoemaker and Reese (2014) offer. Their framework is imprecise and unclear in some ways. Nam-Jin (2004: 2) contends the model is vague and neglects to explain how researchers "can empirically separate the effect of one level from that of another; or how one can accurately compare those effects with one another." In fact, some scholars propose amended models to account for journalistic ethics (Voakes 1997) and emerging routines in digital media (Keith 2011).

To be sure, the framework is under-theorized. At its core, the hierarchy of influences model is not, as Shoemaker and Reese (2014) concede in the latest edition of their book, a hierarchy or ranking system. Yet, even in their most recent edition of *Mediating the Message the 21st Century: A Media Sociology Perspective*, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) do place emphasis on the social system level, contending it is the foundation on which the other four levels rest. This thinking, however, contrasts with postmodern understanding of power that is ubiquitous rather

than possessed by a few (Foucault 1990). In addition, Shoemaker and Reese seemingly also contradict themselves, writing that their model does not “single out any one level as more powerful” (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 8). Yet, most recently, the pair argued that the hierarchical power of government appears to be “reasserting itself” in shaping news content (Reese and Shoemaker 2016: 397).

In a theoretical sense, Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) conceptualization does not offer a consistent explanation of media shaping influences. The *fuzziness* of the levels produces research that reaches scattered conclusions, emphasizing, on the one hand, the impact of micro pushes and pulls (Fahmy and Johnson 2012) and, on the other hand, meso-level forces (Napoli 1997) that determine the shape and character of news content. Furthermore, the model — to construct its “theoretical umbrella for research” of factors that shape the news (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 8) — incorporates several theories from divergent epistemological roots, ranging from Gramsci’s (1971) conceptualization of cultural hegemony to new institutionalism imaginations (Cook 2005) of the news media as a political actor. Arguably, the framework represents a collection of theoretical tools to contemplate how news content gets shaped. Shoemaker and Reese (2014: 5), in reality, admit that calling their model a “theory” could be considered “grandiose.”

Hackett (2006) stresses that the U.S. origins of the model, requires media and communication researchers, when studying other countries, to be mindful of the cultural and economic contexts of non-American countries and the effects of globalization. Admittedly, a great deal of American-focused theory informs this research. In addition to Shoemaker and Reese’s model, I also use indexing and media framing theory to conceptualize my findings and analysis. Unquestionably, most of the conceptual frameworks underpinning this research are imagined within (and focused on) the American context. These theories’ normative conceptions also align with a U.S. media system that prizes western journalistic notions such as objectivity, fairness and accountability.

## 2.6. The Utility of the Hierarchy of Influences Model

U.S.-inspired theory, arguably, applies well to the Canadian context. In addition, to the global “homogenization of media systems” (Hallin and Mancini 2004b: 273), Canada and the U.S. are geographically close and share a similar culture. Furthermore, both countries are arranged as federal states and share similar political practices. As well, Canadian media are shaped by the overwhelmingly bigger U.S media (Taras 2001). Moreover, journalists in both Canada and U.S. hold similar outlooks about their roles in democracy (Hallin and Mancini 2004a). Notably, a recent edited book about the crisis in Canadian journalism relies heavily on U.S. theory and scholarship to conceptualize the problem in Canada, noting that “much can be learned from experiences” of the U.S. (Crowther et al. 2016: 5). Furthermore, recent international work (Jones and Sheets 2009; Robinson et al. 2009; Shehata 2010) concluded indexing theory, for instance, is applicable to media systems outside the U.S.

It makes sense for different studies to position the origins of the media phenomenon under the microscope at different influencing levels for compelling empirical and theoretical reasons. Ultimately, what is important is the evidence and logic researchers posit to back up their theoretical level of emphasis. Sorting out these questions and distinctions, suggest Shoemaker and Reese (2014), rests with scholars — and is dependent on interpretive preferences and scholarly intent. Furthermore, researchers, to be fair, have biases and will place emphasis on “explanation[s] that [fit] their disciplinary and political leanings” (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 12).

My research aims to understand the potential impact of ideology, official sources and journalistic routines and practices on the news content surrounding the war in Afghanistan. This study also wishes to shed light on the contested dynamic between government and military leaders and journalists surrounding the media framing of Canada’s military mission Afghanistan. For this research — since much of the coverage was produced by reporters embedded with the military — the social, social institution and routines and practice levels are, arguably, the most logical shaping factors of the coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan. I now turn to outlining a more

detailed discussion of the theory that underpins how I sorted out these questions and the distinctions I used to interpret my empirical findings.

## **2.7. Focusing on Three Levels of the Hierarchy of Influences Model**

In this section, I focus on what factors shaped the content journalists produced surrounding Canada's combat role in Afghanistan. It specifically examine the influences of: (1) military and government leaders on framing the mediated messages about the war; (2) journalists' reliance on official sources (indexing); and (3) journalistic routines and practices surrounding news values and fact checking the preferred frames of government and military officials. As a result, this work's attention concentrates on three levels of analysis: (1) the macro-level social system; (2) the meso-level social institution; and (3) the micro-level routines and practices. Table One details the various news media forces and phenomena such as indexing, framing and normative conceptions of journalism that are under examination in this study. The table defines and categorizes the news media shaping characteristics. At the macro-level social system level, there are three values and phenomena of interest: (1) ideology; (2) elite framing; and (3) normative conceptions of journalism. I highlight two shaping factors at the meso-level social institution level: (1) embedding journalists with the military; and (2) indexing. I conceptualize two elements of interest at the micro-level routine and practice level: (1) news values and (2) counter-framing or fact checking.

**Table 1 — Three Levels of the Hierarchy of Influences Model**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>News Media Shaping Value or Phenomenon</b>
Social System	Ideology	Ideology / Horizon of Possibility Framing Normative Conceptions of Journalism
Social Institution	Institutions	Embedding journalists with military Indexing
Routines and Practices	Rules, Habits, Forms, Methods and Patterns	Counter-framing and Fact checking News values

Having sketched the essentials of the model and my rationale for focusing on three levels, the coming pages offer a more detailed conceptualization and illustration of: (1) the social system

level; (2) the social institution level; and (3) the routines and practices level. What follows includes both a theoretical discussion along with numerous examples that illuminate this research's focus.

## **2.8. Social System Level**

In this section, I set the theoretical stage for this research's conceptual framework by highlighting (in much greater detail) the possible influences of the social system on news and analysis produced about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) emphasize that news content is shaped by dominant ideology and reinforces the status quo. Notably, Hall (1989: 309) contends a scholarly focus on ideology allows scholarship to understand how the media have the power to "define situations and label groups and individuals as deviant." The imprint of ideology limits and narrows perspectives in news content, making dominant ways of thinking "appear universal, natural and conterminous with "reality" itself" (Hall 1982: 65). While "consent or control is neither automatic nor guaranteed", the imprint of dominant ideology surely shapes news content (McCullagh 2002: 40).

I agree with Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) suggestion that Gramsci's (1971) understanding of hegemony offers a useful theoretical lens for conceptualizing the influence of ideology on the news media. Agency and contingency are central to the Italian political philosopher's understanding of the social world — and are crucial underpinnings of this research's conceptual framework. What follows is, by no means, an exhaustive exploration of Gramsci's thinking about hegemony. Instead, the coming pages set the table for understanding how social system factors that frame news content represents a contested dynamic or a struggle, as Gramsci envisions, between dominant groups and counter-hegemonic forces such as journalists and the public.

## **2.9. Gramsci and Cultural Hegemony and the Social System Level**

Gramsci's (1971) thinking about hegemony offers a more nuanced and intellectually robust conceptualization of power than orthodox Marxism. The Italian political philosopher's emphasis

on agency and contingency moves beyond notions of ideology representing a petty bourgeois false consciousness. Furthermore, ideology, in Gramsci's thinking, evolves from more than a "posthumous" rationale for elites — but a "force capable of creating a new history and of collaborating in the formation of a new power" (Bobbio 1979: 36). Hall (1996: 411) prominently praises Gramsci's understanding of hegemony for its "sophisticated kind" of understanding and potential efficacy for "complexifying existing theories and problems." In doing so, Gramsci contested orthodox economic determinism at the centre of Marxist theory and opened up space for critical analysis of culture.

At its core, Gramsci's imagination of cultural hegemony imagines both direct (force) and indirect (consent) understandings of power. He grappled with why Italian workers and peasants did not rise up against bourgeois and fascist forces as Marx predicted. The Italian intellectual and activist concluded that dominant groups (alliances or blocs) rarely impose their will on subordinate groups through force — but, in fact, manage and govern with considerable *cooperation* and even the *consent* of the submissive. This form of rule appears natural because the "conditions were socially constructed through communication and practice" (Artz and Murphy 2000: 11). Hegemony, in this way of thinking, is not passive — but a "highly complex" process and "never singular" (Williams 1977: 112). Furthermore, hegemony:

"...does not passively exist as a form of dominance. It has to continually be renewed, recreated, defended and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressure not at all its own" (Williams 1977: 112).

Hegemony occurs because the ruling class "exerts a consensus that makes the power of the dominant group appear both natural and legitimate" (Watson and Hill 2000: 125). Artz and Murphy (2000: 1; italics in original) adeptly define hegemony "*as the process of moral, philosophical and political leadership that a social group attains only with the active consent of other important social groups.*" Hegemony *succeeds* because subordinate groups participate in the process, seeing it as natural and not oppressive. Ideology inspires cultural practices, producing "hegemonic apparatuses" such as working and consuming. These complex cultural structures, contend Artz and Murphy (2000: 40), "build consent by establishing accepted practices through sheer reputation ("this is the way we do things here"), then legitimizing them as valuable and natural ("this must be the ways to do things")."

Ideology is not separate from practice in Gramsci's (1971) understanding of hegemony. The two are connected. Moreover, ideology has practical — material — consequences.

"[T]hinking is not divorced from being. Ideas don't float around like leaves in a breeze. Ideas are always carried in and through human beings. Consequently, ideas don't make history. People make history — people *do* history" (Artz and Murphy 2000: 13; italics in original).

Hegemony, argue Artz and Murphy (2000: 20), is not another word, therefore, for "indoctrination" — but manifests itself "as a consensual culture", whereby the dominant group meets the needs of the subordinate group while perpetuating the interest of elites. Those who have the power to influence practice frequently determine dominant meaning, in turn. Gitlin (2003 [1980]) constructively stresses that dominant groups are able to define and frame much of the social world, making it appear natural.

"[T]hose who run the dominant institutions secure their power in large measure directly and *indirectly*, by impressing their definitions of the situation upon those they rule, and, if not usurping the whole of ideological space, still significantly limiting what is thought through society" (2003 [1980]: 10; italics in original).

Elites — often with the help of modern public relation specialists and *spin doctors* — articulate a *common sense* view (often through the news media) that wins the consent of subordinate groups (Artz and Yahya 2003). By common sense, Gramsci meant prevailing ideas that are, literally, common to everyone. While Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* makes no specific reference to counter-hegemony<sup>9</sup>, he does offer two means of resisting hegemony: (1) a "war of maneuver" that involves physical force; and (2) a "war of position" that represents a lengthy battle fought mostly in civil society whereby social actors agitating for change must articulate a new and winning common sense that gains widespread support (Gramsci 1971: 304 / 217). Hegemony's *consensus* in democracy, therefore, remains in constant flux and can be disrupted by articulations of other commons sense narrative by competing elites or subalterns.

Mouffe (1979) deftly links Gramsci's notion of *common sense* to Foucault's (1980: 197) idea of episteme, that is: "the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the

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<sup>9</sup> Gramsci does not use the term counter-hegemony, yet he did call for "intellectual and moral reform" (Gramsci, 1971: 132).

statements which are possible those that will be acceptable...” This *rules in* and *rules out* what gets talked about — what’s even *possible* to talk about — and how those things *get* talked about. Orwell’s (1945) proposed preface to *Animal Farm*, similarly, warns:

“At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question. It is not exactly forbidden to say this, that or the other, but it is ‘not done’ to say it, as in mid-Victorian times it was ‘not done’ to mention trousers in the presence of a lady” (Orwell 1945: 163).

In a similar way, Laclau (2006: 114; italics in original) describes a “horizon” that defines and prescribes the “possibilities” for communication and action “establish[ing] the limits of what is *sayable*.” The horizon represents “an absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility” (Laclau 1990: 64). This understanding,<sup>10</sup> notably, aligns, with Foucault’s perspective on discourse (1980), whereby language and practice are connected, words and texts have consequences and power is linked to knowledge (Foucault 1984). Language, as Hackett (1984: 236) stresses, does not offer a “neutral transmission belt which can refer directly to a world of non-discursive objects.” Words come with values. They convey values and attitudes about what they are describing (McCullagh 2002).

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) also helpfully fold Gramsci’s thinking about hegemony into an understanding of the social world, recognizing the shaping power of discourse while rejecting economic determinism and the belief in a pure truth. Hegemony, as a result, is never fixed and the struggle to articulate a *winning* common sense is constant. This refinement of Gramsci’s thinking helpfully adds more precision and conceptual weight to the social level analysis of news media. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity — and borrowing from what Laclau (1990) labeled the “horizon” and what Foucault (1980) termed *episteme* — I use the expression *horizon* in this research to represent the totality or higher meta-order discourse that encapsulates the knowledge and practices surrounding Canada’s military intervention in Afghanistan. The term is a useful metaphor for understanding and contextualizing the discourse surrounding Canada’s

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<sup>10</sup> Artz and Murphy (2000: 68) take exception to Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) suggestion that “[p]olitics and ideology are sole[ly] a question of linguistic articulations.” Artz and Murphy (2000: 68) dispute this position, stressing that Gramsci did not view the social world as grounded only in rhetoric — but also practice.

involvement in Afghanistan — and, in turn, how government and military leaders tried to frame the war in the news media.

Many political actors — and scholars — frequently, for instance, depict Canada’s military intervention in Afghanistan as inevitable. It is portrayed as organic and taken for granted. According to many accounts, deploying troops to the volatile region of Kandahar was the natural manifestation of both Canada’s traditional *middle power* role or more recent *model power* persona in foreign affairs (see, for example, Gross Stein and Lang 2007; Boucher and Nossal 2015; Saideman 2016). As a *good friend* to the United States and *stand up* member of the NATO alliance, Canada’s military participation in Afghanistan was a forgone conclusion (Saideman 2016). There was no debate. The *horizon* was set. Canada had an “obligation to stand with the alliance in Afghanistan...” (Gross Stein and Lang 2007: 192). “The question was not if,” writes Saideman (2016: 30), “but where, the Canadians would deploy and in what capacity.” As I argue in my fourth chapter, that *horizon* defined how Canada’s involvement in Afghanistan was first imagined by government and military leaders and then framed in the news media. While there are, no doubt, material ramifications of militarization, it also represents “a set of discursive practices that, over time, embed military assumptions and values into the very definition of what is “normal” in everyday life” (Turenne Sjolander and Cornut 2016: 275).

## **2.10. The Media and Hegemony**

Dominant groups, arguably, rely on the media to systematically perpetuate their dominant discourse or perceived “common sense” (Artz and Yahya 2003). Gitlin (2003 [1980]: 2) holds “the mass media produce fields of definition and association, symbols and rhetoric, through which ideology becomes manifest and concrete.” In so doing, the news media does not frequently challenge hegemonic positions and values (Gans 1979), allowing dominant ideas and definitions to shape and frame news content, especially during times of war (Hallin 1986, 1994). Indeed, considerable scholarship points to news organizations uncritically echoing and amplifying elite values and definitions (Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Hallin 1994; McChesney 2004; Bennett et al. 2007; Bennett 2012). Understanding the news media as a hegemonic apparatus is useful for not only thinking about how ideology or the social system influences the content journalists produce (frame-building) — but also how audiences use that

content (frame-setting) to potentially produce meaning. (The second part of this chapter returns to Gramsci's theoretical usefulness for understanding audiences and media framing's potential role in shaping public opinion.)

Hegemony, as Gramsci stresses, is never fixed. The news media persists as a site of contestation where the preferred meaning of dominant groups are perpetually “resisted, limited, altered, and challenged” by forces sometimes outside of the ruling class’ control (Williams 1977: 112). In an interview with Carpentier and Cammaerts (2008: 5) Mouffe argued that the media play “an important role in the maintenance and production of hegemony.”

“[B]ut it is something that can be challenged. Every hegemony can be challenged. I do not think that one should see hegemony as some kind of fatality, leading us to say: ‘ah, we cannot do it because of the media’” (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2008: 5).

Indeed, the news media do not always pass on — uncritically — elite frames (Althaus 2003; Potter and Baum 2010). Journalists, in fact, often resist and question elite definitions, counter-framing events (Speer 2017). Plus, news professionals are prone to highlight conflict and elite disagreement in their coverage (Baum and Groeling 2010a, 2010b).

It is also worth noting here that identity and roles of journalists and the news media are also constantly in flux. It is useful to view the identities of news professionals through the theoretical lens of hegemony — and its focus on contingency and agency. Carpentier (2005) constructively theorizes journalists’ roles and identities using Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) discourse theory. Building on this thinking, journalists’ subjectivity and practices are contingent and flexible. Yet, hegemony can anchor and define how journalists see themselves and their part in the social world, fixing how they understand their work and their role in society (Laclau 1990). Carpentier (2005: 201) details four discursive nodes or anchors for journalists: (1) “the (semi-)professional link to the media organization, (2) management, (3) autonomy and (4) objectivity.” Carpentier concludes that journalists can contest their roles. In line with Foucault’s (1978) understanding, power is not monopolized and journalists can resist their discursive field (or normative conception) within which they work. Yet, “the rigidity of hegemonic articulation” that surrounds the role of journalists has a formidable shaping power over journalists’ subject position and practice (Carpentier 2005: 199). (The coming section about the normative roles of journalism

later on in this chapter fleshes out more fully the implications of journalists' ideological obligations.) The contested nature of hegemony is also pronounced in the media framing process. First, though, the coming pages highlight the contested dynamic between elites, journalists (and sometimes the public) in the framing of news content.

## 2.11. Framing

Theorizations of framing remain scattered and inconsistent (Reese 2007) and continue to represent a “fractured paradigm” (Entman 1993: 51). Moreover, frames lead a *double life* (D'Angelo 2002). They are both strategic rhetoric used by elites and journalists (Entman 1993) and the intellectual scaffolding used by audiences to interpret news (Kinder and Sanders 1990). Individuals, routines and their news organizations — but also the social context within which they are created — shape media frames. As a theory, framing offers a grounding to examine a number of media phenomena, including “bias, ideological construction, political power and audience reception” (Tumber and Zelizer 2010: 387). Social constructivists, for their part, put journalists at the centre of the media framing practice, creating “interpretive packages” that often reflect their source’s preferred frames (Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 2; italics in original). The critical paradigm (Entman 1993; Hackett and Zhao 1994; Gitlin 2003 [1980]), however, remains much more focused on the structural or ideological powers that shape frames in the news media.

As noted at the onset of this chapter, the factors that shape news content, such as media framing, can arguably originate at many levels in Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) hierarchy of influences model. Professional routines and practices and individual motivations can often be the impetus for how some news content gets framed (Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978a; Gans 1979). Moreover, institutional factors (Cook 1998) and the requirements of specific news organizations (Aday 2010) can also shape the framing process. Furthermore, interest groups (Gamson and Modigliani 1987) and elites (Sigal 1973; van Dijk 1985; Bennett 1990, 2012) can also have tremendous shaping power over how news gets produced. This research, however, focuses on the social level factors that influence framing.

Miliband (1969), poignantly, argued that because journalists often come from the same class as the people they report on, they tend to produce hegemonic content. Moreover, '[b]y adhering to routine channels of newsgathering" journalists defer considerably to elite definitions and dominant positions (Sigal 1986: 33). Simply put, ideology holds tremendous sway over how news gets framed. An overreliance by news professionals on elite sources (Bennett 1990) positions dominant groups as "primary definers" (Hall 1982: 102) who perpetuate their imagination of the world or *horizon* in their mediated messages. Indeed, even those with alternative points of view, contends Hall (1982: 62), "must respond in terms pre-established by the primary definers and privileged definitions." Akin to this argument, Reese (2007) draws in thinking about ideology and hegemony to understand frames as:

"…structures that draw boundaries, set up categories, define some idea as out and others in, and generally operate to snag related ideas in their net in an active process" (Reese 2007: 150).

To be sure, the social system — or ideology — has a profound shaping power over how news content gets framed. This work is predominantly interested in assessing how journalists and audiences react to the frames sponsored by government and military officials. Therefore, for this research, it makes sense to conceptualize framing at the social system or ideological level of Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of influences model. Before outlining the powers of elites to frame news, the coming pages steps back to first trace the origins of framing theory and outline the practical definition of framing used by this research.

## **2.12. The Origins of Media Framing Theory**

Nearly a century ago, Lippmann (Lippmann 2009 [1927]: 14), writing about the "swarming confusion of problems" hinted at the idea of framing in his description of the competing political ideas swirling in the popular press attempting to shape the so-called "pictures in our heads" (2004 [1922]: 1). Modern thinking about framing traces its lineage to anthropology, psychology and sociology. Bateson (1972: 191), in his work as an anthropologist, first linked the term "frame" to a communication process, calling it "a spatial and temporal bonding of a set of interactive messages." Inspired by Bateson, the sociologist Goffman (1974: 21) mapped how people use "primary frameworks… to locate, perceive identify, and label" the world around them. Around the same time, the computer scientist Minsky (1974: 1) offered a "partial theory

of human thinking” that likened frames to “a data structure for representing a stereotyped situation.” Tuchman’s (1978a) account of newsrooms and Gitlin’s (2003 [1980]) investigation of social movement representations in the news media connected framing to the creation of mediated public realities.

A decade after Goffman, Kahneman and Tversky (1981; 1984) — working as cognitive psychologists — adapted framing for their experimental research examining risk and consumer choice. Political scientists (Gamson 1992) and media and communication scholars (Kinder and Sanders 1990; Entman 1991) also took up the concept, conceptualizing framing as a communication device in public discourse. As noted above, this research is primarily focused on the political communication surrounding framing.

## **2.13. Defining Media Framing**

“Reality is not given,” argues Carey (1989: 25), it is “brought into existence, is produced, by communication.” Our stories — our storytelling — breathe life into that existence. And our narratives or frames “organize everyday reality” (Tuchman 1978a: 193) in a manner that helps to give “meaning to and unfolding strip of events” (Gamson and Modigliani 1987: 143), while at the same time incorporating “*organizing principles*” or symbols that help structure reality (Reese 2001: 11; italics in original; see also Reese 2010: 17). Former U.S. President George W. Bush, for instance, often conflated the so-called *war on terror* to a binary discourse, suggesting a struggle between “good versus evil” (Kuypers 2010: 302). Frames, such as Bush’s, are often repetitive within news stories and “convey thematically consonant meanings across... time” (Entman 1991: 7). Frames provide “comprehensive structures of meaning” by juxtaposing new concepts with familiar ones (Hertog and McLeod 2001: 140). Frames, in essence, express “culturally shared notions” (Van Gorp 2010: 85).

“Similar to a wooden frame around an oil painting, any given news frame will draw attention to certain *objects and relations* while downplaying others” (Scheufele and Scheufele 2010: 128; italics in original). At their core: frames “simplify complex issues” (Nisbet 2010: 47) when ideas compete in mediated discourse (Popkins 1993). These communication devices can operate

like “recipes” from elites to guide citizens on how they should “cook up their opinions” (Kinder and Sanders 1996: 156). As well, media frames “make the world beyond direct experience look natural” (Gitlin 2003 [1980]: 6) by bringing “order to events” and providing a language to “make the world make sense” (Manoff and Schudson 1986: 228). Similar to Goffman, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) suggest that frames represent a helpful explanation or a mental short-hand, *per se*, that people employ to construct meaning and sort through complicated information and events. Entman (1993: 53), one of the leading critical framing scholars, stresses that media frames “highlight some features of reality while omitting others” — and “frames typically perform four functions: problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgment and remedy promotion” (Entman 2010: 336). In addition to defining the problem and highlighting a solution, media frames often point to who is responsible (e.g. big business, government, the poor) for solving the problem (Entman 1993).

Social constructivists, as noted above, imagine journalists playing a crucial role in the process of framing, producing “interpretive packages” that often echo their elite sources’ preferred definitions (Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 3). Iyengar (1991), notably, distinguished between episodic and thematic coverage. Episodic framing, he contends, “depicts concrete events that illustrate issues (Iyengar 1991: 14). Thematic frames, on the other hand, highlight the general or abstract and offer context or background that connect problems in news coverage with their structural origins (Iyengar 1991: 14). (In the second part of this chapter, I return to outlining the potential influence of thematic and episodic framing on news audiences.) Having defined framing, this discussion now transitions to a brief distinction between framing and discourse.

## 2.14. The Difference Between Discourse and Frames

It seems prudent at this point to draw distinctions between framing and the discursive concept of the *horizon* outlined above. As Cammaerts (2016: 2) notes, framing and discourse exist at the “intersection” of political science and media and communications scholarship as “two distinct epistemologies and conceptual toolboxes” for understanding the shaping power of language and texts. Different scholars use both framing and discourse to help explain how both the symbolic and human actions shape the real world.

Despite their divergent roots, uniformity exists amongst the conceptual tools. Citing Minksy (1974: 30-31), who defines discourse as something that “assembles a network of instantiated frames and subframes”, Cammaerts (2016: 30) contends that discourse should be viewed as a higher or “meta-order compared to frames.” Media frames flow from this discourse or *horizon*. Inspired by a way of seeing the world, political actors attempt to “temporarily fix meaning and ways of understanding” to serve their agendas (Cammaerts 2016: 30).

## 2.15. Elite Framing

As noted in the introduction, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper purposely scripted its media framing of Canada’s NATO-led military mission in Afghanistan. Dimitri Soudas, Harper’s former director of communication, details in his master’s thesis how governments effectively “manipulate” public opinion through news media framing (2015). While Soudas’ claim of manipulation is debatable, it is, of course, a long-established practice for political actors to attempt to advance their agendas with strategic communication (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; McNair, 2000). Politicians hope their media frames provide citizens “influential cues” (Callaghan and Schnell, 2005: 2) “that promote their preferred vision of reality” (Johnson-Cartee, 2005: 199). Gamson and Modigliani (1987) contend elite media framing is aimed at influencing how audiences perceive an issue or event.

To that end, “[p]olitical actors,” write King and Wells (2009: 9) “continually produce, publicize, maintain, and, when necessary, remake and reaffirm their versions of political truth.” During times of war, elite-sponsored media frames attempt to tap into common narratives (Reese 2004; Jackson 2005). The Bush Administration’s ability to effectively frame the news coverage of the so-called “war on terror” in the aftermath of 9/11 illustrates well the power of frames (Robinson and Livingston 2006). Bush’s binary framing — “good” versus “evil” and “freedom” versus “tyranny,” for instance — was closely echoed by U.S. media in 2001 and 2002 (Entman 2003; Coe et al. 2004; Jackson 2005). The “war on terror” became a “linguistic staple” of the administration and news organizations after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Munshi 2004: 54). This type of “antagonistic” speech “become[s] very quickly hegemonic, defining the *horizon* of our thought and excluding other discourses” (Carpentier 2007: 2; italics added).

Stripped of its ideological tone and endowed instead with a “common sense” value, the struggle becomes neutral and “power derived from it takes on a hegemonic form” (van Dijk 2008: 34). Ryan’s (2004) content analysis of U.S. newspapers, by means of an example, found military intervention in Afghanistan was regarded as inevitable or the *right thing to do* after the 9/11 attack, representing an exertion of ideological power over the news media. This power of officials to perpetuate hegemonic positions is strengthened by the public relations infrastructure of modern governments.

## **2.16. Public Relations: Nefarious Spin or Public Benefit?**

Governments remain instrumental as both sources of and stories for journalists (Cook 1998; Meyer 2002; Graber 2003). To be sure, the news media and public relations have become increasingly intertwined. Meyer (2002: xiv, 57) notably contends the news media “colonized” politics, transforming traditional notions of democracy into a “media democracy,” whereby “the rules of the media logic recast the constitutive factors” of politics and democracy.

“From the “spin-doctoring” that follows every televised debate to the timing and stagecrafting of press conferences, political elites devote considerable effort towards influencing not only *what* information gets on the air but *how* it is presented” (Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997: 224; italics in original).

Esser (2013: 160) even argues the very nature of democracy is changed because of “the growing intrusion of media logic as an institutional rule into other fields where it now supplements (and in extreme cases replaces) existing rules for defining appropriate behaviour.” Proponents of mediatization, on the other hand, see a symbiotic relationship, whereby media and politics “work in tandem” (Hepp, Hjarvard, and Lundby 2015: 4-5). Dainith (2001) is much more pessimistic, arguing mediatized political communications undermines the vital necessity of informed citizens in democracy. Other scholarship (Couldry and Hepp 2017), however, contends that the mediatization of politics offers both advantages and disadvantages.

Elites rely on public relations and spin<sup>11</sup> to drum up support for war. Government and military leaders are increasingly focused on shaping public opinion during times of conflict. The U.S. government, for instance, hired the high profile public relations firms Hill and Knowlton and Wirthlin Group to help manage the strategic communication surrounding both the first and second Gulf Wars (Carruthers 2011: 36). Public relations veteran Victoria Clark, who came from the PR giant Hill and Knowlton, managed the Pentagon's communications surrounding the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 as the assistant secretary of defence for public affairs (MacArthur 2004). The deceptive use of government communications to garner public support for war<sup>12</sup> is well represented by the imbroglio surrounding the *sexed up* intelligence contained in the September 24, 2002 United Kingdom government's dossier, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction*. That strategic communication surrounding the justification for war sparked considerable criticism and condemnation (Hutton 2004; Chilcot 2016).

Demonized by some scholars (Habermas 1989 [1962]; Rawnsley 2000; Gaber 2004; Louw 2007), government public relations or political spin is similarly savaged by journalists who herald their pure intentions and normative role in democracy while cynically deplored the strategic communication efforts of political actors (Savage and Riffen 2007). U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair's press secretary Alastair Campbell, for example, was widely derided by many in the news media and even described as "a masterly propagandist" (Jones 2001: 185). This open contempt for political communication strategies, argues Capella and Hall Jamieson (1997: 142), manifests itself destructively in the public, inspiring a caustic "spiral of cynicism" about politicians amongst voters. For his part, Habermas (2008: 366-67) prominently decried

"a public sphere dominated by mass media and large agencies, observed by market and opinion research, and inundated by the public relations work, propaganda, and advertising of political parties and groups."

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<sup>11</sup> The genesis of "political spin" is not clear — but the term appears to have first been used in *The New York Times* in 1984 about the United States' presidential debate. See: [www.theguardian.com/notesandqueries/query/0.5753,-1124.00.htm](http://www.theguardian.com/notesandqueries/query/0.5753,-1124.00.htm).

<sup>12</sup> O'Shaugnessy (2004) contends modern political communication — or so-called spin — surrounding war is best conceptualized as traditional propaganda. Calling the phenomenon "ubiquitous", O'Shaugnessy (2004: 244) argues that propaganda is "sophisticated and naturalized as part of the supposedly objective mass media communication." This work, however, questions the linear relationship between message and audience reception often suggested by theorizations of propaganda.

Essentially, critics contend public relations — and journalism's over-reliance on it — sabotages the democratic purity of modern states.

Scoffed at by many in the academy “as a perversion of what normative theory decrees the public sphere to be for” (McNair 2007: 95), spin has a bad name — but undeservedly so argues McNair (2000). As Garland (2016: 14) has recently argued convincingly, critical accounts of spin justifiably question the nefarious uses of political communication — but, at the same time, needlessly “demonize the process of strategic communications by governments.” Spin, to be sure, has a place in democracy. Normatively conceptualized, democracy represents a contest of ideas — a continuous debate, if you will. The acceleration of spin in modern democracies, arguably, does not minimize the quality of the public sphere — but, in fact, represents a healthy effort by political actors to influence public opinion (McNair 2000).

“Only persuasive discourse seeking to change the opinion of others is in fact capable of eliciting the consent of a majority where, at the outset, there is nothing but a large number of divergent opinions” (Manin 1997: 198).

Journalists, in fact, have become adept at resisting spin, “with retaliatory measures of their own, devoting more and more time to uncovering and critiquing the activities of their ‘evil twins’” in public relations (McNair 2000: 138). Additionally, fact checking has become a staple of modern political journalism (Graves 2016).

The deceptive public relations surrounding the Iraq war in both the U.S. and U.K., as I expand upon later in this chapter, represents an important fracture point for journalists. There is little doubt the torqued spin surrounding the weapons of mass destruction made journalists less trusting of political actors and more likely to challenge their claims about war (Allan and Zelizer 2004; Graves 2016).<sup>13</sup> Having detailed the origins and theoretical contours of framing, the

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<sup>13</sup> Recently, some elite spin has attempted to persuade public opinion by discrediting journalists and the news media. Donald Trump's run for the White House revived the old Nazi slur *Lügenpresse*” (lying press) to discredit the media. Adolf Hitler used the expression to stigmatize his critics and inflame hatred against Jews and communists, frequently branding his critics as part of the “*Lügenpresse* apparatus” (Noack 2016). Trump frequently refers to the “lying” and “dishonest” media (Talbot 2016: np). His former top strategist refers to the news media as the “opposition party” (Gertz 2017: np). Trump's mendacity has even extended to calling the news media the “enemy of the people” (Higgins 2017: np). Hours, in fact, after repeating that claim for a second time, the president's press secretary then barred

coming pages conclude with an illustration of the different forms media framing can take in news and analysis.

## 2.17. A Hypothetical Example to Illustrate the Different Forms of Media Frames

Elite-sponsored media frames can take on numerous shapes in news content. Journalists can use the frames suggested by government officials, for instance, to structure their story or commentary. Conversely, they can frame their stories and analysis in a different way, but still include an elite frame in their story as a means of fairness and balance (D'Angelo and Kuypers 2010). Let me offer a hypothetical (but realistic) example: Suppose a journalist produces a news story analyzing a government's proposed tax cut. The story aims to illuminate the economic benefits and drawbacks of the tax cut for various socio-economic groups. Let us also suppose that this story is produced around the same time the government imposes a time limit on the debate in Parliament over the tax cut. The opposition parties are outraged by what they call the government's "anti-democratic" move to curtail debate. The government rejects the oppositions' claims, arguing the recent election gives them a mandate to impose the tax cut. "The people have already spoken," the government's finance minister claims, adding that the economy needs the *boost* the cut will produce.

The journalist, in this example, frames her story on the *winners* and *losers* in the tax cut. She highlights how high income people will benefit the most and low income people, despite the government's framing, likely won't see a lot of extra money in their pocket, especially since the government recently raised a number of government service fees. The story mostly quotes *everyday people* and an economist. Clearly, the story is framed as a *pocketbook winners versus losers* story. Yet, in order to *hook* the story to the timeliness of the parliamentary debate, the journalist includes information and quotes from both the government and opposition about the controversy surrounding limiting legislative debate. Moreover, the journalist fact checks the government's framing of their rationale for stopping parliamentary debate by including a quote

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journalists from several prominent news organizations, including *The New York Times* and CNN, from attending a so-called *gaggle* or briefing in his office (Hirschfeld-Davis and Grynbaum 2017). While Republicans in the past have charged that the media are "liberal" and "biased", Trump's actions seek to undermine the legitimacy of the media (Gitlin 2017: np).

from the prime minister from when she was in opposition and criticized the previous government for imposing a time limit on a tax bill. So, while the journalist may have framed her story in terms of the economics of the tax cut (who wins and who loses), elite-sponsored frames (the government's and the opposition's) also get represented in the story. Let us also assume (for the sake of illustrating the influence of the social level) that the story — like considerable news content — conforms to hegemonic capitalist values. The story does not question *the system* or raise doubts about capitalism's focus on economic growth over sustainable environmentally sensitive growth, arguably illustrating how the news story was shaped by the context of its social system.

Admittedly, media frames and framing can be a bit slippery. As the above example illustrates, theorizing frames and framing poses problems for researchers. For the sake of clarity, I confined my search to evaluating the contested dynamic surrounding elite media framing and journalistic fact checking. I disaggregate frames used by government and military officials and those used by journalists (Speer 2017). I am primarily interested in if — and how — journalists responded to official frames. (I offer much more detail about journalistic fact checking later on in this chapter.)

Having outlined the influence of the social system as an organizing system that often perpetuates the status quo in the news media, I now wish to transition to a discussion of how normative conceptions of the media's role can shape the coverage journalists produce. Murdock and Golding (1977: 35) argue it is important to link cultural values and thinking to “occupational ideologies.” To that end, I now transition to doing that.

## **2.18. Normative Notions of the News Media's Role in Democracy**

Margaret Thatcher's former Press Secretary, Bernard Ingham, characterized the dynamic between journalists and politicians as “essentially cannibalistic”, adding “they feed off each other but no one knows who is next on the menu” (Ingham, as quoted in Louw 2007: 149). Traditional pluralistic theory sees journalists as neutral, fact-based watchdogs of the powerful. Democracy, in this view of the world, writes Hallin (1994: 3), “requires only the state to be

prevented from interfering with the right of individuals to communicate.” Journalists, in this conception, “serve as custodians of the national order” (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 221). Yet, as Schudson (1995, 2011) argues, journalists do not always live up to their normative conception — and while they may expose wrongdoing as in the Watergate scandal that ended Richard Nixon’s presidency, their coverage ultimately endorses and even celebrates the system within which they work (Schudson 1993; for more on the mythology of journalism and Watergate, see Feldstein 2014).

Critical scholarship contends journalism produces meaning in service of dominant ideology, helping to *manufacture consent* (Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]) or perpetuate “corporate complicity” (Goodman and Goodman 2006). Miliband (1969) sums up the criticism well:

“The press may well claim to be *independent* and to fulfill an important watchdog function. What the claim overlooks, however, is the very large fact that it is the Left at which the watchdogs generally bark with most ferocity, and what they are above all protecting is the *status quo*” (Miliband 1969: 199; italics in original).

In keeping with Miliband — and in contrast to the *watch dog* metaphor — a recent content analysis I helped with determined that the British print media act more like an *attack dog* when it comes to Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn (Cammaerts et al. 2016). Unquestionably, media and communication scholarship is filled with detailed accounts, as Gramsci (1971) notes, of normative discrepancies between the *what ought to be* and the *what is*. Nevertheless, the news media view their role as important to democracy — and it is important, for this work’s understanding of how ideals inspire certain journalistic practices. Yet, as Carpentier (2005) concluded, the *who-ness* and *what-ness* of journalists is prescribed but also contingent and fluid. (I come back to these ideas in the coming pages, but first I wish to outline some helpful normative conceptions of the news media in democracy.)

## 2.19. Normative Models of the News Media

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm’s (1956) analysis ponders why media do different things in different places. The scholars’ cataloguing of media systems — (1) authoritarian theory; (2) libertarian theory; (3) social responsibility theory; and (4) Soviet media theory — concludes “the

press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates" (Siebert et al. 1956: 1). The western authors clearly prefer the freedoms ascribed to the libertarian model. Moreover, their analysis viewed all four theories through "one of the four theories — classical liberalism" (Neorone 1995: 21). To be certain, the end of the Cold War, the rise of the global south and increasing globalization makes the theory obsolete (Hallin and Mancini 2004b). Christians et al. (2009: 16) call for "a new beginning" with their updated normative theoretical conception of journalism's role in a democratic society. The researchers posit that the news media perform four roles: (1) monitorial; (2) facilitative; (3) radical; and (4) collaborative. The coming pages offer a brief synthesis of the four roles of journalists as imagined by Christians et al. (2009) as a means to lay the foundation for this research's conceptual framework.

## 2.20. The Monitorial Role

Laswell (1948) first characterized communication's purpose as *surveillance*, conjuring images of a "watching post, a lookout tower, or the crow's nest of a ship" (Christians et al. 2009: 139). Monitoring often gets conflated with surveillance and associated with Bentham's (2017 [1843]) *panopticon prison*, as a means of theorizing constant vigilance. Everyone in the social world becomes both the *subject* and the *object* of surveillance. People — like the prisoners — are "watched" but also disciplined or educated to watch themselves (Feder 2011: 58). Yet, this articulation of surveillance takes on a sinister tone and is not an appropriate description of news media's monitoring role (Christians et al. 2009).

The notion of *monitorial* more accurately stresses the constitution of media as both a receiver and disseminator of information. The news media do not control information. Journalists in this conception act as observant informers, illuminating and educating audiences based on their relationships with sources such as government officials. This can also be linked to liberalism, and a general distrust of the state and political elites who need to be kept in check.

"Tenacious reporters expose lies as falsities, cutting exaggerated boasts down to size. They insist elected representatives make good on their electoral pledges and spend taxpayers' money wisely. In this watchdog role, the media constitute what's often referred to as a 'fourth estate.' a check on executive power" (Carruthers 2011: 9).

Critical scholars (Hall 1980; Hackett 1984; Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]), however, question the capacity of journalists to live up to this normative conception given the media's propensity, as outlined earlier, to conform to rigid hegemonic discourses.

The role of Canada's news media flows most directly from liberal thinking, whereby journalists are *watchdogs* and *truth-speakers* who play an important function in democracy (Ward 2015). Reporting, in this conception, presupposes the notions of a clinical accounting of events (Russell 1994). Objectivity<sup>14</sup>, despite its criticisms<sup>15</sup>, remains — for many — a “cornerstone of the professional ideology of journalists in liberal democracies” (Lichtenberg 1996: 225). Citizens, in this way of thinking, need facts and “...good reporting requires the exercise of the highest scientific virtues” (Lippmann 1995 [1920]: 74). Truth, fairness, balance and objectivity are, as a result, hallmarks of good journalism (King and Wells 2009). The concept of objectivity in journalism — at the normative level — is “interconnected with some notion of ‘truth’” whereby

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<sup>14</sup> For a history of objectivity in journalism see Schudson (2001).

<sup>15</sup> Objectivity in journalism is, no doubt, a long debated and much contested concept. In the 1950s, Peterson, in *Four Theories of the Press*, called objectivity “a fetish” (Siebert et al. 1956: 88). Notions of objectivity face persistent scrutiny from many corners, including postmodernists such as Lyotard (1984) and Baudrillard (1994) and critical scholars (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1947]) who challenge the validity of objectivity. The debate about objectivity in journalists rages with “some say[ing] that journalism is not objective, others that journalism cannot be objective and still others say[ing] that journalism should not be objective” (Lichtenberg 1996: 225). Objectivity has been further complicated by the ethics surrounding covering war crimes and the “journalism of attachment” that developed in the 1990s (Tumber 2008: 263). This research does not propose to settle the debate over objectivity. While many journalists and media scholars question traditional notions of objectivity (Ward 2015), journalists remain normatively *objective* in their method or work routines (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014: 103). “Journalism and science,” argues Meyers (1998), “come from the same intellectual roots” (Meyers, as quoted in Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014: 108). There are practical implications to this normative conception. The wire service, The Canadian Press, for example, stresses that it “deal[s] with facts that are demonstrable, supported by sources that are reliable and responsible” (Canadian Press 2013: 11). Moreover, this orientation fuels journalists’ compunction to fact check elites (Graves 2016).

journalists strive for accuracy (Tumber and Prentoulis 2005: 64). Akin to Tuchman (1972: 660), who conceptualized objectivity as a “strategic ritual”, Ward (2015) argues journalists invented objectivity to defend themselves against attacks of bias in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Schudson (2003: 75), along the same lines, contends news bosses use objectivity as a form of “industrial discipline” to control journalists.

## **2.21. The Facilitative Role**

The origins of the facilitative role comes from civic republicanism (Christians et al. 2009). In this conception, journalists are deeply imbedded in a broad spectrum of society’s political and social process. Journalists reflect the political system within which they operate for the purposes of informing the public so they can make knowledgeable decisions in a democracy. Journalism, in Carey’s (1987: 17) conception requires the news media to “preside over and within the conversation of our culture: to simulate it and organize it, to keep it moving...” In this normative conception, journalism plays a crucial role in deliberative democracy, whereby the “media do not merely report on civil society’s associations and activities but seek to enrich and improve them” (Christians et al. 2009: 158). Similar to Habermas’ (1989 [1962]) normative conception of the public sphere, this media-facilitated discourse must be equal, respectful and highlight “the mutual recognition of the deliberative liberties of others” (Bohman 2000: 88-89).

## **2.22. The Radical Role**

The radical role diverges significantly from the facilitative role and traces its origins to Marxist conceptions of the news media labouring to unite the working class. Freedom and equality for everyone is paramount. As a result, journalists, in this conception, move beyond mere information providers to advocates for a radical restructuring of the social, economic and political system (Christians et al. 2009). In this understanding, elites not only control the mechanisms of production but also the construction of meaning. Journalists, therefore, have an obligation to “help minorities articulate an alternative set of goals that represent the needs and just moral claims of all, especially the marginalized, the poor and the dispossessed” (Christians et al. 2009: 179). In short, in the radical role, journalists comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Romantic depictions cast journalists as radicals trying to make the world a better

place. Bollinger (1991: 55) describes an autonomous bohemian artist of sorts “who lives (figuratively) outside of society, beyond normal conventions.” The traditional radical role of the press — in the early days of newspapers — diminished with the advent of the increasingly commercial mass media “with less and less space for traditional radicalism” (Christians et al. 2009: 180). Alternative and community news media remain today as vestiges of the radical role, circulating outside the centre of mainstream media (Couldry and Curran 2003).

As a normative conception, peace journalism (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Lynch and McGoldrick 2005, 2006) promotes, arguably, a radical role for the news media. First imagined in his analysis of war reporting, Galtung developed his thinking into both a theoretical (1986, 2002a, 2002b) understanding and a practical reform-minded “working concept” that encouraged correspondents covering conflict to be more reflexive about reportage that valorizes war (Lee 2010: 362). While a “single and universal concept of peace journalism” does not exist (Hanitzsch 2007: 2), Shinar (2007: 2) helpfully defines peace journalism as a:

“normative mode of responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict, that aims at contributing to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and changing the attitudes of media owners, advertisers, and audiences towards war and peace. Such goals are sought through (a) critical evaluations of the current state of conflict coverage and (b) efforts to conceptualize professional values and practices in both theoretical and operational terms.”

At a conceptual level, peace journalism critiques the values and routines and practices that lead the news media during times of war to, wittingly or unwittingly, highlight:

“sensationalism; identification with one or the home side; overemphas[ize]... tangible losses such as human casualties and material damage; military triumphalist language; and a superficial narrative with little context, background, or historical perspective” (Lee 2010: 362).

Peace journalism involves a conscious and reflective practice whereby journalists consciously chose to make space for “and value non-violent responses to conflict” (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005: 12). Peace journalism, as Lynch (2008) explains, attempts to:

1. Foreground the history and context for the causes of the conflict from every side (and not just both sides;

2. Provide voice all parties — at all levels — in the dispute;
3. Reports possible solutions for the conflict;
4. Exposes lies and highlights suffering of all parties in the conflict; and
5. Highlight stories of peace and post-war developments.

The radical role, as imagined by Christians et al. (2009) best encapsulates peace journalism's challenge to the structures that perpetuate hegemony about war and conflict (Lukacovic 2016). Christians et al. (2009: 181-82) imagine the radical role as "journalism as an instrument for challenging and changing political and economic systems." The radical role highlights notions of inequality and injustice in the social world. Journalists, in the radical conception, challenge hegemony and defend the interests of those who are marginalized. "Peace journalism," posits Lukacovic (2016: 3), "... presupposes an injustice in war journalism, which serves the purposes of elites and militarism

To be sure, peace journalism challenges traditional monitorial notions of journalism with its hallmark of objective reporting. Longtime BBC correspondent David Loyn (2007:1) argues forcibly against peace journalism, stressing that "objectivity could be a useful vaccine against the relativism of 'attached journalists.'"

"In the twenty-first century the world has moved on from the classic Clausewitzian vision of war as a continuation of politics 'by other means', to a situation where threats of asymmetric conflicts will continually wrong-foot diplomatic solutions, as they are normally constructed, as well as conventional armies – 'war amongst the people' in the new jargon. The tools of the reporter need to be sharpened not altered" (Loyn 2007: 1).

In a similar vein, Hanitzsch (2005: 189) critiques what he terms the "myths and fallacies" of peace journalism, arguing that the practice inflates the impact of the news media and ignored the importance of interpersonal communication for resolving conflict. Moreover, Hanitzsch (2007) contends that peace journalism inflates the importance of individual journalists and ignores crucial structural factors that shape and limit the work of journalists to effectively promote peace.

"A peaceful culture is the precondition of peace journalism, rather than its outcome. In a culture in which a life has virtually no meaning and violence seems an appropriate measure of conflict resolution, peace journalism is not likely to evolve. While media critics continue to repeat their mantra-like question of why journalism serves society as

poorly as it currently does, I think it is time to turn the question around. We should rather ask: What kind of society do we live in that allows and creates a sort of journalism that has no sense of peace?" (Hanitzsch 2007: 7).

Hackett (2006), as well, highlights numerous structural barriers — education, journalistic objectivity, source election, corporate media ownership — that prevents peace journalism from becoming a more mainstream practice in the news media. To be sure, peace journalism faces several practical roadblocks if it is to be widely adopted in mainstream journalism (Lukacovic 2016). I will return to this debate in my final chapter when I reflect on this critical strand of scholarship with respect to my own normative conclusions about journalism's coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan.

## **2.23. The Collaborative Role**

In the collaborative conception, the news media are closely engrained within the political and economic power system. The role of journalists implies a *partnership* or *relationship*, according to Christians et al. (2009). Collaboration, according to Christians et al. (2009: 197), reflects

"an acknowledgement of the state's interest — to which the media accede either passively or unwittingly, reluctantly or wholeheartedly — in participating in the choices journalists make and the coverage they provide."

While journalists in the watchdog conception often adopt a maverick posture in the face of power, news professionals in the collaboration role actively work to advance the state's interests (Christians et al. 2009).

As will be made clear in the coming pages, embedding journalists with the military often leads to a collaboration of sorts between news professionals and the military. In order to gain access to the front lines of war, journalists agree to certain conditions. Many journalists, however, do not view this as collaboration — but their obligation to *get the story* (Christians et al. 2009). Of note, collaboration does not imply censorship. Often journalists, in line with Herman and Chomsky's (2002 [1988]) propaganda model align their reportage with the narrow and rigid way of seeing the world preferred by elites. Singapore's press, for instance, is required to cooperate with the government to bolster the city state's goals of progress and prosperity (Christians et al.

2009). Similarly, Israel's news media give up some of their independence because of censorship rules, requiring journalists to withhold "national security" details from the public (Christians et al. 2009: 207). For this research, the monitorial role, which aligns with classic liberal notions of the news media as watchdog, the facilitative role, whereby journalists have a constitutive role in democracy and the collaborative role, where journalists are embedded with military forces, represent the most useful models for understanding the Canadian news media's roles surrounding the war in Afghanistan.

## **2.24. The Implications of Normative Conceptions of the News Media**

Principles such as fairness, balance and transparency are highlighted in most mainstream news media organizations' ethics and journalistic standards and practices (see, for example, *The New York Times* 2004). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) policy dictates that the news service will not publish a story until it has "ensured that the facts and evidence support the conclusions and judgments" (CBC 2014: np). Moreover, the corporation's dedication to "accuracy and integrity" requires journalists to confirm information from second sources or authenticated documents (CBC 2014: np). Borrowing from Mouffe (1979: 8), journalists adopt their profession's code, sharing values and "conceptions of the world" with their colleagues. To that end, habitual practices occur and the social agent becomes "caught up" in the process of identification with their "specific subject position" (Smith 1998: 63). As a result, the norms surrounding the production of news are both externalized and internalized by journalists. Journalists produce content that conforms to a certain standard because they become the *subject* and the *object* of surveillance.

In addition to internalizing the norms of journalism, the surveillance of news bosses and elites ensure reporters adhere to these codes. Politicians and their aides upset with news coverage often complain to news executives or regulatory bodies. Herman and Chomsky (2002 [1988]) contend journalists, in fact, self-censor themselves to avoid catching *flack* from elites if they produce counter-hegemonic interpretations of issues and events. Born (2005), for instance, details the attack the Blair government led against the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for its alleged anti-war bias surrounding the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Blair's long-time press

secretary, Alastair Campbell, often coordinated complaints on behalf of himself and his political master to news executives and regulatory agencies (Campbell 2012). Oborne (1999: 182), notably, details a litany of Campbell’s “playground bully” tactics aimed at ensuring journalists produced sympathetic stories.

“New Labour... never hesitated to destabilize journalists by going behind their backs to their bosses... This weapon could be used even against close allies who strayed from the party or government line” (Oborne 1999: 182).

In Canada, as well, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper turned its complaints about the CBC into a fund-raising effort, asking its supporters for money to counter what it calls the public broadcaster’s supposed biased political coverage (Taber 2010).

All journalists, of course, do not function as lap dogs of hegemonic forces as many Marxist and neo-pluralist accounts contend (Cammaerts 2015). Carpentier (2005) contends that the role and identity of the journalists are fluid — but very much dependent on hegemonic articulations of the profession. Foucault would likely argue that journalists can resist hegemonic forces. Still, as Lukes (2005 [1974]: 150) stresses, someone can “resent” the power over them — but “consent” to it begrudgingly. Undoubtedly, the social level offers many moving parts to consider when assessing how dominant ideas shape news media content. I now wish to turn from this macro-level to the meso-level influence of institutions. Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) model posits that because the news media work in “relationship” or association with powerful organizations such as government and corporations, those institutions also influence the production of news.

## **2.25. Social Institution Level of the Hierarchy of Influences Model**

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) urge researchers to conceptualize the news media as an institutional actor whose content is frequently shaped by its close relationship with political and economic power centres (see also: Benson 2004). Media and communication scholarship in the new institutionalism paradigm frequently positions the news media as a political actor (Cook 1998; Sparrow 2006). Analysis, in this vein, views institutions through a sociological lens. It attempts to understand, for instance, how the interaction between government and the news media possibly influences news content. For this research, it makes sense to envision

embedding and indexing at the social institution level because so much of the news coverage of Afghanistan was produced by reporters embedded with Canadian Forces.

There are practical reason for the news industry to locate many of its resources at official institutions such as the White House or the Pentagon (Cook 1994, 2005, 2006; Schudson 2003). It makes economic sense for news organizations to station their resources at these locations because they are guaranteed to yield *news* from what Tuchman (1978a) labeled the “news net.” Fishman (1980), in fact, concluded that the news media and government have combined to form a bureaucratic news producing machine. Cunningham’s (2003: np) analysis of news coverage of the Iraq War in 2003, for instance, found that the vast majority of news stories by the three big U.S. networks originated from the White House, Pentagon and State Department, resulting in “too much of the “official” truth.” Hallin (1992), notably, argues that journalists made a Faustian bargain of sorts with officials in the U.S. for access to official locations such as the Pentagon and White House. As the following section makes plain, the institutional influence of embedding journalists with the military can, indeed, shape news content.

Theoretically, it is also justifiable to view indexing as a social or ideological level influence. Bennett’s (1990) initial conception of the indexing hypothesis contended it was natural for journalists to afford more access to official sources in democracies. Indexing can also be viewed as a routine and practice. Again, journalists gravitate towards sources who give them *official* accounts of events and, therefore, legitimate their stories. Therefore, it makes conceptual sense for this research to view indexing as a social level influence. As the coming methodology chapter makes clear, the coverage analyzed in this research came mostly from journalists embedded with Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. In the coming pages I first critically examine the potential influences of embedding journalists with military forces on news content before reviewing the potential shaping power of indexing on news content.

## 2.26. Embedding Journalists with the Military as a Social Institution Level Influence

“The principles of reporting are put to a severe test when your nation goes to war. To whom are you true?” (Kate Adie, BBC war correspondent, as quoted in Allan and Zelizer 2004: 3).

Journalism and war share a long and intertwined relationship. Complementary and conflicted, their storied entanglement engenders pugnacious squabbles, pitched pronouncements of independence, inevitably followed by admissions of their intrinsic need for one another. Since the early days of the printing press, newspapers have yearned for dispatches from the front. British newspapers often paid soldiers for their eyewitness accounts — and even plagiarized reportage, stealing them from foreign newspapers (Bergen 2005). *The Times* of London distinguishes itself as the first news organization to assign war correspondents to the front lines in 1854 (Knightly 2003 [1975]). “War not only creates a supply of news,” wrote Laswell (1927: 192), “but demands for it.”

News and analysis about war has become increasingly complicated and dangerous (Tumber 2002; Tumber and Palmer 2004; Tumber and Webster 2006; Tumber 2013). Increasingly, journalists are targets in modern conflicts. On top of the physical danger, there is also the psychological stress associated with covering war and terrorism. Questions persist, too, about the role of embedded journalists during times of conflict: is the war correspondent a “participant” or “observer”? (Tumber 2002: 260; see also Tumber 2009). Correspondents attached to military units during war frequently get criticized for echoing and amplifying military and political leaders’ framing of the war (Knightly 2003 [1975]) or identifying with the soldiers because they feel “an affinity with the troops, a shared determination to see the venture through to the end” (Morrison and Tumber 1988: 97). Journalists embedded with U.S.-led forces in the Iraq war in 2003, for example, were more inclined to label the war a “liberation” than “invasion” (Sivek 2004: np). The practice of embedding raises serious political and ethical questions.

“[E]mbedding constitutes a strategic source of legitimization of war that becomes *facilitated* by the media in the eyes of the public. The war correspondent, then, is rendered a political instrument of war” (Tumber 2013: 52; italics in original).

While military officials did not censor journalists with Canadian Forces in Kandahar, the embedding relationship definitely complicated normative ideals of journalists as independent

observers or *watchdogs*. To be sure, government and military leaders hope embedded journalists feel and affinity with the troops they are with (Tumber and Palmer 2004; Carruthers 2011). Embedded journalists definitely worry about compromising their impartiality (Tumber 2009, 2013). Veteran journalist George C. Wilson with the *National Reporter* equated embedding to being on a dogsled team:

“You see and hear a lot of the dog directly in front of you, and you see what is passing by on the left and right, but you cannot get out of the traces to explore intriguing sights you pass, without losing your spot on the moving team” (Wilson, as quoted in Linder 2009: 23; see also Carruthers 2011: 230).

As Carruthers (2011: 229; italics in original) justifiably wonders: “How could journalists, themselves coming under fire alongside their units, possibly *not* identify with the uniformed men and women on whom their protection depended?” Long-time foreign correspondent Chris Hedges (2003) contends journalists who cover war are increasingly complicit in government spin and manipulation. War correspondents, he contends:

“want to do their bit. And their bit is the dissemination of myth, the myth used to justify war and boost the morale of the soldiers and civilians. The lie in wartime is almost always the lie of omission” (Hedges 2003: np).

While U.S. military officials, at first, worried about embedding reporters in 2003, those fears soon dissipated. U.S. government and military officials were largely pleased with the embedding process (Tumber and Palmer 2004). “Embedding,” opined *The Guardian’s* Oliver Burkeman (2003: np) “has been an astounding PR success for the Pentagon.” Reporters, he emphasized:

“use the words ‘we’ and ‘us’ profusely, identifying themselves with the military, and while this has prompted concerns about objectivity among US commentators, it is not surprising, given their very personal stake in their unit’s success” (see also Allan and Zelizer 2004: 6).

Journalist Jeff Gralnick cautions that embedded correspondents often become sympathetic to the military men and women they are with.

“You will fall in with a bunch of grunts, experience and share their hardships and fears and then you will feel for them and care for them. You wind up loving them...” (Gralnick, as quoted in Tumber and Palmer 2004: 51)

Moreover, embedded reporters cannot easily turn to other sources to *get the other side* of the story as required by *objective* journalistic norms. Embedding largely prohibits “the familiar practice of juxtaposing every ‘he said’ with a ‘she said’” (Carruthers 2011: 230).

Embedded journalists, though, do not always slavishly churn out pro-military coverage about war. Lewis, et al. (2006: 154) notably found no evidence of bias from embedded journalists covering the invasion of Iraq in 2003 — but their research did conclude that war zone reportage turns the conflict into a *story* that ultimately forces larger more critical questions about the war “into the background.” While hegemony can never be understood to be total, embedding, arguably, has a profound influence on how journalists shape news and analysis. Practically speaking, journalists are likely to become more sympathetic to the military personnel they are reporting on. Yet, as the coming section makes plain, even a reliance on military sources can still afford journalists latitude and agency to challenge the media frames of government and military leaders. Having offered an overview of the potential shaping power of embedding, the coming pages now transition to outlining how indexing can also influence news content.

## 2.27. Indexing

The foundation of indexing theory holds that journalists and news organizations focus on — and implicitly place greater emphasis on — what elites do and say. First postulated as a hypothesis (Bennett 1990), indexing theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding “press-state relations” and a means to forecast how elite discourse shapes news content. News media coverage, posits Bennett (1990), largely mirror the consensus and disagreements amongst political actors.

“Mass media news professionals, from the boardroom to the beat, tend to “index” the range of voices and viewpoints in news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a topic” (Bennett 1990: 106).

In short, issues and events that garner more attention by elites spark more attention from news media. Murphy (1991) contends journalists gravitate towards official sources because their authority solves the new media’s verification problem. Stories that quote officials are deemed to be *reliable*. In her Oxford Bibliography entry about indexing, Lawrence (2012: np) intriguingly

equates indexing to the indicators economists frequently use to forecast economic performance. Elite disagreement, she contends, “predicts” the level of “conflict” about an issue or event that will be reflected in the news media. In a similar way, Herman and Chomsky’s (2002 [1988]) political economy understanding of the news media posits that journalists’ overreliance on elite sources leads to news coverage that largely echoes elite discourse.

## **2.28. Indexing’s Theoretical Origins**

Drawing on previous research (Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978a; Gans 1979; Hallin 1986; Sigal 1986), Bennett (1990) hypothesized that news content closely adheres to elite debate. This conception flows from the normative assumption that journalists, in order to fulfill their role as *honest brokers* of information in a democracy, must represent the “legitimate” and “credible” views of elected representatives (Bennett 1990: 107). Elites — cabinet ministers, Members of Parliament, military officials, senior civil servants, judges, experts, academics — have “privileged access to (and greater claims on) media coverage” because of their “status” or “claims to expert knowledge” (McCullagh 2002: 68). The 4thEstate.net’s media *VoiceShare* analysis, for example, found that only a third of the people quoted by major newspapers in the 2012 U.S. presidential election were citizens compared to elite political actors (4thEstate.net 2012).

In a similar vein, Hall and his colleagues (1978, 1982, 1986) ascribed considerable power to elites to dominate news coverage, prescribing how events and issues get defined in the news media. This, in turn, allows these news sources to ““command the field” and set the terms of reference within which all further coverage of debate takes place” (Hall et al. 1978: 58). This line of thinking, of course, is open to a Gramsci-inspired critique. Underlying Hall et al.’s argument is the notion of a unified elite. Surely, hegemony is sometimes contested by journalists and their sources. Schlesinger and Tumber (1999 [1994]: 259), of particular interest to this research, concluded that Hall and his colleagues “tend to overstate the passivity of the media as recipients of information from news sources.” Accordingly, counter-hegemonic forces, such as public interest groups and advocates, can, in fact, have an important influence on news media discourse (Schlesinger and Tumber 1999 [1994]). Notably, Hall (1982:86), himself, concedes

that the “hegemony of the powerful” to shape news discourse is not complete because elites are not always unified and other counter-hegemonic voices are sometimes represented in the news media.

## **2.29. Indexing and War and Terrorism**

Without question, government and military officials are dominant sources of information for most news organizations surrounding foreign affairs and during times of conflict (Hallin 1986; Zaller and Chiu 1996). As a result, media coverage of war and terrorism tends to align with hegemonic interpretations and positions (Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Schudson 2002; Domke, Graham, and Coe 2006). Embedded journalists, as the previous section highlighted, often are criticized for being government *mouthpieces* (Knightly 2003 [1975]). This phenomenon, some have argued, became particularly pronounced in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorists attacks in the U.S. in 2001 (Zelizer and Allan 2002). Using Herman and Chomsky’s (2002 [1988]) propaganda model, Boyd-Barrett’s (2004a: 448) analysis of news coverage after the 9/11 attacks concluded that the news media’s over-reliance on official sources led, in part, to “degrees of collaboration between media and propaganda sources.”

Expanding and refining indexing theory, Bennett and his fellow researchers (2007), in fact, document how the U.S. news media *failed* because of their heavy reliance on elite sources and patriotic zeal to resist the considerable shaping power of George W. Bush’s push to invade Iraq in 2003. Zaller and Chiu (1996: 385) champion indexing as “the single most important” factor in determining the narrow range of official views that get reproduced in coverage of U.S. foreign policy. Their systematic analysis of news coverage between 1945-1991 concluded that the news media are the “government’s little helper[s]” when it comes to perpetuating dominant positions about foreign policy (Zaller and Chiu 1996: 385). The news coverage of the lead up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 exemplifies this well. The *New York Times*’s overreliance on official sources produced “flawed journalism” about WMD, according to the newspaper’s own public editor (Orkent 2004: np). The *Time*’s Judith Miller was singled out for not challenging officials’ claims about WMD. Miller, however, insists it is not a reporter’s job to:

“assess the government’s information and be an independent analyst myself. My job is to tell readers of *The New York Times* what the government thought about Iraq’s arsenal” (Miller, as quoted in Massing 2004: 62).

Yet, as the *New York Times*’s public editor stressed, this is reporting or stenography and not compatible with watchdog journalism (Orkent 2004: np).

To underline the previous section about embedding, Hallin’s (1986) examination of news coverage of the Vietnam War offers useful empirical insight for this work into the influence of indexing on media production during times of conflict. Hallin (1986: 63-70) observes that war correspondents’ commitment to objectivity often blunted critical assessments of the conflict during its early phase. Hallin’s (1986: 117) content analysis found that journalists’ reliance on official sources produced “spheres” of “consensus” and “legitimate controversy” in line with elite interpretations of the war. Hallin (1986) details how news accounts of the conflict before 1968 largely mirrored official statements and elite consensus about the war effort. When controversy and criticism was reported, Congressional leaders were often the source. However, after the surprise Tet Offensive, which left U.S. and South Vietnamese forces on their heels, elite consensus transformed — and the news media’s coverage of the war began reflecting that disagreement. Moreover, Defence Secretary Robert McNamara, convinced that winning the war was no longer possible, resigned after President Lyndon Johnston escalated bombing in Southeast Asia. Hallin (1986: 117) contends journalists picked up on the growing elite disenchantment about the war and became increasingly critical of the conflict, reflecting a “sphere of legitimate controversy.” Intriguingly, though, the news media’s coverage of the Vietnam often gets blamed for “loosing” the war. After the first Gulf War, George H. W. Bush famously bragged: “By God, we’ve finally kicked the Vietnam Syndrome” (Prashad 2003: np).

Taking up Hallin’s (1986) typology, Schudson (2002) found that journalists also confined their coverage of war and foreign policy to the sphere of consensus in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Reporting about the so-called war on terror largely echoed the Bush Administration’s framing of the conflict. Journalists, observed, Schudson (2002: 40), adopted what might “even be called a priestly or pastoral mode. The tone of the detached neutrality was replaced by a quiet, solemn tone, as if speaking at a funeral.” Tumber and Palmer (2004) also use Hallin’s

(1986) framework in their analysis of the U.K. news media's coverage of the Iraq War in 2003. That research found that the pre-invasion reporting and analysis emphasized public opposition and scepticism about officials' justification for the war ("sphere of legitimate controversy") (Tumber and Palmer 2004: 164). During the invasion, most of the news media adhered to the "sphere of consensus" (Tumber and Palmer 2004: 165). Reporting and analysis after U.S-led forces took Baghdad, moved back to the "sphere of legitimate controversy", transitioning "away from defining the violence only as a brief aftermath or as the remnants of the regime and towards seeing it as something more sustained" (Tumber and Palmer 2004: 165, 135).

### **2.30. Overestimating Indexing's Effect**

Journalists — and news organizations — can resist indexing's power to shape news content. A growing body of research (Wolfsfeld 1997; Oliver and Myers 1999; Lawrence 2000; Althaus 2003; Kuypers 2006; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Harp, Loke, and Bachmann 2010; Porpora et al. 2010; Hayes and Guardino 2010; Speer 2017) argues indexing does not always directly correlate with elite discourse shaping news content. Hayes and Guardino (2010), for instance, suggest foreign opposition to the Gulf War in 2003 shaped U.S. domestic news. American audiences, they argue, were not only presented with accounts of a unified elite consensus of the Iraq conflict. Foreign opposition the war also influenced news coverage. In a similar way, Harp, Loke and Bachmann's (2010: 467) content analysis results shows that while most of the critical voices in news coverage of the Iraq conflict (2003-2007) came from U.S. officials, Iraqi and American civilians "did have space to voice their dissatisfaction in the coverage."

In contrast to Bennett et al.'s (2006, 2007) analysis of the second Gulf War, Porpora and colleagues (2010) argue the *Washington Post* did not, in fact, accept — uncritically — the Bush administration's framing of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. In a similar way, Althaus' (2003) examination of television news broadcasts during the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War discovered much more evidence of independence from elite discourse, despite a propensity by news professionals to index their coverage to official sources. His case study argues that indexing research fails to recognize the critical interpretation journalists fold into their reports and analysis. Even without much elite discontent over a public policy issue, argues Althaus (2003),

normative journalistic impulses lead news professionals to seek divergent points of view. To this end, journalists highlight different possibilities or narratives even from anonymous sources. Journalists weave “off the record” discontent into their news coverage. Moreover, even when there is unanimity amongst elites, journalists will tend to “follow the trail of power” to non-governmental sources with a stake in the policy or use “accidental occurrences as pegs on which to hang criticisms of government policy” (Althaus 2003: 405).

Schlesinger (1990) also challenges the power of indexing, stressing that journalists use a range of diverse sources in their news and analysis. Moreover, elites do not speak with a unified voice. While officials still have a privileged position when it comes to defining news, according to Schlesinger (1990), increased competition amongst interest groups for the media’s attention has intensified in recent decades, meaning news coverage does not strictly confine itself to the contours of elite discourse. Ample research highlights the autonomy and agency of journalism (Patterson 1993; Callahan and Schnell 2001; Baum and Groeling 2010a, 2010b; Potter and Baum 2010; Speer 2017). Of interest to this research, Potter and Baum (2010) argue that indexing theory underestimates the independence of the media. “[O]nly when the press is an effective independent actor,” they contend, “are the actions of leaders transparent to the public” (Potter and Baum 2010: 454). Groeling and Baum (2008) also highlight the interpretive (Zelizer 1993) quality of journalism. News professionals, they contend, prize analysis and conflict — and especially inter-party disagreement.

### **2.31. An Updated Conception of Indexing’s Shaping Power**

Bennett et al. (2007) offer an updated understanding of indexing, suggesting a number of *notable conditions* such as events, technology, investigative journalism and counter-spin allow journalists to stray from hegemonic interpretations. Dramatic events can push officials off their preferred message. Events — especially dramatic ones — can disrupt the framing power of elites (Bennett and Lawrence 1995; Wolfsfeld 1997; Oliver and Myers 1999; Lawrence 2000; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Speer 2017). Dramatic events — defined as “occurrences that are nonroutine” and “involve conflict [and] qualities that resonate with journalists’ perceptions of newsworthiness” — have been shown to disrupt the power of elites to frame issues and events

(Speer 2017: 284). When no weapons of mass destruction (WMD), for instance, were found in Iraq (which contradicted a major justification for going to war in 2003), the news media increasingly reflected a less unified picture about the rationale for the military invasion of the Middle Eastern country and gave more prominence to anti-war frames.

Entman's (2003, 2004) cascading activation model also questions indexing's predictive power, suggesting that journalists and audiences also have shaping (or framing) power over news content, despite the propensity of journalists to prize officials as sources. Akin to Hallin's (1986) work, this agency described by Entman is, however, usually associated with elite disagreement. Baum and Groeling (2010b), insightfully, offer their elasticity of reality concept as a means of understanding how elites often have more media framing power initially, but that influence wanes over time as reporters and the public gain "more information about an event and have the opportunity to retrospectively assess the reality of prior elite rhetoric" (Baum and Groeling 2010b: 10). As well, journalists, *as a badge of honour*, pride themselves on resisting *spin* or the *party line* (Zaller 1999). The absence of WMD in Iraq, notably, emboldened journalists to be more critical of the Bush Administration's handling of the counter insurgency in that country. Correlating survey data and a content analysis of news coverage of the Iraq war between 2003-2007, Baum and Groeling (2010a) determined that the Bush administration had a framing advantage at the onset of the war — but the administration's power ebbed as security deteriorated in the country.

Having completed my critical overview of the potential shaping power of indexing and embedding, I now wish to turn to scrutinizing how the everyday routines and practices of journalists shape the content they produce. In the coming section, I explore the "patterned, repeated practices, forms, and rules" that guide journalists to craft news content in a certain and often expected way (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 165).

### **2.32. Routines and Practices Level**

There is little doubt that routines and practices situated at the micro level have an important framing or shaping power over news content (Tuchman 1978a; Gans 1979). Notably, Tuchman (1977) observed that journalists who master their craft's routines and practices are regarded as

professional and prized for their competence. The coming pages intend to zero in on two news shaping values or phenomena at the routines and practice level: (1) news values; and (2) journalistic fact checking. It seems prudent to begin with the values and standards that inspire many routines and practices — and ultimately shape news content.

### **2.33. News Values**

News gets shaped by numerous values (Galtung and Ruge 1965). Journalists prize some stories — some narrative elements — over others. Galtung and Ruge's (1965) pioneering work concluded that a dozen factors in three categories — (1) impact; (2) audience identification; and (3) practical issues associated with media coverage — shape news output. Of note, Galtung and Ruge (1965) stress that elite voices are often featured more prominently in the news media than *ordinary* voices. Plus, news coverage prizes frames of reference that allow for referencing ongoing stories. Citing numerous studies (Stephens 1980; Dennis and Ismach 1981; Baskette, Sissirs, and Brooks 1982), Shoemaker and Reese (2014: 171) posit that news values are “predictable” shapers of news content. The researchers offer six common news values that shape news:

- (1) Prominence and importance — that is, stories that are impactful and powerful;
- (2) Conflict and controversy over the status quo;
- (3) The unusual over the routine, for example: man bites dog;
- (4) Human interest stories such as celebrity and gossip;
- (5) Timeliness — that is, what is happening now?; and
- (6) Proximity — events nearby take on more importance than those far away (Shoemaker and Reese 2014).

These news values influence news coverage — but no matter what their focus, most news content imposes storytelling (Uko 2007) or “narrativity” (Jacobs 1996: 373). In particular, the news media’s focus on timely stories produces considerable episodic coverage focused on “events” (Iyengar 1991: 14).

Journalists also prize conflict — and overemphasize the negative (Sabato 1991; Patterson 1996; Cappella and Hall-Jamieson 1997). Tension, after all, remains a key ingredient of good storytelling (Uko 2007). Cynical editors often tell junior reporters that bad news equals a good story. Furthermore, journalistic ethics and professional norms tend to ensure that *both sides* get represented in almost every story. Journalists do this, in part, to vaccinate themselves against charges of bias (Tuchman 1978a). News demands new information and journalists search out “novelty, conflict, balance and authority” (Baum and Groeling 2010b: 87). Moreover, when elites (particularly those from the same political party) disagree about an issue, those dissenting voices become even more newsworthy — and dissent is even more appealing when it is intra-party conflict (Baum and Groeling 2010b).

These norms produce conformity and repetition across the news media industry. Reporters also rely on one another as reference points and ideas. As a result, the news media frequently produce *pack journalism* (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). This coverage is both “insular and self-reinforcing” while offering journalists “a modicum of certitude that enables them to act in an otherwise uncertain environment” (Sigal 1973: 180-81). Fact checking, as the next section points out, is also becoming a norm of news.

### **2.34. Journalistic Counter-framing and Fact checking**

Journalists, as detailed earlier, sometimes use the media frames sponsored by political actors to produce compelling and newsworthy stories. They can adopt their sources’ frames, challenge them or crafting their own (D’Angelo and Kuypers 2010). As part of their work routines, journalists “package” their stories in “efficient” ways so that their audiences will easily understand them (Gitlin 2003 [1980]: 7). Reporters often reduce the complexity of politics, for instance, to horseraces — who’s winning who’s losing — stories and analysis. News professionals also frequently interrogate, challenge and even reject the frames sponsored by political actors (Mermin 1996; Graber 1997; Callaghan and Schnell 2001; Groeling 2001; Lawrence 2010; Reese 2010; Van Gorp 2010). “[T]he discipline of verification,” contends Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014: 98), “is what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, fiction or art.” The tendency of journalists to challenge elite-sponsored frames

happens, in part, because of ideological and institutional forces within the media and journalistic routines and socialization (Shoemaker and Reese 2014; Graves 2016). Entrenched in liberal theory, it is the job of journalists “to pierce [the] blanket of obfuscation” offered by elite media frames, especially during times of war (Carruthers 2011: 8).

Journalistic challenges often come in the form of rational, technical and scientific claims. Over the last decade, these challenges come in the form of fact checking. Fact checking, though, remains a vague conception in media and communication literature. The recent — and growing — practice, which grew out of an online movement, is stilling being defined and refined (Graves 2016). While fact checking is becoming increasingly mainstream in journalism, it remains controversial. Fact checking, contends Graves (2016: 9) is a “deliberate critique of conventional reporting and its practices of objectivity” (Graves 2016: 9).

“fact-checkers seek fairly openly to fix political journalism by introducing new practices, revising prevailing norms, and building institutional resources for what they see as an essential and undervalued form of public-affairs reporting” (Graves 2016: 37; *italics in original*).

Donald Trump’s rise to the highest office in the United States sparked a recent explosion in fact checking by journalists. Stories regularly state that the president’s claims are “patently false” or represent “a false claim” (Adair 2016). Graves, Nyhan and Reifler (2015) detail what they call the “global boom” in fact checking since 2010. While Trump’s propensity to lie has heightened fact checking in journalism, the trend is not new and represents a decades-long interpretive turn (Schudson 1982; Zelizer 1993; Barnhurst and Mutz 1997; Barnhurst 2014) in journalism, whereby analysis is woven into reporting (Hallin 1992; Barnhurst 2003; Fink and Schudson 2014). As “sacerdotal” journalism diminished, journalists became increasingly skeptical of political actors (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999: 218). In the 1990s, broadcasters increasingly scrutinized political campaign commercials, questioning the truth of negative advertisements’ claims (Bank 2007; Papper 2007; Graves et al. 2015). As Graves et al. (2015: 4) note, these fact checking critiques of negative political advertising garnered considerable attention and journalistic prizes, “helping to legitimate and institutionalize new practices.”

Recent manifestations of journalistic fact checking flow from many practices pioneered by

online blogs and social media platforms. Early on in the World Wide Web's history, Snopes.com emerged as an online fact checking organization. Founded in 1994 by David and Barbara Mikkelson, the website began by investigating urban legends. The independent, non-partisan and self-sufficient website prides itself on its "painsstaking, scholarly and reliable" fact checking (Snopes.com: np). Online fact checking grew in the subsequent years. In 2001, three recent college graduates, "distressed at the growing dominance of spin in American politics" launched Spinsanity.org "as a nonpartisan watchdog dedicated to unspinning misleading claims from politicians, pundits and the press" (Spinsanity.org: 2018: np).

Early online bloggers (run by citizen journalists and activists from the left and right of the political spectrum) pushed journalists to be more transparent (Scriber 2016). Fact checking, posits Graves, was a "response to blogging's critique of journalism" and even "define[ed] the medium" (Graves, as quoted in Scriber 2016: np). Two landmark events illuminate the early power of blog on journalistic fact checking. In 2002, Republican Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott offered effusive praise for one-time segregation supporter Senator Strom Thurmond. Lott suggested "we wouldn't of [sic] had all these problems ... if Thurmond had won the presidency" when he led the States Rights Democratic Party in 1948 (Woan 2007: 490). The mainstream media did not report Lott's curious accolades for the retiring South Carolina Senator. The ensuing online controversy over Lott's remark sparked interest from legacy media. The backlash in the mainstream media forced Lott to resign his leadership role in the Senate.

Blogs, in this time, were also fact checking traditional news reports, too. In September 2004, two months before the U.S. presidential election, CBS's 60 Minutes revealed documents suggesting that President George W. Bush had not fulfilled his service to the National Guard in the 1970s. Within hours of the report's broadcast, bloggers scrutinized the authenticity of the documents offered by CBS News to question Bush's service in the military (Pien 2005). CBS News retracted their story and apologized two weeks later (Graves 2016). Woan (2007: 491) contends both the Lott story and the CBS controversy highlight the "dialectic relationship between the blogosphere and traditional media."

"When a controversial issue arises in one media sphere, the other becomes a reactionary, often oppositional force, as both sides strive to arrive at the truth by exchanging contradictory ideas and propositions... Thus, in this manner, the blogosphere adds a

dimension to news reporting that did not exist when only traditional media dominated” (Woan 2007: 491).

Amidst this growing power of blogs, Factcheck.org — a non-partisan and nonprofit website — began in 2003 to challenge political spin with the aim of cutting “the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics” (Factcheck.org 2018: np). The website dedicated to monitoring the factual accuracy of political actors was launched by long-time journalist Brooks Jackson and Annenburg Public Policy Centre Director Kathleen Hall Jamieson (Graves 2016). While working at CNN, Jackson became known for his “Ad Police” segments that fact checked political campaign ads. The emergence and growth of the Internet made:

“it possible for these dedicated organizations to practice fact checking in a different way: to launch these sites that are dedicated exclusively to fact checking; to do research; and to show their research in a way that wasn’t as easy in traditional media” (Graves, as quoted in Scribes 2016: np).

In this same period, fact checking picked up steam in the mainstream media during the U.S. presidential campaign of 2004 because of the so-called Swift Boat TV ads that questioned Democrat John Kerry’s Vietnam War record. PolitiFact.com founder Bill Adair recalls that the campaign spurred him to step up his fact checking in response to the negative advertising.

“This grew out of my own guilt. I had covered political campaigns and felt that I had been a passive co-conspirator in sort of passing along inaccurate information and hadn’t fact-checked it in a way I should and so went to my editors with a proposal that we create a web site where we could do fact-checking full time” (Adair, as quoted in Graves 2016: 61).

Four years later in 2007, PolitiFact.com launched as a collaboration between Times and the Congressional Quarterly (Graves 2016). Both FactCheck.org and PolitiFact.com have increasingly institutionalized the fact checking form of news coverage that promotes accountability journalism (Graves 2016). The routine has been widely adopted by an increasing number of news media organizations and individual journalists (Dobbs 2012). Of note, the number of newspaper articles using “fact checking” or variants of the term grew “by more than 300 per cent from 2008 to 2012” (Graves, Nyhan, Reifler 2015: 7).

## 2.35. Social Media and War

Social media persists as an important site of fact checking in modern journalism. Online social media platforms have also become a notable factor in media coverage of war. While some have heralded social media's democratizing of media (Beckett 2008), others have worried about surveillance and hoaxes (Sacco and Bossi 2015). Despite these debates, there is no doubt that social media technology has intensified the routines and practices of the news media in its coverage of war — and increased the connection between journalists and their audiences (Beckett 2008; Roginsky 2014). No longer, as with traditional media, is communication a one-way affair. The audience can talk back and fact check journalism in real time. The line between journalists and audience is, in fact, increasingly blurred. Who is a witness and who is a journalist is increasingly complicated as citizens and soldiers disseminate information using social media from the centre of conflicts (Andén-Papadopoulos 2009). Indeed, the frequent subjects (military personnel) of news reporting about conflict now produce their own homemade videos of war and broadcast them on social media sites. This, in turn, has challenged the traditional news media's:

“claim to authenticity and credibility, precisely by showing that which the mainstream news will not show and thus rendering dubious the professional practices of selection, framing, and editing” (Andén-Papadopoulos 2009: 26).

The traditional “hegemony of hierarchical news media,” writes Creig (2017: np) “is almost gone.” Anyone — from a child tweeting about being bombed in Syria to a Russian troll farmer — can disseminate information about a conflict to a potentially mass audience now.

To be sure, social media provides several new affordances to journalists covering conflict, including: (1) offering new — instantaneous — sources of information about unfolding events; (2) speeding up the dissemination of news; (3) extending the reach of journalists and their news organizations; and (4) increasing the plurality of voices included in coverage (Sacco and Bossio 2015). But it is important to remember, as Bruns (2014: 3) cautions, “media innovation is an innovation in media practices at least as much as in media technologies.” Social media has changed the reporting practices surrounding war. Social media resources come with their drawbacks and complexities. Journalists covering war may, for instance, have access to multiple sources. Verification and contextualization are, however, increasingly problematic, especially in

chaotic and unsafe war situations (Beckett 2008). In their examination of the Arab Spring, Sacco and Bossio (2015: 72) concluded that social media, while making journalism more complex, “can complement traditional media because it works as an alert and allows direct access to sources and images from remote areas.” Yet, considerable social media content, especially in conflict, is devoid of context and lacks explanation. This requires journalists to be more zealous interpreters and gatekeepers. At the same time, there is potential for traditional forms of news media to incorporate social media with a mind to make its content “stand as a positive vehicle to cover war and conflict and let foreign news gain its deserved attention” (Sacco and Bossio 2015: 73).

Social media, argues Patrikarakos (2017) has dramatically transformed how war is covered and consumed. Power, according to Patrikarakos, has shifted away from traditional sources such as government and the news media to individuals. “The information revolution has given ordinary people enhanced powers to change their circumstances” (Patrikarakos, as quoted in Illing 2017: np). Patrikarakos backs up his argument by pointing to British journalist and blogger Elliot Higgins who used social media to link Russia to the downing of Malaysia Airline Flight 17 in July of 2014.

“A guy, for all intents and purposes, you would've considered an online nerd. He spent hours and hours and hours playing online role-playing games with people in other parts of the world. He took these skills — his obsessive nature, his ability to marshal different people online — and [began using social media to investigate the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17]. And he eventually proved that Russia had supplied the weapon, the missile, that shot down Flight MH17” (Patrikarakos, as quoted in Illing 2017: np).

Higgin’s blog illustrates well how social media has disrupted the traditional role, authority and gatekeeper function of journalism.

## **2.36. Demanding Accountability**

As Donald Trump demonstrates (almost daily it seems), politicians can sometimes have a tenuous relationship with honesty. “Truthfulness,” observed Arendt (1971: np) after the release of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, “has never been counted among the political virtues, and lies have always been regarded as justifiable tools in political dealings.” Journalists, it is argued,

have an obligation to be circumspect and analytical in response to the prevarication of politicians. Schudson (2013: 169), notably, observes that over the last decade there has been an increased emphasis on “truth-telling” and “policing of publicly relevant lies,” producing both “new venues” such as FactCheck.org and PolitiFact.com and “systematic procedures for holding accountable both governmental leaders and those who aspire to elective political office.”

This compunction was compounded by journalism’s *failure* surrounding the Bush Administration’s push to invade Iraq (Bennett et al. 2007). Skeptical reporting and fact checking became the “antidote to the stenographic reporting that helped the Bush Administration build its case of the war in 2002 and 2003” (Graves 2016: 62). “Fact-checkers very much want to reject the tradition of “he said, she said” reporting” (Graves, as quoted in Scribes 2016: np).

“Just as the Vietnam War destroyed the cozy relationship between the president and the White House press corps, the [weapons of mass destruction] fiasco caused many mainstream journalists to become much more cautious about accepting uncorroborated claims by politicians of all stripes” (Dobbs 2012: 6).

These moments, arguably, “destabilize hegemonic discourses and identities and, at the same time, constitute the breeding ground for the origin of new discourses and identities” (Carpentier 2005: 209). For many journalists, the Iraq War and the failure to find WMD represented a breaking point, if you will, whereby news professionals began a reflexive search for new ways of counteracting elite spin. But often, after war, journalists huff and puff about all the lies they were told by officials, “swearing never again to be so credulous...” (Carruthers 2011: 253). Yet, as Carruthers (2011) justifiably notes, journalists upset with the media manipulation during the first Gulf War did not really change their practices for the second invasion of Iraq.

### **2.37. Defining Fact checking**

Nietzsche famously asserted “there are no facts, only interpretations” (Nietzsche 1954 [1873]: 45). To be sure, *truth* remains a contested — and much debated — notion (Foucault 2004). As well, fact checking questions the idealized understanding of objective reporting. It moves beyond the typical he said / she said *false equivalence* reporting. Deciding what is true and what is not true, requires judgment. “Journalism that challenges public statements,” writes Graves (2016: 42) makes it harder in practice for reporters to claim a clear separation from political

actors.” Challenging a politician’s claims is, indeed, political. The protection of objectivity evaporates when journalists start determining what is true and what is not. Nevertheless, journalists are increasingly looking for a ways of holding decision-makers to account (Graves 2016).

While notions of journalistic objectivity are problematic (Ward 2015), journalism is normatively *objective* in terms of how it defines and determines truth (Kovach and Rosentiel 2014: 103). “Journalists’ authority,” writes Zelizer, (1993: 224-25), “is assumed to derive from their presence at events, from the ideology of eyewitness authenticity.” Fact checking is similarly represented as an authentic expression of journalism’s attempt to expose the *truth*. Proponents liken their efforts to sciences’ rigorous methods and procedures, “constantly inventing, discarding, and refining theories to explain the confusion of the contemporary world” (Dobbs 2012: 3). Uscinski and Butler (2013: 163) helpfully define fact checking as the process of “comparing” the statements of elites “to ‘the facts’ so as to determine whether a statement about these topics is a lie.” The form of journalistic fact checking is often scientific and technical — and looking for a “goodness of fit” of evidence or “set of facts” that fits the “moral order” of its context (Ettema and Glasser 1998a: 135, 9).

It is also important to note here that fact checking also represents a site of potential contestation in line with Gramsci’s (1971) thinking. The practice has the potential to be counter-hegemonic. Fact checking allows news professionals the opportunity to counter-frame the media messages of elites. Jones (2009: 2-3) contends the purpose of news is, in fact, to challenge officials and “hold government and those with power accountable.” Sometimes, this journalistic counter-framing of issues and events wins out over the preferred media frames of elites (Wolfsfeld 1997; Speer 2017).

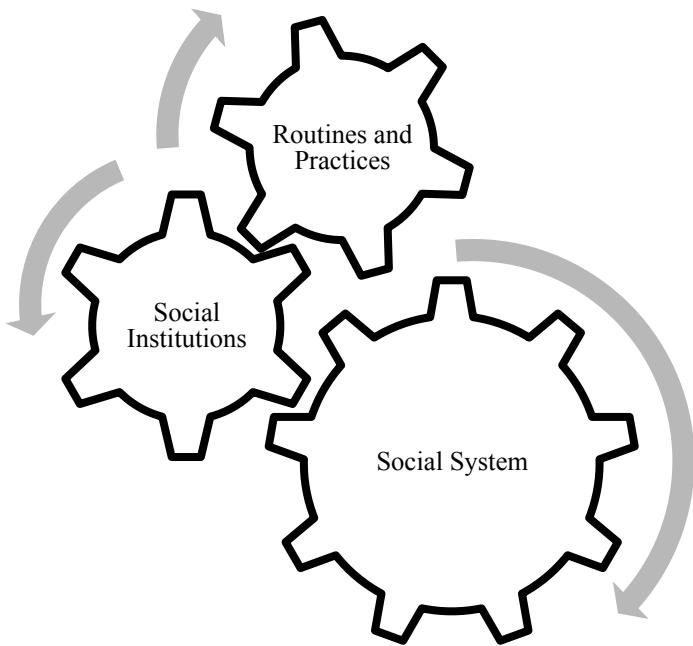
Journalists, though, tend to impeach elite rhetoric with elite standards because of normative practices of objectivity (Ettema and Glasser 1998a. 1998b). This commitment to impartiality or objectivity, however, “often reproduces dominant understandings and values” (Carruthers 2000: 18; see also Pedelty 1995: 9). Mermin (1996) convincingly argues that journalists are not overly critical of broad policy decisions — but instead often only critique the ability of government officials to deliver on promises and execute policy decisions. Moreover, when critical voices are

not readily available, journalists themselves are “compelled to challenge the official version of events” so as to include “tension and conflict that would otherwise be absent from their stories” and thus inure themselves and their news organizations against charges of bias (Cook 2005: 106). Interviews with Canadian journalists who covered the conflict in Afghanistan determined that reporters believed they possessed a professional obligation to challenge the media frames promoted by the government and military leaders about the war in Afghanistan (DeCillia 2009). Embedded reporters used their own observations about the conflict to challenge government and military leaders’ media framing of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan. Bennett (2012: 202) argues that this “posture of antagonism”, whereby journalists impeach the frames of elites with their own observations and research, “creates the appearance of mutual independence while keeping most news content to the political perspective certified by authorities.”

### **2.38. Conclusion - The Hierarchy of Influences Model**

Media content, as I have outlined in the previous pages, can be shaped by an individual factor or, most often, a confluence of individual news professionals, institutions and the social system within which they operate. While journalists, themselves, can have a profound shaping effect on journalism, most often the factors that influence news content are multilevelled and manifold. As Figure Two illustrates, news is not produced or framed in a vacuum, devoid of setting or circumstances. Journalism is contingent on its social and cultural context. It is best understood as a system or circuit.

**Figure 2 — The Shaping Power of Three Levels**



To be sure, in order to be understood by audiences, news takes on an expected and reliable form, shaped and molded by the steady churn of influence.

“We may think news is just news, an ephemeral piece that informs about the world. What we may not realize is that by following the agreed conventions that make it recognizable as news, it sets up a framework within which its predefined elements are related to each other” (Rantanen 2009: xi).

If content is key to understanding how the news media might “exert their own unique shaping power” on audiences (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 4), then it is logical then that researchers also put the actual content audiences experience under the microscope before attempting to understand its potential impact. Having critically outlined the elements that shape news (or the frame-building process), this chapter now transitions to the frame-setting process.

### **2.39. Introduction - Frame-setting**

Every day, a tsunami of a half a billion, ephemeral, 140-character tweets speed through cyberspace. Nearly 80 million photos from around the world get imprinted with Instagram’s

vintage look on an average day. And nearly two billion people around the world are active on Facebook (Zephoria Digital Marketing 2017: np). We swim — or drown, depending on your perspective — in world filled with media. Our lives are truly — and thoroughly — mediated. While there is no doubting media’s ubiquitous nature, its *effects* — its one-to-one input/output stimulus response — remains decidedly less clear. Many people, of course, determine how to dress based on television or radio weather forecasts. The tone of business news can often corresponds to consumer confidence (McQuail 2005). People — with a seemingly phlegmatic response — throw out food when news reports talk of contaminated products. Some research (Mann, Apter, and Bertolote 2005) even claims media can exacerbate suicide risk by simply mentioning it in newscasts. On top of all that, whole industries (marketing, advertising, public relations and political communications) focus relentlessly on triggering some sort of media impact. Despite all this, the influence of media (and especially the news) remains a hotly debate matter in media and communication scholarship.

For many, a correlation between message and response seems natural and clear. “The entire study of mass communication,” McQuail (1994: 327) famously suggested, “is based on the premise that the media have significant<sup>16</sup> effects.” No doubt considerable media and communication research over the last 100 years assumes *effects*, “yet it seems to be the issue on which there is the least certainty and least agreement” in communication and media scholarship (McQuail 1987: 251). Despite the ongoing debate and lack of certainty over media *effects*, a body of literature (Gerbner 1972; Nimmo 1983; Iyengar 1991; Gamson 1992; Page and Shapiro 1992; Zaller 1992; Callaghan and Schnell 2001; Lewis 2001; Johnson-Cartee 2005; Chong and Druckman 2007; Page, Shapiro and Dempsey 2007; Lecheler 2011; McCombs et al. 2011), points to the media influencing the public. By means of a roadmap, the story of the second half of this theoretical chapter sketches the history and current thinking surrounding media *effects*, and specifically the potential impact of media frames. I begin by briefly situating this research’s position concerning frame-setting and conceptualize frames as an independent variable. I also

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<sup>16</sup> Of note, the evolution of McQuail’s (1987, 1994, 2005) book *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* highlights the evolution in thinking well. McQuail (1987: 251) notes “that there are effects from the media” — but by the third edition, McQuail assigns “significant effects” to media (McQuail 1994: 327).

outline Gamson's (1992) useful model for understanding political opinion formation. I concluded this chapter with my conceptual framework and my research questions. As the coming pages make evident, a layered theoretical understanding offers a considered and nuanced way of thinking about the potential influences of media framing on audiences. First, however, I offer some brief comments about frame-setting and frames as an independent variable.

#### **2.40. Frame-setting and Frames as Independent Variable**

Frame-setting, as detailed at the onset of this chapter, amounts to the potential impact frames may have on audiences. The messy process of framing *effects* likely mixes both the immediate impact of the media message and an individual's entire knowledge and attitudes (Capella and Hall Jamieson 1997; de Vreese 2005). At its core, frame-setting is best conceptualized as a *potential* framing *effects*. Frames *can* spark individual changes in opinions, for example. The media messages *can* also trigger societal-level shifts, whereby they influence collective action (de Vreese 2005). The concept is best viewed as an independent variable. This type of research (Entman 1993; Pan and Kosicki 1993) links media messages to public opinion. In the coming pages I sketch the history of media *effects* research before turning to the literature concerning the potential influence of media frames.

#### **2.41. The History of Media *Effects* Research**

McQuail (2005: 457) suggests there is a “natural history” to media *effects* research, linking the scholarship to the era in which it was produced. For instance, researchers in the early part of the 20th century, having witnessed two world wars, worried about the impact of propaganda. This scholarship — often described as the hypodermic needle or magic bullet tradition<sup>17</sup> — aimed to draw direct links between media messages and mass public opinion. In the next era of research, scholars rejected early notions of a powerful media *effects*. This was followed by a return to

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<sup>17</sup> Curran (2006: 116) contests what he calls the “caricatures of the history of communication research” that “mythologize” accounts of *effects* scholarship being “dominated” by the hypodermic model. Curran argues that the thrust of considerable early scholarship aimed to “assert the independence and autonomy of media audiences.”

findings of robust media *effects*. The fourth era, dominated by social constructivism, “combines elements of both strong and limited effects of mass media” (Scheufele 1999: 105). In this most recent phase of research, the mass media are often conceptualized as having considerable influence over shaping the social world “by framing images of reality... in a predictable and patterned way” (McQuail 1994: 331). But, media consumers — allowing for a more nuanced notion of power (Foucault 1978) — can resist or accept media messages. Media messages, ample research stresses, are only part of resources and factors that shape mass public opinion (see, for example, Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gamson 1992; Castells 2009; McCombs et al. 2011). In the last decade, Bennett and Iyengar (2008) provocatively argued that we may have returned to a state of minimal media *effects* because to the growing detachment of individuals from mainstream media and the so-called *filter bubbles* that allow people to confirm their biases<sup>18</sup>. The following sections outline the century-long debate over media *effects* with a mind to positioning this research’s conceptual framework for understanding the potential influence of media frames on audiences.

## 2.42. The Powerful *Effects* Model

Around the time of the First World War (1900-1930), media were conceptually endowed with considerable power (Bauer and Bauer 1960; see also McQuail 2005). Based largely on the popularity of newspapers, radio and film, Walter Lippmann highlighted the media’s role in shaping the “pictures in our heads” (Lippmann 2004 [1922]: 1); while Laswell (1927) inflated the power of propaganda. Orson Welles’ infamous Halloween radio broadcast in 1938 of H.G. Wells’ novel *The War of The Worlds* reflects the real concern during this era about the perceived

<sup>18</sup> Bennett and Iyengar (2008) contend that the explosion of new interactive technologies, with their emphasis on choice, allows many to tune out mainstream mass media. “As receivers exercise greater choice over both the content of messages and media sources,” the researchers argue (2008: 708), “effects become increasingly difficult to produce or measure in the aggregate while creating new challenges for theory and research.” Holbert, Garrett and Gleason (2010) dispute Bennett and Iyengar’s arguments, suggesting (1) the pair gravitate towards technological determinism; (2) overestimate the *effects* of discriminatory exposure; (3) fixate on news as the predominant source of information; and (4) ignore the *effects* of “attitude reinforcement, long recognized as an important type of political media influence” (Holbert, Garrett, and Gleason 2010: 15). In step with this research, Holbert, Garrett and Gleason (2010) posit that media *effects* models that incorporate nuanced understandings of the confluence of both media messages and individual factors can still help researchers understand the influence of political communication on audiences.

negative impact of media on mass audiences. Also, in this period, some in the Frankfurt School worried about the mass media creating a docile public, readily accepting elite domination (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1947]). The primary focus of communication studies in this phase centred on a “one-way” media response with the audience “conceived as an unwitting target or a passive recipient of media stimuli” (McQuail 2005: 403). This phase was, however, characterized by a lack of empirical evidence proving media *effects*. Lazarsfeld et al.’s (1944) ambitious attempt to draw a direct link between political campaign messages and voting intentions instead found a more complicated process of opinion formation. This research led to the so-called two-step model of (or limited effects model) of media *effects* that dominated the next era of research.

#### **2.43. The Minimal *Effects* Model**

Unsatisfied with this lack of data to support a direct correlation between message and response, a second phase of *effects* investigation began. This research period is recognized for the media’s minimal *effects* on audiences. Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1955), examination of women in Decatur, Illinois concluded that media influences opinion leaders who, in turn, interpret media messages, for others. Media messages essentially drift through social networks, filtered by community leaders, to other less informed individuals (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). This circuit produces political opinions. Klapper (1960) reinforces the turn in direction for media *effects* research. His phenomenistic approach posits the media are not the single dependent variable determining *effects*. Other factors, he argues, such as life experience, politics, religion and attitudes, play a role as well. Media stimulus, as a result, must be placed alongside “total observed phenomenon” (Klapper 1960: 5). Moreover, individuals eschew media messages that do not adhere to their predispositions. However, researchers working in this vein — despite its more sophisticated models and variables for measuring *effects* — became “increasing disillusion[ed]” with their inability to link media messages to *effects* (McQuail 2005: 459).

## 2.44. The Swing Back to the More Powerful *Effects* Model

In the wake of the social upheaval of the 1960s, new research (see, for example, Glasgow University Media Group 1976, 1980, 1982, 1985; Gerbner 1972; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Gasmson and Modigliani 1989) began making a more direct connection between media texts and an impact on audiences. Lang and Lang (1959), for instance, disputed notions of minimal *effects*, arguing that the media's influence is cultural and long-term. The pair found:

“The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about” (1959: 232)

This approach — looking at long-term impacts of media — imagined a more powerful *effects*. Mediated texts, images and audio, in this phase of *effects* scholarship, were conceptualized as playing an important role in a negotiated construction of reality. Audiences, in this conception, essentially build meaning by blending media messages with their own experience(s) and context. Citing the “bankruptcy of behaviourism”, the return to this more powerful conceptualization also coincided with a shift away from quantitative means of assessing *effects* to qualitative methods (McQuail 2005: 461).

In this paradigm, for instance, “cultivation theory” singles out television as paramount in symbolic production (Gerbner 1972). Gerbner et al. (1994) concluded that individuals who watch a lot of television tend to overestimate the amount of real crime in the world compared to those who watch less television. Echoing the Frankfurt School’s critical analysis of media, cultivation theory categorizes television as the “cultural arm of the established industrial order [which] serves primarily to maintain, stabilize and reinforce rather than to alter, threaten or weaken conventional beliefs and behaviours” (Gross 1977: 180).

In a similar hegemonic imaginary, Noelle-Neumann (1974) also offers her spiral of silence theory in this period, suggesting people consent to an often elite-sponsored heuristic of their social reality to avoid voicing opinion not in the mainstream. People, she posits, essentially

adopt the *every person* opinions about public issues and remain reluctant to voice how they really feel. Noelle-Neumann (1974) contends this “spiral of silence” happens because:

1. Society threatens deviant thinkers with isolation;
2. People fear isolation;
3. People constantly assess the opinion climate at all times; and
4. People resist expressing opinions in public.

Simply put, individuals, in tune with what the media are telling them about public opinion, fear being in the minority and thus keep their opinions to themselves. Undoubtedly, Noelle-Neumann positions media as having powerful *effects* on audiences.

Much of the research in this era is grounded in the underlying premise that media — in some obvious and opaque ways — lead audiences or “malleable citizens” (Brewer and Gross 2010: 160) to certain conclusions, but not always (see, for example, Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Iyengar (1997: 212) sums up this type of *effects* research, stressing with “confidence” that:

“news affects people in different ways — some subtle and others not so subtle — and that people differ significantly in what they “get” from the news and their receptivity to the messages and the themes presented by the media.”

The media, in this imagination, possess the power to make audiences think about certain issues and events.

McCombs and Shaw’s (1972) agenda setting research, for instance, draws links between messages emphasized in the news media and public opinion. At its core, agenda setting scholarship (see, for example, McCombs and Shaw 1972; McCombs, Einsiedel, and Weaver 1991; Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 2007) posits that what the news media focuses on have an important impact on what audiences think about. The media, as Cohen (Cohen 1963: 13) asserted, “may not be very successful much of the time in telling people what to think... it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” Interestingly, Entman (2007: 165) flips Cohen’s logic around — a staple of most media *effects* literature reviews — branding

it as misleading and stressing that if, indeed, the media are “stunningly successful in telling people what to think about, they must also exert significant influence over what they think.” Entman argues that when elites give people something to think about, that is the first step, in fact, in getting them to think and act in a certain way. Influence in pluralistic democracies, Entman stresses, is the beginning of politicians constructing the context and information people will ultimately use to form political opinions.

McCombs and Estrada (1997: 247) go further, arguing that in addition to determining what the public thinks about, the media also “may tell us how and what to think about it, and even what to do about it.” Again, the ability of the news media to set the agenda and frame the issue(s), it is argued, is further enhanced when it comes to international relations (Palmgreen and Clarke 1991; Entman 2003, 2004; Berinsky 2007, 2009). McCombs (2004), of note, controversially linked agenda setting to framing, conflating both concepts<sup>19</sup>.

Priming is closely related to agenda setting as an *effect* of media. The priming thesis holds that the media influence the criteria by which people evaluate public issues events and even politicians (Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder 1982; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). First conceptualized by social psychologists, priming focuses on the activation and accessibility of information used to make judgments (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Johnston et al. 1992; Krosnick and Brannon 1993; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Pan and Kosicki 1997; Domke 1998; Callaghan and Schnell 2005; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). Iyengar and Kinder’s (1987) pioneering research on priming, concluding that news coverage makes specific issues and events more top of mind for the public. As a result of this highlighting, the media “shape the considerations” in the foreground of people’s thinking as they pass judgment on public policy

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<sup>19</sup> McCombs (2004) argues that framing is an extension of agenda setting. He characterized the phenomenon as “second-level agenda setting.” Several scholars (Price, Tewksbury, and Powers 1997; Scheufele 2000; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007) argue the two theories are distinct. “Agenda setting [sic],” writes Price and Tewksbury (Price, Tewksbury, and Powers 1997: 184), “looks on story selection as a determinant of public perceptions of issue importance and, indirectly through priming, evaluations of political leaders. Framing cues not on which topics or issues are selected for coverage by the news media, but instead on the particular ways those issues are presented.” Akin to Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), this research takes the position that agenda setting and priming are an accessibility *effects*; whereas framing *effects* is one of applicability. See also: Scheufele and Iyengar (2014).

and politicians (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007: 11). While the media gain more influence over audiences in the conceptual *swing back* to a powerful conception of media *effects*, audiences also gained more power to resist media messages.

## 2.45. Reconceptualizing Audiences

Postmodern thinking inspired considerable media research to move away from the metanarrative of Marxism to a much more nuanced way of thinking about audiences. The move away from a Marxist critique of media *effects* coincided with arguments trumpeting individualism, pluralism and subjectivity, all of them questioning the singular importance of economics to Marxist thinking (Curran 2006). This new research (Hall 1990, 1982) reformulated the conceptualization of media power, grounding its assumptions in Gramsci's (1971) thinking about cultural hegemony. The media, in this imagination, became a "contested space" (Curran 2006: 141). To be sure, Gramsci's (1971) understanding of hegemony opened up many new avenues of intellectual pursuit in audience research.

No longer confined to the economic and rigid conception of class, Gramsci's thinking allowed wider examinations of the shaping power of cultural and social identities such as gender, race, sexuality religion and even professional identifications (see, for example, Williams 1977, 1980; Hall et al. 1978; Hall 1980). Culture, politics and economics, in Gramsci's understanding, are understood as a network. They influence each other. They are relational. The social world represents a place where dominant and oppositional cultures commingle and contest on another (Jones 2006: 126). Culture, according Gramsci, is central to social change because it is "how class is lived" and shapes people's "ability to imagine how it might be changed, and whether they see such changes as feasible or desirable" (Crehan 2002: 71).

Gramsci's conceptualization of a negotiated power demands a different approach to audience reception of media texts than traditional structuralist views. If hegemony is open and negotiated, then textual analysis requires a more open reading and conceptualization. Texts, in a Gramscian understanding, are the products of producers who have agency — and their readers also have the ability to negotiate their meanings. The interpretation of media messages is polysemic. Media

texts are a site of resistance (Gilroy 2009). Furthermore, texts cannot be analyzed in isolation. Interpretations of TV, for instance, must be “open enough to admit a range of negotiated readiness through which various social groups can find meaningful articulations of their own relation to the dominant ideology” (Fiske 1992: 126). Furthermore, there is often a collaboration with audiences. “The cultural hegemony system that results,” writes Gitlin (1979: 531), “is not a closed system. It leaks. Its very structure leaks, at the least because it remains to some extent competitive.”

Inspired by Gramsci (1971) and other post-modern thinking<sup>20</sup>, scholarship interested in the impact of media on audiences moved away from the traditional stimulus/response model. The “birth” of reception studies is often traced to Hall’s (1980) theory “Encoding/Decoding” theory. Hall’s work also moves away from more orthodox, Marxist views of structure to Gramsci’s more nuanced and ideologically centred imagination of the social world. Hall’s thinking challenges reductionist behaviouristic stimulus-response model that dominated early media *effects* research. Media’s impact is not “like a tap on the knee” (Hall 1980: 131). The influence of media, in Hall’s way of thinking, depends on the interpretation by the individual receiving the message. Like earlier communication models (see, for example, Laswell 1948; Gerbner 1956; Shannon and Weaver 1963), Hall’s encoding/decoding conceptualization still imagines a message, reception and *potential* influence on its receiver.

Media messages, for Hall, cannot be conceived of as “a ball that the sender throws to the receiver” (Alasiitari 1999: 3). Still, Hall (1980) stresses that texts are inherently encoded with preferred meaning(s), fixing hegemonic forces. Meaning making (or decoding) is contingent — but dominant meanings are often encoded in media messages. Hall (1980: 137) offers that an individual’s decoding can result in three outcomes: (1) a preferred hegemonic reading; (2) a negotiated reading; and (3) an oppositional reading. Hall’s model is not without its detractors

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<sup>20</sup> Curran (2006: 107) observes that a “revisionist movement” swept across cultural and media studies in the 1980s, inspired by liberal pluralist and neo-Marxist thinking.

who claim it is too political, too totalizing and places too much emphasis on ideology over material conditions (Schroder et al. 2003)<sup>21</sup>.

Affording audiences more agency creates a paradox, undoubtedly, for critical media and communication scholarship (Lewis 2001; Philo 2001). Media messages and audiences are *both* powerful. As well, critical scholarship frequently denounces the hegemonic meaning encoded in most media — and celebrates the active *decoding* of audiences. To overcome this, Hall (1980) urges media scholars to focus on organic expressions of oppositional readings — and not textual analysis.

To sum up, the literature remains divided about the actual *effects* of media. While considerable research makes claims about media *effects*, not everyone is convinced. Gauntlett (2001: 12), for instance, rejects the *effects* conceptualizations as “indefensible and unfortunate.” Media *effects*, Couldry (2004: 17; italics added) helpfully offers, are:

“hard to avoid if you start from the text itself: Outside literary approaches, why else study the detailed structure of a media text as your primary research focus unless you can plausibly claim that those details *make a difference* to a wider social process?”

Couldry (2004) urges researchers to de-centre media (and its power) and conceptualize our lives as media-related. With this way of thinking, media texts offer a variety of competing messages that people can accept or reject, while also incorporating them with their own predispositions. Rather than a simple information transfer to individuals, the media are a complex space of collective practices and we must resist the temptation to overstate its role in the construction of meaning and place (Silverstone 2007). This research favours Livingstone’s (1993; 1996; 2000, 2005) conception of a thinking audience, actively decoding (Hall 1980) and using their individual experience and knowledge to evaluate and judge mediated information (Gamson 1992; see also Corner 2000). Having reviewed the debate about media *effects*, the coming pages transition to outlining the potential impact of news framing.

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<sup>21</sup> Schroder and colleagues (2003: 127-28) contend Hall’s “left-wing political scholarship from the 1970s” *muddies the water* when it comes to seeing true media *effects*. Others (Golding and Murdock 1979; Stevens 2002), however, have criticized Hall’s encoding and decoding model for placing too much emphasis on ideology, while ignoring economic questions such as who owns the news organization producing the potentially hegemonic content.

## 2.46. The Potential Influence of News Framing

Contested — and continually debated — the influence of media frames is, admittedly, not clear cut. But media frames, arguably, do something. They are *consequential* on some level. Public opinion, argue Kinder and Nelson, (2005: 103), often “depends in a systematic and intelligible way” on how issues are constructed by political actors and the news media. Considerable research makes solid empirical claims about the power of media framing on audiences<sup>22</sup>. Druckman (2001), for instance, replicated Tversky and Kahneman’s (1981) historic Asian disease framing experiment, confirming that test subjects opted for risk-adverse frames at significant statistical differences. Most of media framing research, stress Lecheler and de Vreese (2011), focuses on political communication and therefore moves beyond simple stimulus/response *effects* (Kahneman and Tversky 1984). For many in the field, there is little doubt: media frames constructed by both journalists and political actors can have a “significant impact” on people’s judgment (Tadlock, Gordon, and Popp 2007: 196). This thinking envisions voters relying on news media frames to shape – in part – their thinking about politics (Johnson-Cartee 2005). The power of media frames are, arguably, further enhanced by the agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw 1972) influence of the news media on audiences.

The influence of media frames, argues Chong and Druckman (2007: 104), happens “when (often small) changes in the presentation of an issue or an event produces (sometimes large) changes in opinion.” Simon and Jerit’s (2010) framing experiment, for instance, found that individuals exposed to almost identical news articles about abortion came to divergent opinions about the medical procedure after reading differently framed news samples. Individuals who read the “baby” article were more inclined to support abortion regulation versus those who read the almost identical “fetus” story. Of note, participants who read a third article where the words fetus and baby were used interchangeably were similarly disposed to abortion regulation as those who only read the “baby” article.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Zaller 1992; Zaller 1994; Iyengar 1997; Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997; Druckman 2001; Lewis 2001; Druckman 2001a; Scheufele 2004; Berinsky and Kinder 2006; Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 2007; Philo 2008; Lecheler and de Vreese 2011.

In a similar way, Shen (2004) measured how preexisting opinions about stem cell research and oil drilling in Alaska meshed with people's existing beliefs about ethics, economics and environmental concerns. A week before exposing participants to differently framed news stories, she assigned subjects to schema groups based on a pre-survey. Shen's (2004: 400) research concluded that people are more likely to accept novel news frames if they are consistent or "resonated" with existing beliefs. Still, Kinder (2007), who conducted several cognitive framing experiments himself, offers some *curmudgeonly advice*, arguing such studies amplify *effects*. Likewise, Brewer and Gross (2010: 168) call on framing research to turn to the "world outside" in search of the true influence of media frames on audiences (I return to these concerns – and how I attempt to overcome them – in the coming methods chapter.)

## 2.47. News and Individual Factors

Often viewed as negative or manipulative, media frames sponsored by elites evoke "nefarious possibilities" of "freewheeling exercises in pure manipulation" (Druckman 2001: 1041). Another view holds that framing happens because citizens look to "credible elites" for "guidance" to sort out complicated events or issues (Druckman 2001: 1061). Significant scholarship (Zaller 1992; Lewis 2001; Kinder and Nelson 2005; Chong and Druckman 2007; Berinsky 2009; Baum and Groeling 2010a, 2010b; Brewer and Gross 2010) suggests elite media frames shape public opinion. Yet, the presence of a frame in the news media does not necessarily correlate directly with an impact or influence on the receiver. Individual factors can also play a substantial role (Kosicki and McLeod 1990; Gamson 1992; Scheufele 1999; McQuail 2005; Brewer and Gross 2010). While McQuail (2005: 532) concedes "...it is highly plausible" media frames do resonate with audiences and do, in fact, have an impact "with some regularity in important as well as trivial cases," he remains skeptical about them being the only influence on opinion formation for several reasons:

1. Opinions can emerge from long-term personal circumstances;
2. The media are not as influential as the social world;
3. People increasingly self-select media;

4. Different media motives have different impacts;
5. *Both sides of the story* news coverage cancels out the impact of competing media frames;
6. People are reluctant to change their minds; and
7. Audiences can resist media messages (McQuail 2005).

So, while news frames can have an influence on individuals, it is most likely a confluence of media messages and individual factors that shape political opinions. People, naturally, draw on their own experiences when processing media messages. For their part, Price, Tewksbury and Powers (1995: 23) describe framing as “a kind of ‘hydraulic’ pattern, with thoughts of one kind, stimulated by the frame, driving out other possible responses.” People are not a *tabula rasa*, of sorts, evaluating mediated communication by only the information contained within, for instance, a news report. Individuals are constantly incorporating “their own thoughts, going beyond the information provided and drawing out some basic implications on their own” (Price, Tewksbury, and Powers 1997: 496).

Conceptualizing the influence of media frames requires an interactive and multi-level analysis. Frames, as noted in the previous section about news framing, need to be recognized as both “devices embedded in political discourse” and “internal structures of the mind” (Kinder and Sanders 1990: 74). Gamson and Modigliani (1987: 143) helpfully conceptualized frames as

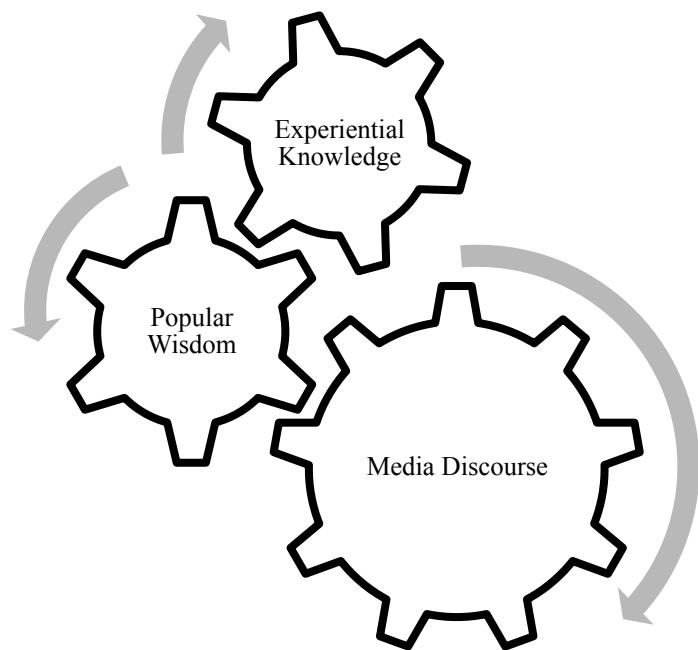
“a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events . . . The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue.”

Similarly, Entman (1993: 53) defined frames as “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information.” To that end, media messages are only “part of the process by which individuals construct meaning” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 2). Gamson (1992) constructively explains how individuals blend both public discourse and their own knowledge and experiences to form attitudes. The coming pages turn to a more detailed outline of Gamson’s work and utility for conceptualizing how people develop their opinions about politics.

## 2.48. Gamson's Model of Political Opinion Formation

Gamson's (1992) book *Talking Politics* challenges traditional views (Lippmann 2004 [1922]; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1968; Bennett 1975; Neuman 1986) of average voters as oblivious and passive actors incapable of articulating even the most basic knowledge about politics or current events. The sociologist also dispels the simplistic interpretations of individuals drawing solely (or heavily) on media discourse to construct their understanding of politics. "Media discourse," Gamson offers (1992: xi), "is clearly not the only resource that most people use to construct meaning on political issues." Opinion formation, Gamson stresses, is much more sophisticated and complex than most political science accounts. Amidst a "cacophony of media clatter," people turn to their own experiences and "popular wisdom, and knowledge" to make sense of politics (Gamson 1992: xi). As Figure Three depicts, individuals construct opinions through the mix of processing media discourse, experiential knowledge and popular wisdom.

**Figure 3 - Gamson's (1992) Model of Negotiating Meaning**



Gamson (1992) determined that Americans' views about affirmative action, for instance, are shaped by their individual identity, personal experiences, conversations with friends — and media discourse. Gamson's focus groups about four issues: (1) affirmative action; (2) nuclear power; (3) the Arab-Israeli conflict; and (4) the slump in American industry reveals how, as people sort through these issues, their discussions do mimic media messages — but also notably folds in their own experience and knowledge.

Gamson's (1992) work is also decidedly anti-elitist, too. His research is grounded in three core assumptions about people: (1) they are not "so passive"; (2) they are "not so dumb"; and (3) they "negotiate with media messages in complicated ways that vary from issue to issue" (Gamson 1992: 4). Gamson rejects traditional concern (Lippmann 2004 [1922]) about voters drowning in a sea of competing ideas and willing to listen to emotional and irrational appeals or media frames. His research also attempts to "reconcile" notions of how low-information citizens negotiate complex issues and events to form political opinions (Iyengar 1991: 7). Gamson (1992: 6) does not reject concerns about such "handicaps" — but insists citizens, unlike so much social science depictions, are not unsophisticated and ill-informed and, in fact, do "read media messages in complicated and sometimes unpredictable ways, and draw heavily on other resources as well in constructing meaning." The coming pages explain each factor in some detail.

#### **2.49. The Media and Constructing Meaning**

For Gamson (1992: xi), the media represent a "system in which active agents within specific purposes are constantly engaged in a process of supplying meaning." But instead of thinking of media messages as a simple stimuli, mediated communication represents only one part of a "complex symbolic contest" where meaning emerges from "thinking individuals" blending both their own experiences and news content (Gamson 1992: xii). Gamson (1992) stresses that individuals can rely mainly — and even exclusively — on media to form opinions about issues, events or political actors. It is important to stress that the "readers" of media discourse are not "passive recipients" in their opinion formation (Herda-Rapp 2003: 545).

According to Gamson (1992), political attitudes emerge from a confluence of individual factors and media frames that spotlight facts, making them more salient or applicable, especially when it comes to foreign policy (Western 2005). Media frames and the rhetoric of public figures such as U.S. President Ronald Reagan were echoed repeatedly in Gamson's focus groups. Often, participants repeated so-called catch phrases that were popular in the media or used by politicians.

The media offer cues or structures for individuals to form opinions about issues, events and political actors, according to Gamson (1992). Lippmann (2004 [1922]), an astute observer of political opinion, stressed almost a century ago that the news media help frame the pictures in our minds:

“Each of us lives and works in a small part of the earth’s surface, moves in small circles, and of the acquaintances knows only a few intimately. Of any public event that has wide effect we see at best only a phase and aspect … Inevitably, our opinions cover a bigger space, a longer reach of time, a greater number of things, than we can directly observe. They have, therefore, to be pieced together out of what others have reported and what we can imagine” (Lippmann 2004 [1922]: 33).

Zaller (1992), echoing Lippmann, highlights the importance of the news media in his receive, accept sample (RAS) model of public opinion formation, stressing that elite media frames often lay the foundation for public attitude (see also, Edelman 1964; Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Kinder and Sanders 1990). Zaller (1992: 311) in fact, rejects notions of minimal media *effects*, conceding that no single news story “may have great effect, but at the cumulative effect of many stories over a period of months or years may nonetheless be large” (see also Iyengar 1991). Zaller (1992, 1994) contends that the balance of persuasive news media messages can shape public attitudes about political issues and events. In a similar vein, Berinsky (2009) highlights the importance of news media messages, arguing that people cue to the view of partisan leaders to form opinions about foreign policy.

As noted earlier in the section about the practice of journalistic news framing, Iyengar (1991) posits that journalists frequently frame their stories in episodic or thematic ways. Iyengar (1991: 11) concluded individuals “are exquisitely sensitive” to this type of news framing. New stories framed in a thematic fashion encourage audiences to not connect narratives to larger systems and localize consequences and blame at the individual level. Episodic stories about poverty, for

instance, encourage people to blame *lazy individuals* for being economically disadvantaged. “[P]eople,” writes Iyengar (1991: 137), “settle upon causes and treatments that “fit” the observed problem.” To that end, episodic frames encourage hegemonic interpretations of issues and events, “leading to the trivialization of public discourse and the erosion of electoral accountability” (Iyengar 1991: 143). Moreover, episodic framing diminishes public discourse, preventing people “from cumulating the evidence towards any logical, ultimate consequence” (Iyengar 1992: 48). News stories framed in a thematic way, on the other hand, encourage audiences to connect issues in the news to larger social structures. A thematic story about poverty, for example, shifts blame for such economic hardship away from individuals to larger structural problems such as education and racism.

## 2.50. Popular Wisdom

Popular wisdom is knowledge that is common to everyone. Gamson’s model (1992: 123) determined that many people use popular beliefs and narratives to negotiate meaning, defining it as a “general rule of thumb that relates the experience to some popular maxim that it illustrates.” Gamson (1992) found that there are usually two ways by which popular wisdom gets folded into thinking about politics: (1) rules of thumb; and (2) analogies about everyday life. The “rules of thumb include proverbs, maxims, and biblical sayings” (Gamson 1992: 124). For many, popular wisdom is natural and taken for granted. It is part of their history or culture. Gamson (1992: 123) found that many of his focus group participants prefaced their arguments with statements such as: “That’s the way life is”; “It’s human nature”; and “As everyone knows.” Popular wisdom, therefore, relies on common knowledge and is more likely found in homogenous groups.

Popular wisdom is both an individual resource and a cultural one. It represents a person’s personal experience and knowledge — but also “maxims and analogies” that “resonate with broad cultural themes” (Gamson 1992: 143). To be sure, popular wisdom communicates a cultural theme. When popular wisdom resonates with media frames, individuals connect the two (Gamson 1992). The “success or failure” of media messages depends on:

“resonances with popular thinking, active elite sponsorship, and media practices that might favour some frames over others. Frames develop in a dialectic fashion, as

contesting parties articulate counter-frames to meet their opponents' preferred interpretations (Price et al. 2005: 182).

People frequently rely on popular conceptions or heuristics to form political attitudes. Zaller (1992: 1), for instance, posits that individuals use ideas that are “most immediately salient to them or the “top of the head”” (see also Taylor and Fiske 1978).

The influence of media frames on audiences is most noticeable when the focus of attention is consistent with an individuals' common sense view of the world (Chong and Druckman 2007). Media frames, to be sure, mingle with “fundamental human values” and have an impact on decision makers and public policy choices (Miller and Parnell Riechert 2001: 108). As Tuchman (1976) stressed, framing means accepting some facts and rejecting others. In a similar way, Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model (ELM) predicts that people tend to spend more time thinking about (and are more likely to accept) ideas and arguments that dovetail with their predispositions. Simply put, individuals prize information that corresponds with their own popular wisdom and experiential knowledge because it avoids the uneasiness of incorporating information that is incongruous with an individual's predispositions into opinion formation.

## **2.51. Experiential Knowledge**

Individual experience also has a profound influence on how people think about politics. Think, for example, about the unemployed worker. His or her experience will undoubtedly play a role in how that person feels about the economy and government services for the out of work. This type of knowledge, argues Gamson (1992: 123), can be both direct or by proxy because it has a “privilege[d] place: it says, “I know because I saw it myself, firsthand.”” Individuals actively rely on their experiences to “negotiate the meaning of issues” (Price et al. 2005: 181).

“Experiential knowledge is valued precisely because it is so direct and relatively unmediated. Although there is penalty of selectivity in the memory of experience, it is our own selectivity, not someone else's” (Gamson 1992: 126).

Moreover, this type of knowledge can inspire empathy, allowing people to step out of their personal situation to understand how others feel in a similar situation. A formerly unemployed worker, for instance, may be sympathetic to those who are currently unemployed because she or he knows what it is like to be without a job.

Social groups often influence experiential knowledge. Converse (1964) posits that reference groups frequently shape how people arrive at their political opinions. The influence of groups is sociotropic (Mutz 1998). Individuals situate themselves politically based on experiential factors such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion and other tribal factors. People even “evaluate parties and candidates in terms of their expected favourable or unfavourable treatment of different social groupings in society” (Converse 1964: 216). This *referencing* — or deference — to groups extends to foreign policy attitudes, too. Berinsky (2009) challenges scholarship (Holsti 2004; Jentleson 1992; Page and Shapiro 2007) that argues the public comes to their opinions about support for war in a rational way. According to Berinsky (2009), foreign policy — akin to domestic politics — is shaped largely by individual’s predispositions and their social groupings. “Attachment to and enmities towards politically relevant groups,” argues Berinsky (2009: 62), “provide the baseline reaction towards war.”

Emotion can also play a critical role in how people form political opinions. In his book dismissing Descartes’ famous assertion *I think therefore I am*, Damasio (1994) contends that emotions and feelings are central to how individuals interpret their social world and construct meaning. The neurologist argues emotions are not divorced from reason — but are “indispensable for rationality” (Damasio 1994: xvii). Nevertheless, considerable political science, psychology and economics scholarship (see, for example, Edwards 1977; Edwards and Newman 1986) posits that individual decision-making is a cost-benefit choice, whereby actors weigh the utility of options such as voting for candidate A over candidate B. Bounded rationality models (see, for example, Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 1974; Kahneman and Tversky 2000; Tetlock and Mellers 2002), similarly, highlight analytical choices — but recognize that people use shortcuts (heuristics) to make decisions. Westen (2007), convincingly, challenges orthodox Western philosophy’s separation of reason from emotion in opinion formation. “In politics,” argues Westen (2007: 35), “when reason and emotion collide, emotion invariably wins.”

“Although the marketplace of ideas is a great place to shop for policies, the marketplace that matters most in American politics is the *marketplace of emotions*” (Westen 2007: 35-36; italics in original).

Westen (2007) stresses that emotional connections to “communities, tribes, sects, or nations” often supersede rational notions of decision-making in politics. Marcus (2002), as well, argues that emotion is crucial to political thinking — and theorists need to account for feelings in political deliberation. Akin to Mouffe (2000), Marcus (2002), in fact, argues that public discourse benefits from emotion.

Emotion and opinion can even override factual information. “[O]ur brains,” stresses Westen (2007: 100), “have a remarkable capacity to find their ways towards convenient truths — even if they are not that true.” Challenging existing media frames in an individual’s minds is difficult. “If a strongly held frame doesn’t fit the facts, the facts will be ignored and the frame will be kept” (Lakoff 2004: 37). Druckman and Bolsen (2011), of particular interest to this research, concluded that factual information has little sway or utility in the face of emotion. Facts, the pair found, have negligible influence on individuals’ initial reactions to news information. Secondly, individuals do not prize frames containing facts over ones that do not. Finally, once people make up their minds, they process factual information in a biased way, attempting to confirm their initial opinion. To be sure, the political brain is decidedly emotional. We are skeptical of information that conflicts with our values (Westen 1985; Haidt 2003; De Waal 2005). As Francis Bacon observed four-hundred years ago:

“The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion … draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a great number of weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects or despised … in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusion may remain inviolate” (Bacon, as quoted in, Westen 2007: 89).

Westen (2007), notably, suggests that political campaigns focus on emotion over substance. “You can slog it out for those few millimeters of cerebral turf that process facts, figures and policy statements,” he writes (2007: 88), or political campaigns can effectively frame their message as emotional appeals to voters.

## **2.52. Conclusion: The confluence of Media, Experience and Popular Wisdom**

Gamson’s (1992) model suggests public opinion represents a confluence of media messages, experiential knowledge and popular wisdom. The process is, admittedly, not direct — but

multi-level. Personal experiences are, of course, produced by cultural experiences, including media discourse. Moreover, media messages “have no fixed meaning but involve a negotiation with a heterogeneous audience that may provide them with meanings quite different from the preferred reading” (Gamson 1992: 125). People read in their own meanings when interpreting media frames. Popular wisdom bridges both the personal and the cultural. It incorporates both personal experience and links them to common knowledge or rules of thumb. Popular wisdom is also woven into media discourse:

“Analogies to everyday life and popular maxims are often invoked to make abstract frames more immediate and concrete. Popular wisdom is not only a conversational resources but a resource for sponsors of different media frames and for journalists as they interpret events. By linking media discourse to popular wisdom, it is thus brought closer to experiential knowledge” (Gamson 1992: 126).

To that end, media frames that appear more natural and in line with popular wisdom have a better chance of resonating with publics. Some media frames possess a “natural advantage because their ideas and language resonate with a broader political culture. Resonances increase the appeal of a frame by making it appear natural and familiar” (Gamson 1992: 135).

“Not all symbols are equally potent. Certain packages have a natural advantage because their ideas and language resonate with larger cultural themes. Resonances increase the appeal of a package; they make it appear natural and familiar. Those who respond to the cultural theme will find it easier to respond to a package with the same sonorities” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 5).

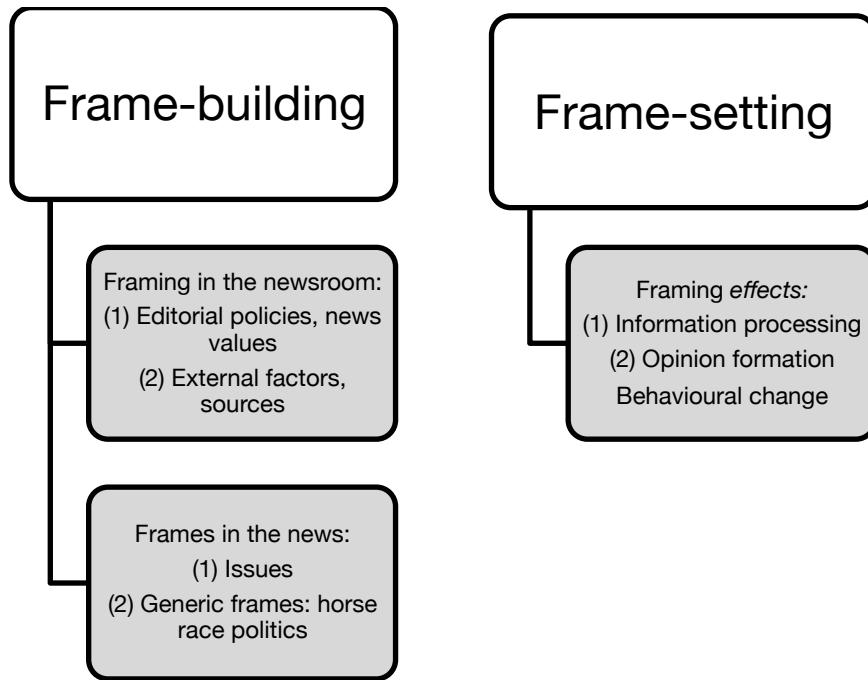
Having completed my overview of the relevant theory underpinning this research, the ensuing pages seeks to outline this study’s conceptual framework and research questions

### **2.53. Conceptual Framework and Research Questions**

This chapter offered two *storylines* about framing. The first outlined how frame-building and media content are shaped by three levels of influence: (1) social; (2) institutional; and (3) routines and practices (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). The second half of this chapter conceptualized how frame-setting may influence audiences’ political opinions. In line with Denzin’s (1989: 297) notion of triangulating theory with a mind to placing several concepts “side by side to assess their utility and power” this chapter underpins this study’s conceptual framework. What follows now is a description of the system or circuit that this research

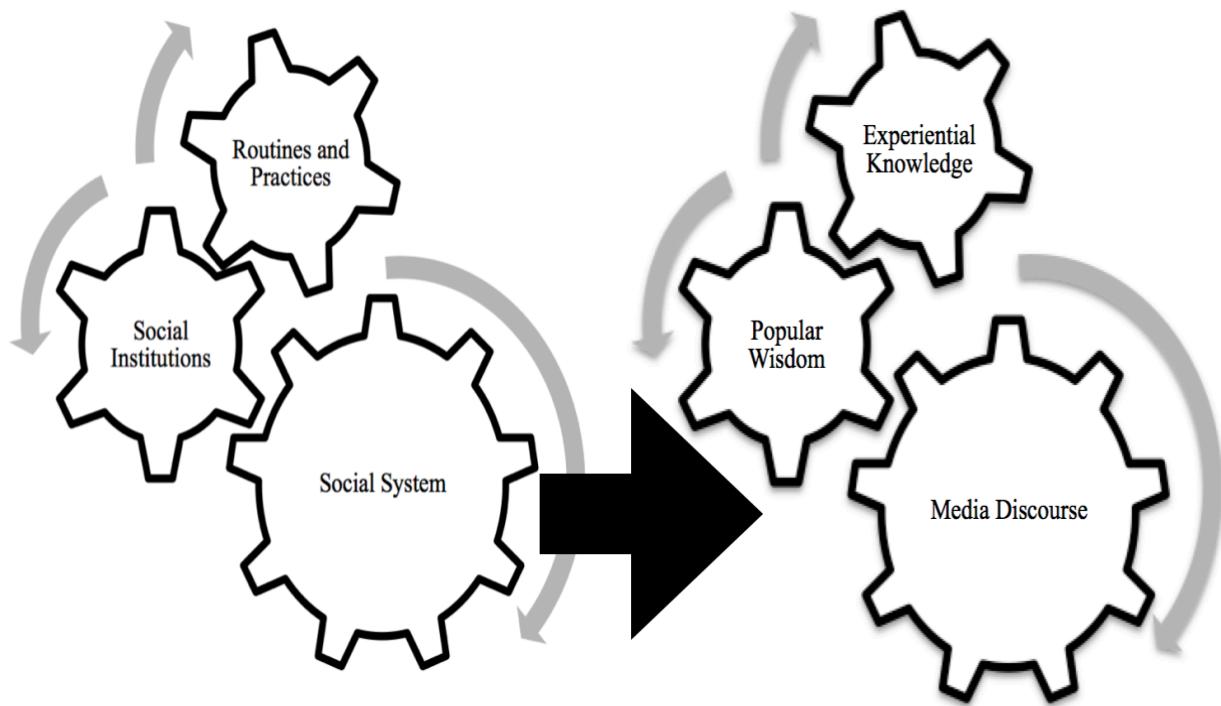
imagines shaping both news content and potentially individuals' political opinions. As Figure Four illustrates, media framing occurs at two different stages: (1) frame-building; and (2) frame-setting (Scheufele 2000; D'Angelo 2002a; de Vreese 2005). Frame-building, as this chapter outlined, involves a mix of factors — social, institutional and routines and practices — that influence news production (Tuchman 1978a; Gans 1979; Gitlin 2003 [1980]; Snow and Benford 1992; Shoemaker and Reese 2014). Frame-setting, on the other hand, envisions the potential influence of media frames on audiences.

**Figure 4 An Integrated Process Model of Framing (de Vreese 2005: 52)**



As Figure Five illustrates, a convergence of factors shape both frame-building (news media content) and frame-setting (information processing). The social system or ideological level defines the *horizon* of what gets talked about and how those issues and events get talked about. It is also at this level that political actors articulate media frames to advance their strategic interests.

**Figure 5 — Conceptual Framework**



The news media's normative role is also influenced at the social system level, affecting how news professionals conduct themselves at the routines and practices level. At the social institution level, embedding and indexing continually structure news production. The normal, everyday methods and practices of journalists lead them to prize certain stories over other and to frequently fact check the media frames sponsored by elites. The churn of these three factors, I contend, influenced the coverage the news media produced about the war in Afghanistan.

The potential influence of media on audiences also represents an assemblage of factors as Figure Five illustrates. The media discourse produced in the first part of the circuit mixes with the experiential knowledge and popular wisdom of individuals to potentially produce people's political opinions. Audiences, to be sure, are sophisticated and active readers. They can resist media messages. But ample research suggests political opinions likely represent the confluence

of media discourse and people's predispositions. To test this conceptual framework, this study poses a number of research questions in relation to: (1) how micro, meso and macro-level factors shaped coverage of the conflict in Kandahar; and (2) how Canadians arrived at their opinions about the war. My main Research Question (MRQ) evaluates: what impact government and military media frames about the war in Afghanistan had on journalists covering the conflict and the Canadian public. I propose eight sub-research questions:

**R1.** How was Canada's military mission in Afghanistan framed in the news media?

**R2.** What role did news values play in shaping news content?

**R3.** How do journalists (if at all) fact check the preferred media frames of the military and government leaders surrounding Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan?

**R4.** What role does indexing play in shaping the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan?

**R5.** How (if at all) does journalistic fact checking influence audiences' judgments about war?

**R6.** How are audiences influenced (or not at all) by the popular wisdom concerning peacekeeping?

**R7.** How are Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts influenced (or not at all) by experiential knowledge?

**R8.** How does the confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge potentially shape Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts?

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methods used to answer the eight research questions posed at the end of the last chapter. It offers both a rationale and a description of this study's content analysis and population-based survey experiment. I begin this methods chapter by outlining the classic content analysis (CA) I performed to assess and measure both research questions one to four:

**R1.** How was Canada's military mission in Afghanistan framed in the news media?

**R2.** What role did news values play in shaping news content?

**R3.** How do journalists (if at all) fact check the preferred media frames of the military and government leaders surrounding Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan?

**R4.** What role does indexing play in shaping the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan?

This work's CA ( $n = 900$ ) allowed me to quantify the extent — and impact — of framing, news values, fact checking and indexing. Recognizing the constitutive and informational role of news media as a source, reference point, validator, and barometer for topics of social, cultural, and political significance, this research examined how Canada's military mission in Afghanistan was represented in the Canadian news media. CA remains a useful tool for quantifying media practice and content (Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 2008; Neuendorff 2002; Althaus 2003; Bauer 2007; Porpora et al. 2008; Harp et al. 2010; Krippendorff 2013; Speer 2017). The coming pages outline why a content analysis offers a useful means to assess the factors that shaped news coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan. It is important to note that this research's content analysis acts as a springboard for this research's subsequent attempt to assess the impact of mediated messages on Canadian audiences. To enhance this work's external validity, the media samples used as treatments in this work were drawn from examples identified by the CA.

The second section of this chapter details the procedures and justifications used to assess research questions five to eight:

**R5.** How (if at all) does journalistic fact checking influence audiences' judgments about war?

**R6.** How are audiences influenced (or not at all) by the popular wisdom concerning peacekeeping?

**R7.** How are Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts influenced (or not at all) by experiential knowledge?

**R8.** How does the confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge potentially shape Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts?

This research's representative population-based survey experiment ( $n = 1131$ ) tested: (1) the potential impact of media discourse about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan; (2) the potential impact of journalistic fact checking on audiences; (3) and the possible confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge shaping Canadians' opinions about the war in Afghanistan. The subsequent pages outline the procedures and rationale for my content analysis before taking up the same topics concerning my population-based survey experiment.

### **3.1. Rationale**

Content analysis merges both qualitative and quantitative features, allowing for a thorough examination and identification of common phenomena in media texts. In particular, CA provides an effective tool for identifying and quantifying frames across many media samples (Matthes and Kohring 2008). Several scholarly examinations of framing (Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Entman 1991; Woolley 2000; Entman 2003; Bennett et al. 2006, 2007; Baum and Groeling

2010a; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Speer 2017) have, for example, examined how government and military leaders and journalists frame media messages about war, conflict and terrorism. By analyzing a large sample of news content, CA identifies and provides a count of variables — source, frames and oppositional readings — enabling researchers to infer larger meanings (Bauer 2007; Riffe et al. 2008). Moreover, if we accept audiences are influenced — even minimally — by the new media then a systematic assessment of actual media texts for patterns and trends ideally predicates audience research (Philo 2001; Bauer 2007; Shoemaker and Reese 2014).

CA remains a useful method for quantifying what media do with elite discourse (Hallin 1986; Bennett 1990; Entman 1991; Woolley 2000; Bennett et al. 2006, 2007; Baum and Groeling 2010a; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Speer 2017). Leaders in the field of CA (Riffe et al. 1998; Neuendorf 2002; Bauer 2007; Krippendorff 2013) contend the research tool offers an efficient means for analyzing media. The method allows researchers a nimble means to “turns words into numbers” and deduce larger meaning(s) and execute longitudinal examinations of media (Franzosi 2004: 4). Bauer (2007: 135) highlights four advantages of CA: (1) it constructs “a text corpus as an open system in order to pick up trends and changing patterns”; (2) its comparisons can reveal “differences”; (3) it offers evidence to relate to other phenomenon; and (4) the method can create “maps of knowledge... embodied in texts.”

Critics, on the other hand, argue that CA fails as a methodology because of its trivial applications to quantify insignificant problems or phenomena (Holsti 1969). CA — by no means, of course — offers any metrics for understanding the potential impact of media messages (Bauer 2007). After considering other methodological approaches (discourse analysis, interviews with journalists), a classic content analysis was chosen as the best systematic means for measuring — empirically — the shaping factors influencing the news media’s coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan.

### 3.2. Defining Content Analysis

Definitions and applications of CA or content analysis are inconsistent in the literature, with some calling it a method and others labelling it an analytical approach (Deacon et al. 1999). Bauer (2007: 132) describes CA as “systematic classification and counting of text units.” Berelson (1952: 18) defined CA as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.” Budd, Thorp and Donohew (1967: 2), in a similar fashion, hold that “content analysis is a systematic technique for analyzing message content and message handling — it is a tool for observing and analyzing the overt communication behaviour of selected communicators.” Holsti (1969: 14), on the other hand, emphasizes the “technique’s” merits for drawing inferences. Weber (1985: 9), champions the “set of procedures” that lead to suppositions. Krippendorff (2013) stresses that inferences from CA are replicable and valid. In a comparable way, Neuendorf (2002: 10), highlights the scientific method, with its “attention to objectivity, intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability and hypothesis testing.” To be sure, a systematic CA “distill[s] a large amount of material into a short description” so as to construct “maps of knowledge” (Bauer 2007: 132, 35). Simply put, CA provides a snapshot of journalistic efforts.

### 3.3. The Difficulty of Finding Media Frames

Given its subjective nature, questions persist about CA’s reliability, specifically with respect to identifying and assessing media frames (Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Miller 1997; Scheufele 1999; Grandy 2001; Hertog and McLeod 2001; Tankard 2001; Matthes and Kohring 2008). It remains “extremely difficult” to eliminate the research’s subject position from frame identification and analysis (Van Gorp 2005: 503). Many researchers are vague — and even silent — about how exactly they pinpoint frames. Hanson (1995: 384), for instance, writes that the frame “emerged from the analysis.” Similarly ambiguous, Haller and Ralph (2001: 412) offer that “news frames were found.” In equally amorphous fashion, Coleman and Dysart (2005: 13)(2005) stress their “deep reading [...] informed the authors of the emergent frames.” Simon (2001) and Tankard (2001), not surprisingly, argue this *fuzzy* methodology sparks questions and

uneasiness about bias, arbitrariness and methodological rigour. Matthes and Kohring (2008) go further, suggesting researchers consciously or unconsciously find the frames they go looking for.

In traditional CA, six typical approaches prevail in framing research, according to Matthes and Kohring (2008). The forthcoming pages offer a brief picture of each — and their strengths and weaknesses. This is done with a mind to justifying this CA’s hybrid method of frame identification and analysis.

**(1) Hermeneutic Approach:** With its origins deeply rooted in qualitative research, hermeneutic CA examines a small sample population of texts so as to make connections with wider discourse. This interpretive method connects and links frames with larger cultural events (Matthes and Kohring 2008). Several concerns persist about researcher bias, validity, reliability — and how, exactly, researchers identified the frames they quantify in their CA. Downs (2002: 47), in fact, concedes that the implicit subjectivity of the approach makes it “more experiential and contextually contingent than empirical.”

**(2) Linguistic Approach:** Linguistic CA (Entman 1991; Pan and Kosicki 1993; Esser and D'Angelo 2003) identifies frames by analyzing what words get used and where they get used. The text essentially provides the *building blocks* for systematically identifying and analyzing the frame. Critics charge the approach is too complex, questioning how words intertwined together construct a frame. Akin to concerns about hermeneutic analysis, those that doubt the method, worry about its reliability and ability to be replicated (Matthes and Kohring 2008).

**(3) Manual Holistic Approach:** This inductive process of media texts analysis builds towards frame identification (Simon and Xenos 2000). This iterative approach leads to a codebook and subsequent coding. *Deep readings* by researchers draw out themes or frames found in texts. Skeptics argue the approach shares similar problems with the hermeneutic approach — and question its validity and reliability.

**(4) Computer-assisted Approach:** Frame mapping relies on the assumption that certain words form the foundation of frames (Matthes 2009: 261). Computer software catalogue word groupings in order to identify frames. Critics, however, wonder why researchers would rely on

computers for what is largely a subjective analysis. Moreover, they question with clumps of words actually compose a concrete frame. Computers cannot detect the nuances of frames (Matthes and Kohring 2008).

**(5) Deductive Approach:** This approach uses frames found in literature to create codes to analyze text. Literary critic Northrop Frye (1982) famously asserted that the Bible formed the “mythological framework” underpinning Western literature. Semetko and Valkeburg (2000), in fact, offer five generic frames: human interest, conflict, economic ramifications, morality and responsibility.

**(6) Cluster Frame Analysis:** Like the computer-assisted approach, Matthes and Kohring (2008) contend that frames follow certain patterns. Statistical factor analysis, the researchers offer, provides a way to confirm the existence of frames. “When some elements group together systematically in a specific way,” they argue, “they form a pattern that can be identified across several texts in a sample. We call these patterns frames” (Matthes and Kohring 2008: 263). Skeptics of this method worry that computers can miss frames or evolving issues in complicated — and nuanced — news media texts.

This research employed a manual holistic approach. In order to overcome the methodological deficiencies outlined above, this CA first determined theoretical grounding and goals (Bell 2001). Neuendorf (2002: 107), as well, stresses that theory and past research can help to define variables, conceptual foundations and hypothesis with the aim of getting “the researcher to think critically about the nature of his or her study.” To that end, this research began with the four research questions detailed at the beginning of this chapter.

Moreover, this research disaggregated frames between those sponsored by government and military leaders and how journalists structured (or framed) their stories. Not a lot of research separates the frames that are attributed to sources and those that are generated by news professionals (Speer 2017). It is critical for this work to separate the framing to see how journalists deal with the frames sponsored by government and military leaders. Making a

distinction between the frames allowed me to assess if journalists fact checked the frames used by officials.

In preparation for developing the coding scheme and schedule, I began by reading numerous Canadian federal government policy documents and speeches surrounding the military mission in Afghanistan. As well, a Strategic Counsel survey in July 2007 of Canadians about their attitudes towards the military mission largely informed the variable adoption. The polling firm's questions mirrored the *talking points* (or media frames) used repeatedly by the government and military leaders in their communication efforts about the war. The Canadians surveyed by The Strategic Counsel (2007)<sup>23</sup> were asked about the consequences if Canada withdrew its forces after 2009, considering:

1. “The Taliban will regroup and come back into power in Afghanistan”;
2. “The authority and legitimacy of the United Nations would be severely damaged”;
3. “Canada’s reputation within the international community would suffer”;
4. “The rights of women and children will be negatively affected”;
5. “More terrorist attacks on Western nations such as Canada will occur”; and
6. “Afghanistan’s economy would become more reliant on the cultivation of poppies for the production of opium and heroin” (The Strategic Counsel 2007: np).

Canadians were also asked if they support the government’s justification for the military mission:

1. “The Afghan people want the assistance of Canada to remove the Taliban threat” and
2. “Canada’s contribution is making a real difference” (The Strategic Counsel 2007: np)

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<sup>23</sup> The survey results found that between 53-81 per cent of survey respondents agreed with the government’s rationale for war. Still, only seven per cent of Canadians “strongly supported” the military mission. The polling firm surveyed 1,000 Canadians between July 12 and July 16, 2007. The margin of error was +/- 3.1 per cent 19 times out of 20 (CTV 2007).

After a careful reading of government texts, this research moved to a second inductive phase of reading numerous ( $n = 45$ ) news media samples between 2006-2011 concerning Canada's military mission in Afghanistan with a mind to identifying themes and media frames. Akin to Rendon and Nicolas (2012), a two-step inductive approach to developing coding categories was employed. This analysis of media texts revealed rhetorical patterns and consistent media frames first identified in government documents. This process produced a tentative list of 10 frames to search for in a pilot project (see Appendix One for a complete list of frames).

### **3.4. Identifying the Media Frame**

In order to overcome the methodological deficiencies outlined above concerning researcher bias influencing frame identification, this study took pains to define how it determined the frames it would single out for analysis. Entman (1993: 52; italics in original) helpfully contends that framing requires “select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular *problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described*.” This research’s frame identification process also adopted Matthe’s (2009) criteria for establishing the presence of a frame. Inspired by Matthes and Kohring (2008), this research’s CA employed an elementary, manual cluster analysis, whereby the coding process looked for combined words such as “helping women and children” or “making Afghanistan safer.” This was done to improve this CA’s frame identification reliability and validity.

Robinson’s (2002: 138-39) CA surrounding the “CNN Effect” determined that keyword analysis proved “the toughest test” for identifying frames. This research’s frame identification paid particular attention, for instance, to moral speech devices, such as “brave” or “evil” that officials often evoked in their media frames about Canada’s military efforts in southern Afghanistan. Using Entman’s (1993) definition of frames, this research’s inductive phase found that fundamental factors grouped together in an organized fashion, composing established patterns. Table Two below illustrates how this study’s frames fit into Matthe’s (2009) four criteria: (1) “problem definition”; (2) “causal interpretation”; (3) “evaluation”; and (4) “treatment recommendation” (Matthes 2009: 264).

**Table 2 — Frame Elements - Operational Definition<sup>24</sup>**

Promote a Particular Problem Definition	Causal Interpretation	Moral Evaluation	Treatment Recommended
“The Taliban will regroup and come back into power in Afghanistan”	“Canada’s military efforts are making Afghanistan safer. The armed forces are winning or beating the insurgents (Taliban)”	“The authority and legitimacy of the United Nations would be severely damaged”	“We need to fight the terrorists where the terrorists live; instead of fighting them at home.”
“More terrorist attacks on Western nations such as Canada will occur”	“Canadian Forces are making progress — fighting the insurgency (Taliban), enhancing development,	“Canada’s reputation within the international community would suffer”	“We need to restore democracy.”
“Afghanistan’s economy would become more reliant on the cultivation of poppies for the production of opium and heroin”		“The rights of women and children will be negatively affected”	“Canada’s contribution to reconstruction and development in Afghanistan is making a real difference to improving the lives of Afghan people”.
		“The Afghan people want the assistance of Canada and other countries to remove the Taliban threat”	
		Soldiers/Military/Mission — endowed with brave, noble, efficient, strong, warrior-like, dedicated characteristics.	

<sup>24</sup> Arguably, some of these frames contain more than one element.

This careful definition of frames and cluster analysis adds, arguably, to the reliability and validity of this CA's frame identification and analysis.

### **3.5. Pilot Project**

In order to further enhance the reliability and validity of this CA, a pilot project ( $n = 45$ ) was conducted. That work identified a need to refine my coding schedule. The so-called *talking points* for military and government leaders detailed above captured many of the frames used by military and government leaders. The small-scale CA, however, identified a few more nuanced frames. Many government and especially military leaders stressed winning the “hearts and minds” of Afghan people. In a complementary way, several samples include a government or military official highlighting the “progress” of Canadian Forces in southern Afghanistan. Moreover, my coding scheme surrounding “more terrorist attacks” happening in the West also needed broadening because government and military leaders were often more subtle or nuanced in their articulation of the terrorism frame. In one sample, a general argues Canadian Forces are required in Afghanistan so as to ensure there is no “fertile ground for terrorist organizations to operate” in the country. The pilot project added three more frames to the coding schedule (see Appendix One for a complete list of this CA's variables).

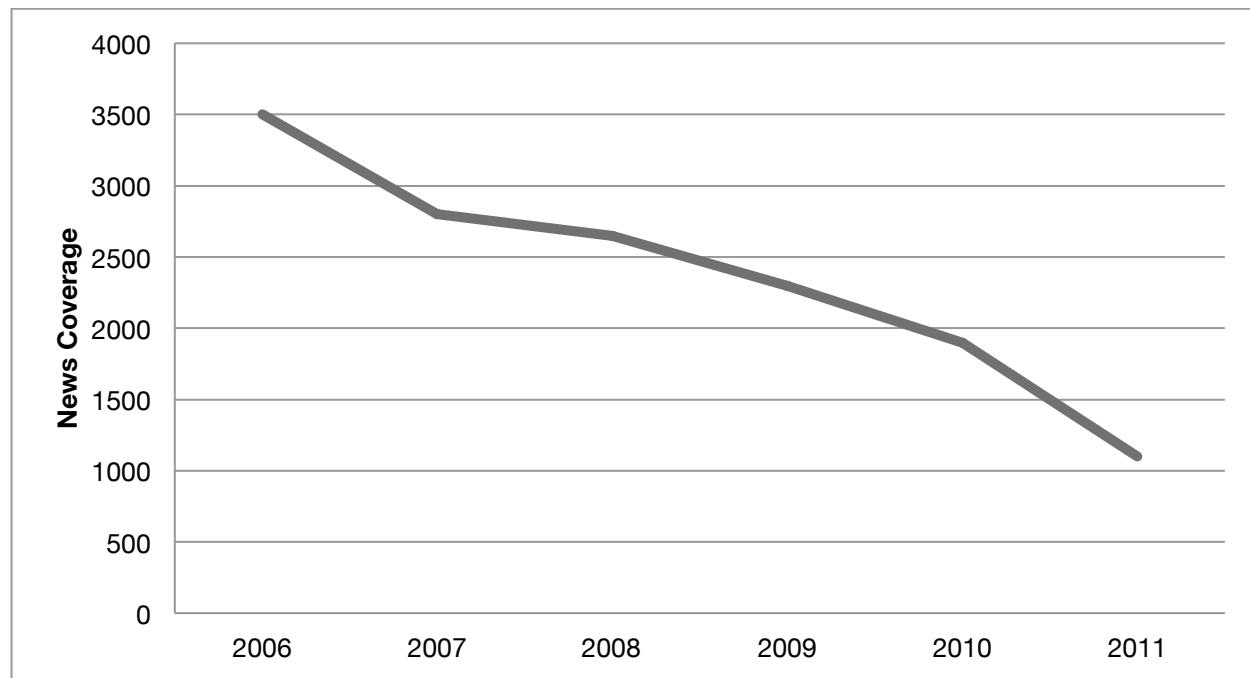
### **3.6. News Media Sample**

The media texts (or sampling frame) for this CA, were drawn randomly from 48 months (January 2006 – December 2009) of Canadian news media coverage of Canada's military mission in southern Afghanistan. Using the news archive *Infomart.com*, the search terms “Afghanistan” and “Canada” produced a population of 12,057 news media pieces about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan between January 1, 2006 - December 31, 2011 (entire mission). This sample drew from four media organizations — CBC National Radio News<sup>25</sup>, *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post* and CTV National News.

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<sup>25</sup> I covered the military mission in southern Afghanistan twice as an embedded journalist for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in 2006 and 2007.

**Figure 6 — Possible Media Samples — 2006-2009**



The news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan dropped substantially after 2009 as Figure Six illustrates. The political debate about the controversial mission essentially ended with a confidence motion in Canada's House of Commons in 2008, pledging Canadian Forces stay until the end of 2011 (Canadian Press 2014). Moreover, of the 162 Canadians killed in Afghanistan, 132 died between 2006-2009 (CBC 2014a).

This CA decided to “ring-fence the range” of its sample collection around the most intense period of public debate — 2006 - 2009 (Deacon et al. 1999: 123). This period was, arguably, the sharpest time for government and military leaders to engage in framing the military mission in the media. As Bauer (2007) and Krippendorff (2013) note, representation often depends on the research question. As well, Riffe et al. (1998) contend *purposive sampling* is determined by the analytical problem proposed by the research. As a result, this CA incorporates a representative<sup>26</sup> or *systematic sample* ( $n = 900$ ) comprised of 10 per cent of the nearly 9,000 possible samples

<sup>26</sup> A representative is a typical example or specimen reflecting the quality and kind of media concerning Afghanistan and Canada. This rationale is in line with Kensicki (2004).

(population) of news media about Canada's military mission identified by *Infomart.com*'s search engine<sup>27</sup>.

This CA chose four national media organizations — CBC National Radio News, *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post* and CTV National News. *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post* are Canada's two national newspapers. CTV and CBC broadcast nationally and have large audiences. The samples are spread almost evenly amongst the news organizations (see Table Three) and each of the 48 months, making it a more valid sampling frame from which to make generalizable inferences about the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.

**Table 3 — Media Samples**

Media Organization	Type	Count	%
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	Newspaper	262	29.2
<i>National Post</i>	Newspaper	230	25.6
CBC Radio News	Radio	193	21.4
CTV National News	TV	215	23.9

(n = 900)

### 3.7. Systematic Sample

Systematic sampling requires researchers to choose every nth unit for the corpus (Riffe et al. 2008; Krippendorff 2013). This sample also represents a manageable amount of material for coding. “Taking every nth unit becomes a probability sample when the starting point is randomly determined” (Riffe et al. 2008: 108). Systematic samples “favour” content analysis when the texts are derived from routine publications and broadcasts (Krippendorff 2013: 116). To that end, I used a random number generator to pick a number between one and 10. The online tool chose four. As a result, I harvested every fourth sample identified by *Infomart.com*'s search for my corpus. For each month, I alternated starting at the top and the bottom of the possible samples to collect every fourth media sample.

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<sup>27</sup> This research's focus on national English media organizations is, admittedly, a limitation. An analysis of Quebec media about the conflict in Afghanistan is likely to yield different results.

During the collection process, it was necessary to *kick out* a number of *false positive* samples because they did not directly deal with Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. Only samples that deal directly with Canada's military mission in Afghanistan were added to my corpus. When a potential sample was excluded, the next appropriate sample (fifth, sixth, seventh, etc.) was then chosen from the population in order to replace the sample that was eliminated.

### **3.8. Limitations of a Classic Content Analysis**

Reducing a myriad of news media words about the conflict in Afghanistan to numbers is not without its drawbacks. To be sure, conflating text to numbers strips away important elements contained within the media content. There is no deep examination of language patterns and symbols contained within the text (van Dijk 1985; Wodak and Meyer 2001) in a content analysis. CA abridges such considerations. Moreover, CA lacks the deep descriptive analysis that comes with discourse analysis (Foucault 1980). Boucher's (2009) thick and descriptive discourse analysis of how Canadian leaders talked about the country's military mission in Afghanistan, for example, reveals how political actors struggled to articulate a consistent narrative about the war. I attempt to overcome the shortcomings of CA by offering a number of lengthy examples in the coming findings and discussion chapter to better explain and contextualize the factors that shaped news content about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.

It is also important to emphasize here that the news archive *Infomart.com* reduces broadcast stories to transcripts. The texts analyzed for this research were stripped of the colour and emotion that is often conveyed by pictures and sound. To be sure, this represents a limitation (Matthes 2009). Visual analysis of the framing of war (Butler 2009) and terrorism (Zelizer 2002) has merits. As Rose (2001: 10) stresses, “visual modes of conveying meaning are not the same as written modes.” Reducing broadcast stories to texts strips samples of important socially constructed visual information (Penn 2007).

“To understand a visualization is thus to enquire into its provenance and into the social work that it does. It is to note its principle of inclusion and exclusion, to detect the roles that it makes available, to understand the way in which they are distributed, and to decode the hierarchies and difference that it naturalizes” (Fyfe and Law 1988: 1).

While recognizing the importance of visuals, ultimately this research is aimed at understanding the media frames used by government and military leaders to strategically position the war in Afghanistan and how journalists fact checked those frames. As a result, a detailed visual analysis is beyond the scope of this work.

### **3.9. Coding/Inter-coding Reliability**

Because of the potential for bias (Rendon and Nicolas 2012), an independent coder was recruited and trained to assess a random sample of 11 per cent of the media articles ( $n = 100$ ) in an effort to validate this research's coding (Neuendorf 2002; Krippendorff 2004). The second coder was recruited early on in the coding process. At the onset of the coding, the researchers and second coder coded 10 samples together, using an initial coding scheme. Mindful of "how much interpretation can be involved in applying a schedule," some extra key words and definitions were added to the coding schedule or *rule book* during this preliminary coding (Deacon et al. 1999: 128). Attention was paid to applying a systematic interpretation to all the samples (Deacon et al. 1999; Bauer 2007; Krippendorff 2013).

After that initial coding, an online random number generator determined which samples were chosen for *double-checking* by the second coder. This process produced a very high overall inter-coder reliability —  $r = \text{agree} / (\text{agree} + \text{disagree})$  — of above 80 per cent for all variables. Most of the variables were above 90 per cent. The online ReCal ("Reliability Calculator") tool was used to compute the intercoder/interrater reliability coefficients (Krippendorff 2004; Hayes and Krippendorff 2007; Lu and Shulman 2008; Speer 2017) for all the variables (see Appendix Two). Reliability more than 80 per cent is considered high and indicates a well-defined coding scheme and a robust sampling validity that can stand the test of being replicated (Bauer 2007; Krippendorff 2013).

### **3.10. Data Analysis**

This research's analysis is grounded not in finding deterministic link — but probabilistic relationships (Kellstedt and Whitten 2013). My analysis employed a number of statistical methods compatible with CA (Bauer 2007; Bryman 2012; Krippendorff 2013). I used the

computer software SPSS to compute the CA's frequencies. Because all of the coding variables in the CA were categorical, I used a series of cross tabulations and Pearson's chi-squared tests to evaluate statistical associations concerning this work's research questions. This work's statistical analysis relied on the conventional social science 0.05 statistical significance level to interpret the real differences between groups under evaluation (Bryman 2012). As noted above, Appendix Two Appendix provides the Scott's Pi, nominal Krippendorff's alpha, and Cohen's Kappa for the study's inter-coder reliability. Having outlined this research's CA procedures, the coming pages turns to this work's population-based survey experiment.

### **3.11. Population-based Survey Experiment**

The second section of this chapter outlines the rationale and procedures for a population-based survey experiment aimed at testing the potential impact of the news media's fact checking concerning Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. Moreover, this experiment also assesses the confluence of factors – media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge – that may have shaped Canadian's opinions about the war in Afghanistan. Specifically, this method seeks to assess the four research questions posited at the conclusion of the previous chapter:

**R5.** How (if at all) does journalistic fact checking influence audiences' judgments about war?

**R6.** How are audiences influenced (or not at all) by the popular wisdom concerning peacekeeping?

**R7.** How are Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts influenced (or not at all) by experiential knowledge?

**R8.** How does the confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge potentially shape Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts?

The ensuing pages lays out the rationale and methods for this research's population-based survey experiment. As noted at the onset of this chapter, this experiment embedded in a survey builds on this research's content analysis. The media treatments used in this study approximate the news coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. I begin this section by providing a brief description of the constituent parts of a population-based survey experiment: surveys and experiments. Combining the two methods, Hovland (1959) contends, offers "the royal road to wisdom (Hovland, as quoted in Iyengar McGrady 2007: 206).

Surveys remain a staple of gathering generalizable data about populations (de Vaus 1996; Fowler 2009; Kellstedt and Whitten 2013)<sup>28</sup>. Opinion surveys extrapolate generalities about public attitudes based on random samples chosen from the general population (Fowler 2009). Moreover, the method offers a *relatively* economical means to garner evidence about a large population (Iyengar and McGrady 2007). Scholarly research frequently uses representative surveys to measure, for instance, the impact of media frames (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Nelson and Kinder 1996).

In addition to sampling error, which reflects the statistical uncertainty of sampling, there are other potential sources of inaccuracy in a survey, including non-response bias, response bias, coverage bias and poorly designed questionnaires (Groves et al. 2009; Fink 2013). Furthermore, self-reporting media use in survey research tends to represent "a byproduct of the very same political attitudes that are considered effects of media consumption" (Iyengar and McGrady 2007: 205). To be sure, surveys often produce unclear results<sup>29</sup> concerning the influence or *effects* of media exposure. For media and communication scholarship, this poses a problem, according to Iyengar and McGrady (2007: 204) because "the most fundamental weakness of the survey is that it provides little control over the key phenomenon of media exposure."

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<sup>28</sup> This chapter, by no means, offers a comprehensive review of survey methodology — and represents, admittedly, the *tip of the iceberg*. For detailed survey methodology, see: Moser & Kalton, 1971; Buckingham & Saunders, 2004; Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2009; Fowler 2009; Groves et al. 2009; Bryman, 2012; Sue & Ritter, 2012; Fink, 2013; and Gobo and Mauler, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Notably, Andrew Cooper, British Prime Minister David Cameron's former director of strategy and pollster, discounts the quality of surveys because of methodological concerns, including response rates and estimates of who actually votes (Colville 2017).

Experimental research<sup>30</sup>, on the other hand, seeks to understand cause-and-effect relationships, whereby the design “controls and randomly assigns values of the independent variable to the participants” (Kellstedt and Whitten 2013: 72). Using controlled conditions, researchers observe change(s) to the dependent variable by systematically treating or changing one or more independent variable. The baseline (or control) allows researchers to compare data from manipulated circumstances to evidence where there is no intervention. An experiment is defined as “objective observation of phenomena which are made to occur in a strictly controlled situation in which one or *more* factors are varied and the others are kept constant” (Zimmey 1961: 18; italics in original). Experiments, arguably, offer the most “unambiguous evidence of causation” concerning the influence of media (Iyengar and McGrady 2007: 207).

Derided for its origins in positivism, audience experiments routinely get dismissed by scholars who question *effects* researchers for using statistical methods “as instruments of torture on the data until it confuses something which could justify publication in a scientific journal” (Cumberland 2001: 21). Yet, audience experiments long ago have moved well beyond the *hypodermic needle model theory* originally imagined by early media *effects* research. It is, of course, difficult, to *prove* a causal connection between message and its potential influence on an individual’s attitudes or behavior (Imai et al. 2010). But, rigorous experiments and appraisals “favour[s] some tentative explanations” about the impact of media messages (Schroder et al. 2003: 323). Again, this research aims to highlight the probabilistic relationship between media messages and people’s political opinions (Kellstedt and Whitten 2013)

So-called deceptive surveys, which embed experimental manipulation into random, representative surveys, can assess the impact of media messages while achieving random assignment and control (Brewer & Gross, 2010: 169). Questionnaires, containing differently framed treatments, frequently get used to measure the impact of different messages. Kangas, Niemela and Varjonen (2014), for instance, used a deceptive survey to measure how competing

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<sup>30</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a detailed description of audience experiments. For experiment design see: Christensen, 1997; Schroder, Drotner, Kline and Murray, 2003; Maxwell and Delaney, 2004; Iyengar and McGrady 2007; Willer and Walker, 2007; Berger, 2011; and Montgomery, 2012.

frames shaped public opinion about policy change. Their research stratified respondents ( $n = 1,500$ ) into five different groups. Different pools of respondents were asked differently framed questions based, among other things, on *equality*, *rightfulness* and *cost* frames. The research concluded that to be “successful, a politician must simplify the issue and appeal to moral sentiments rather than present too many difficult ‘factual’ viewpoints” (Kangas et al. 2014: 73).

A hybrid methodology, population-based survey experiments combine the advantages of experiments and surveys (Piazza, Sniderman, and Tetlock 1989; Sniderman and Grob 1996; Conley and Glauber 2005; Mutz 2005; Avant and Sigelman 2006; Eaton and Visser 2008; Mutz 2009, 2011; Pingree et al. 2012; Ostfeld and Mutz 2014). The method embeds an experiment in a representative survey — and can offer insight into the relationship between cause and a potential influence. Population-based survey experiments utilize the survey sampling techniques to test representative samples of respondents’ reactions to experimental treatments (Mutz 2011). The method often uses online panel surveys — with random participant assignment — in order to examine the potential influence of independent variables on the dependent variable of interest to researchers (Kellstedt and Whitten 2013).

A leading proponent of the method calls population-based survey experiments “more experiment than survey” because the research tool uses the utility of random assignment in order to allow for statistically significant causal inferences (Mutz 2011: 3). Moreover, population-based survey experiments also overcome the traditional critique (Hovland 1959; Kinder 2007; Brewer and Gross 2010) of the artificiality of laboratory experiments. Online panel surveys, which have become quite common over the last decade, are considered more natural or routine in comparison to laboratory settings. Respondents participate in the research online, usually from their home or office. The experiment is embedded in what appears to be a routine survey. Moreover, population-based survey experiments allow researchers to test the potential impact of news media messages with a representative populations while “eliminating population average treatment effect” caused by homogenous groups of, often, undergraduate students (Mutz 2011: 20).

In terms of validity, Mutz (2011) argues that population-based survey experiments offer the best of both words: (1) the internal validity of experiments; and (2) the generalizability of surveys with representative samples<sup>31</sup>. Random assignment ensures internal reliability for population-based survey experiments (Holland 1986; Bryman 2012; Kellstedt and Whitten 2013). The experiment inside a survey offers the further advantage of “rul[ing] out spurious relationships” surrounding the media treatment (Mutz 2011: 138). Moreover, representative samples allow researchers to generalize about the population under investigation (Todorov and Mandisodza 2004). At their core, population-based survey experiments “have an unusually rich collection of advantages, combined with very few disadvantages” (Mutz 2011: 157).

### **3.12. Research Background: Canada’s Military Mission in Afghanistan - 2006-2011**

As detailed in the introduction, Canadian government and military leaders set out to strategically and systematically *sell* the war in Afghanistan (Government of Canada 2008a). As I noted in the theory chapter, journalists frequently fact check the preferred frames of government and military leaders. As the coming chapter outlines, two frames stood out in the CA — safety/security and reconstruction/development. As the CA also found, these frames were most likely to be fact checked by journalists at a statistically significant level.

**Safety and Security:** Canadian government and military leaders often attempted to frame the military’s efforts in Afghanistan as making the volatile region of Kandahar safer and more secure.

**Reconstruction and Development:** Government and military leaders often tried to justify Canada’s military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting Canadian Forces were helping to reconstruct or restore the war-torn country. Officials also frequently contended the development work would improve the lives of Afghan people.

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<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, online, panel-based surveys are not probability-based. Respondents are not selected randomly because no complete list of voters' IP Internet addresses exists (Zurkin 2015). This study's respondents were drawn from a pre-stratified online research panel population. The precision of this online population-based survey data is measured using confidence intervals (Simpson 2012).

To examine the potential link between news coverage of the war in Afghanistan and support for the war, this study's population-based survey experiment tested participants' responses to questions after they read news stories closely approximating those analyzed in this study's content analysis. These *fabricated*<sup>32</sup> news stories highlighted the preferred frames of government and military leaders — and also spotlighted journalistic fact checking of those frames. This experiment aimed to test whether the preferred frames of government and military leaders influenced public perceptions and how (if at all) the fact checking of those media frames by journalists might have also influenced public opinion. Table Four outlines the segmented groups.

**Table 4 — Frame Stimuli / Treatment**

Group	Frames
One	Control
Two	Safety
Three	Safety + Journalistic Fact Check
Four	Reconstruction
Five	Reconstruction + Journalistic Fact Check

### **3.13. Population-based Survey Experiment Design**

This research's population-based survey experiment attempted to shed light on how the media frames used by government and military leaders may have influenced audiences' thinking about support for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. Moreover, it seeks to test the potential impact of journalistic fact checking. This research randomly divided respondents into five different groups:

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<sup>32</sup> The ethical ramifications of this method are outlined later in this chapter.

**Control Group:** participants received no media treatment

**Frame Stimulus Security Group One:** participants were exposed to a news story highlighting a government and military frame suggesting Canadian Forces were helping to improve security in Kandahar;

**Frame Stimulus Security Group Two:** participants were exposed to a news story highlighting a government and military frame suggesting Canadian Forces were helping to improve security in Kandahar. The news story also contained a fact check casting doubt on the military's efforts to improve security in the volatile region.

**Frame Stimulus Reconstruction Group Three:** participants were exposed to a news story highlighting a government and military frame suggesting Canadian Forces were helping to reconstruct and rebuild war-torn Kandahar; and

**Frame Stimulus Reconstruction Group Four:** participants were exposed to a news story highlighting a government and military frame suggesting Canadian Forces were helping to reconstruct and rebuild war-torn Kandahar. The news story also contained a fact check casting doubt on the long-lasting impact of the military's development efforts.

### **3.14. Questionnaire**

Mutz (2011) suggests keeping population-based survey experiment questionnaires short. She argues it is critical to keep respondents engaged. Diagnostic frames are found to have the biggest influence on audiences. With that in mind, the survey was kept to 29 questions and took respondents (on average) about 10 minutes to complete.

In the planning stages of the questions, attention was paid to determining the attitudes, beliefs and values that this research wished to measure in relation to Canada's military mission in Afghanistan (Fink 2013). This study's research questions drove the information needs of the questions. Respondents received questions in a fixed order (Groves et al. 2009). Fink's (2013: 38-41) seven rules for writing closed survey questionnaire guided the process of writing this population-based survey:

1. The questions were tangible and meaningful. That is, the questions were clear in their purpose. Explanations, as the coming pages outline, offered reasons for why the questions were being asked;
2. Simple language was used. The survey was free of jargon and complicated concepts. (The pre-test revealed no concerns amongst respondents about the wording or intent of the questions.);
3. All the questions focused on respondents' personal experiences. The questions only asked about respondents' opinions;
4. The questions avoided loaded or biased words;
5. I was aware of my own biases when writing the questions. I worked hard to make all the questions as neutral as possible;
6. The questions and their order reflect a sensitivity about personal questions. The more sensitive personal demographic questions were asked at the end. Admittedly, there were no particularly sensitive personal questions included in this population-based survey experiment; and
7. Each question contained only a single thought. Some of the questions included preambles or contextual information. Attention was paid to keeping every sentence simple and geared towards someone with a sixth to eight-grade reading level (Fink 2013: 38-41).

This population-based survey experiment used both a ten-point scale and a Likert-type six-point ordinal scale to assess respondents' attitudes towards Canadian Forces and its combat role in Kandahar (Fowler 2009; Groves et al. 2009; Fink 2013). Respondents were asked about their agreement or disagreement with statements. To ensure internal reliability and validity of the

ordinal measurement scales, manipulation checks were included in the questionnaire (Bryman 2012). The coming pages detail this population-based survey experiment's procedures.

This study's population-based survey experiment questionnaire began by offering some context and instructions to respondents. Participants were told (see preamble in Appendix Three) to expect questions gauging their interest and engagement with Canadian public affairs and the media. They were also informed that they did not have to participate in the research – and could quit at any time.

The questionnaire began with demographic questions such as sex, age, education and region (see Appendix Three). To make the population-based survey experiment feel like an authentic survey (and before being asked their opinion about the main dependent variable), the questionnaire asked (Q.1.6 and Q.1.7) respondents about their support concerning recent federal political issues, including the budget and plans to relocate thousands of Syrian refugees to Canada.

Fletcher et al.'s (2009) examination of declining public support for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan found that Canadians who adhered to a "peacekeeping" orientation were less likely to support the military mission than those in the so-called "realist" camp who prefer to see Canada's military used primarily for combat. Also of note, "more knowledgeable" and "emotional" Canadians were found to be the most supportive of the mission (Fletcher et al. 2009: 920). These findings are in keeping with Chong and Druckman's (2007) conclusions about the greater impact of media frames on knowledgeable individuals. Moreover, Canadians' attitudes towards "peacekeeping" conform with Druckman's (2001) position that frame adoption is more likely when the message is congruous with deep personal beliefs — and especially when they come from credible sources, such as government officials. This research assumed that predispositions amongst Canadians — the so-called division between the "peacekeeping" and "realist" camps — about the country's military were likely central to opinion formation about the war. To that end, this population-based survey experiment asked respondents (before being asked about their opinions concerning the main dependent variable) to first classify themselves according to their preference for the use of Canada's armed forces.

**Q1.8:** Some people believe Canadian armed forces should focus on combat. Others, however, believe Canadian armed forces should be focused on peacekeeping. What do you think should be the main focus of Canadian armed forces?

The questionnaire then followed with a question asking respondents to choose between the two roles.

**Q1.9: If you have to choose between only armed combat and peacekeeping, what do you think should be the main focus of Canadian armed forces?**

*(1) Armed combat*      *(2) Peacekeeping*

Fletcher et al. (2009) also found that pride (emotion), knowledge and ideology played a significant role in determining how supportive Canadians were of their country's military mission in Afghanistan. To that end, a series of questions about pride in mission, political engagement and ideology followed the peacekeeping questions.

**Q1.10:** Between 2006-2011, thousands of Canadian troops were in combat in the southern region of Afghanistan. Thinking back on that time, how do you feel about Canada's military efforts in that south Asian country (with one being not proud and 10 being very proud)?

1 to 10 (tap and drag)

**Q1.11: Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?**

1 to 10 (tap and drag)

**Q1.12:** In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the scale below, where 1 is left and 10 is right?

1 to 10 (tap and drag)

Again, in an effort to make this study’s population-based survey experiment feel more like an authentic online survey, questions Q1.13 and Q1.14 mirrored the typical *horse race* polling question, asking respondents who they would vote for today and who they voted for in the 2015 federal election (see Appendix Three). Q.15 to Q.19 attempt to assess respondents’ knowledge about Canadian politics and current events (see Appendix Three). The sum of the right answers divided by the total number of questions (five) produced a knowledge score for use as an

independent variable to assess the impact of knowledge on the main dependent variable. After these questions, the survey then transitioned to its main purpose: seeking to determine the potential influence of government and military framing and journalistic fact checking on audiences.

### **3.15. Stimuli /Treatment**

Participants (randomly and almost equally assigned to the five groups detailed above) were exposed to one news article incorporating the media frames described above. (Respondents in the control group were not exposed to a news treatment.) Respondents in the treatment groups were told that in an effort to refresh their memory, they would have to read a short representative news story concerning the war in Afghanistan (Pingree et al. 2012). Respondents assigned to the control group were offered only the most essential context (see Appendix Three).

Respondents assigned to the four other treatment groups were provided *fabricated* news samples that closely mirrored samples analyzed in the CA (Shen et al. 2004). The media samples or treatments serve three purposes: (1) to create media samples that strongly articulate the preferred media frames of government and military leaders; (2) allow the researcher to maximize the effectiveness of the experimental treatment and measure how frames resonate with audiences when journalists fact check those frames in the same news story; and (3) replicate a typical news report about the war to increase realism. Q3.1 (below) offered respondents an unchallenged security frame sponsored by Canada's defence minister. Q.4.1 (below) offers almost the exact same media treatment — but with a typical journalistic fact checking (in bold) identified by this research's content analysis.

**Security framed story (with no journalistic fact check) — Q3.1:** *Between 2006-2011, Canada assumed a combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission. In an effort to refresh your memory, please read the following short representative news story from that period. After you read the short news story, you'll be asked whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements.*

*KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The defence minister says Canadian soldiers are making the war-torn country of Afghanistan a “much safer” place. Peter MacKay toured a road construction project and a newly opened causeway over the Arghandab River during a*

*whirlwind three-day tour. “Kandahar is much safer now than it was before we arrived – and Canadian Forces are needed to restore this country’s security after decades of war,” said Peter MacKay. The defence minister says the reconstruction projects he visited would have been impossible had security in the volatile region of Kandahar not improved over the last year. MacKay adds Canadian Forces remain focused on training Afghan soldiers and police so they can handle security once coalition forces leave.*

*The following question asks whether you agree or disagree with the statement. Thinking about Canada’s combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission between 2006-2011, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I supported Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan.*

1. *Strongly disagree*
2. *Somewhat disagree*
3. *Slightly disagree*
4. *Slightly agree*
5. *Somewhat agree*
6. *Strongly agree*

**Security framed story (with journalistic fact check) — Q4.1:** *Between 2006-2011, Canada assumed a combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission. In an effort to refresh your memory, please read the following short representative news story from that period. After you read the short news story, you’ll be asked whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements.*

*KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The defence minister says Canadian soldiers are making the war-torn country of Afghanistan a “much safer” place. Peter MacKay toured a road construction project and a newly opened causeway over the Arghandab River during a whirlwind three-day tour. “Kandahar is much safer now than it was before we arrived – and Canadian Forces are needed to restore this country’s security after decades of war,” said Peter MacKay. The defence minister says the reconstruction projects he visited would have been impossible had security in the volatile region of Kandahar not improved over the last year. MacKay adds Canadian Forces remain focused on training Afghan soldiers and police so they can handle security once coalition forces leave. Yet, data from an independent security firm clearly shows that insurgent attacks have dramatically increased this year over last. Attacks have jumped 77 per cent from last year.*

*The following question ask whether you agree or disagree with the statement. Thinking about Canada’s combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military*

*mission between 2006-2011, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I supported Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.*

1. *Strongly disagree*
2. *Somewhat disagree*
3. *Slightly disagree*
4. *Slightly agree*
5. *Somewhat agree*
6. *Strongly agree*

### **3.16. Validity and Reliability**

To check validity and reliability of the fabricated media stories, a pre-test was conducted before the main data collection (Mutz 2011; Eaton and Visser 2008). The pre-test ( $n = 38$ ) assessed: (1) the possible power of the treatments; (2) if the news media treatments were valid and well conceived; and (3) if there are any other problems (clarity or technical) with the questionnaire. A post-survey questionnaire of all pre-test respondents found no concerns about the survey or its instructions. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the possible influence of fact checking on support for the war. There was a statistically significant influence of the independent variable (fact checking) on the dependent variable (support for the war) at the  $p < .05$  level amongst the five groups ( $F(4)(33) = 7.71$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), suggesting the media treatments had some influence on respondents. An analysis of the pre-test data also found a moderate uphill (positive) to a strong uphill (positive) linear (Pearson Correlation) relationship between the main dependent variable and the prompts included later in the questionnaire (see Table Five).

**Table 5 – Pre-test Prompt Correlations**

Main Dependent Variable	Prompt	Correlation Coefficient R
Control Support	Control Safe Prompt	.578*
Security Group One Support	Security Group One Safe Prompt	.696*
Security Group Two Support	Security Group Two Safe Prompt	.590*
Reconstruction Group One Support	Reconstruction Group One Reconstruction Prompt	.415*
Reconstruction Group Two Support	Reconstruction Group Two Reconstruction Prompt	.498*

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

There was also a statistically significant moderate uphill (positive) linear relationship ( $r (38) = .574$ ,  $p < .01$ .) between the main dependent support variable and the variation question (Q.7.4) asked at the end of the questionnaire, suggesting the treatment was resonated with respondents (Mutz 2011).

### 3.17. Ethics

Experiments occasionally require deception — and necessitate an honest and “carefully worded” explanation after the questionnaire was completed (Mutz 2011: 101). This research’s deception was short-lived and — frankly — not that different from actual media accounts during Canada’s military involvement in Afghanistan. The media treatments were based on a sample identified in the content analysis and only slightly modified to increase the treatment’s impact. The slight alteration is likely to have little lingering or consequential impact on respondents (Mutz 2011). “If participating in a science scientific study does not expose people to any greater deception or inaccuracy than watching [TV talk shows] (an activity that is not generally considered harmful, even for children), then it seems reasonable the benefits outweighed the risks, particularly if debriefing is possible” (Mutz 2011: 106).

In keeping with an honest debriefing, respondents received a message sharing information about the scope and purpose of the research. This message made clear that this research hopes to understand how media frames influence thinking about Canada’s role in Afghanistan. The

message informed participants that the news samples they read were based on real-world samples but manipulated slightly to create valid stimuli (see Appendix Three). Respondents were also provided an online link with information about the survey company's privacy policies. Having outlined this population-based survey experiment's design, I now wish to address who participated in this research – and how they were chosen.

### **3.18. Participants / Anonymity, Data Protection, Privacy and Treatment Assignment**

A representative sample of Canadians participated in this research's population-based survey experiment. The Toronto-based survey company Vox Pop Labs collected a pre-stratified sample ( $n = 1136$ ) from its online research panel<sup>33</sup>. The sample was balanced on gender, education, age, vote choice and region to match Canada's population characteristics (Mutz 2011). Participants could opt to take the survey in either French or English. Panel respondents were initially recruited as part of an online national voter engagement tool administered by Vox Pop. Vote Compass is marketed by its Vox Pop and its media partner, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, as “an educational tool developed by political scientists designed to help you explore how you fit in Canada's political landscape” (Vote Compass 2016: np). After participating in the voter engagement tool, respondents were asked to supply their e-mail if they wished to participate in further online surveys.

Panel respondents receive no incentive for participation in surveys — and have the option of declining any surveys. Vox Pop's online panel response rate, with one e-mail prompt, averages 18 per cent (Kerr 2016). Given that Canada's major combat role in Afghanistan ended in late 2011, respondents younger than the age of 23 were not able to participate in the population-based survey experiment.

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<sup>33</sup> A random sample of 1,000 Canadians is considered standard and representative. The precision of this online population-based survey is consistent with a similar telephone survey — and data is measured using confidence intervals (Simpson 2012). Where appropriate, this research reports the confidence intervals. As an average, this research's data has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 points.

For privacy reasons, I only received aggregate — non-identifying — data from the survey company<sup>34</sup>. Vox Pop stores all of its data in an encrypted — password-protected — data base and restricts its use to business requirements including, but not necessarily limited to: (1) research and analysis; (2) panel studies; (3) audience segmentation; (4) technical processing; and (5) addressing of queries, technical problems or complaints. The survey company does not sell its panel's contact information to third parties. Having outlined how respondents were recruited, I now wish to detail who participated in my population-based survey experiment.

### **3.19. Respondents' Demographics**

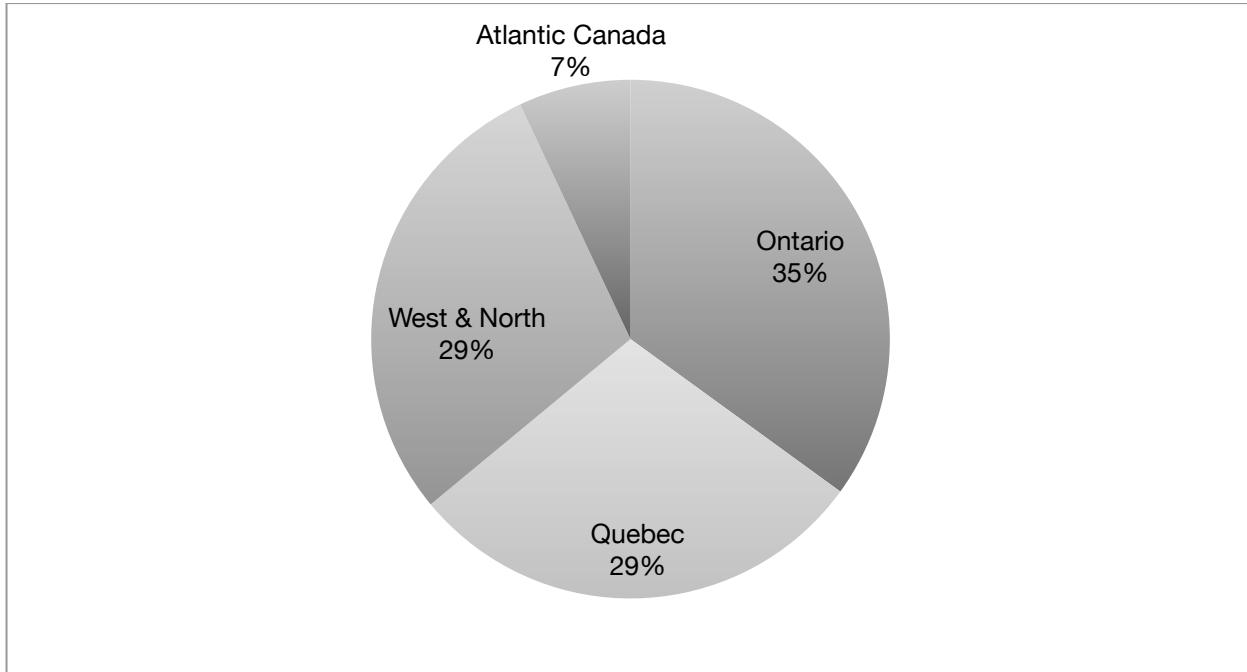
Demographics, such as age, sex, education, income and region, can have an important influence on people's political opinions (McCombs et al. 2011). This section sketches a picture of the Canadians who responded to this study's population-based survey experiment. As I noted earlier, 1,131 Canadians participated in this study's population-based survey experiment. The average age of respondents was 55. There was an overrepresentation of male respondents (60.2% compared to 39.8%)<sup>35</sup>. Respondents came from all regions of Canada and closely align again with current Canada Census data concerning populations across the country (see Figure Seven).

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<sup>34</sup> Vox Pop's full privacy policy is available at: <http://voxpoplabs.com/privacy-policy/>

<sup>35</sup> To compensate for the predominance of male respondents, all frequencies reported in this research are weighted to align with the most recent Canadian census data (49.5% male / 50.5% females). Gender weighting is not used for any inferential statistics in this research.

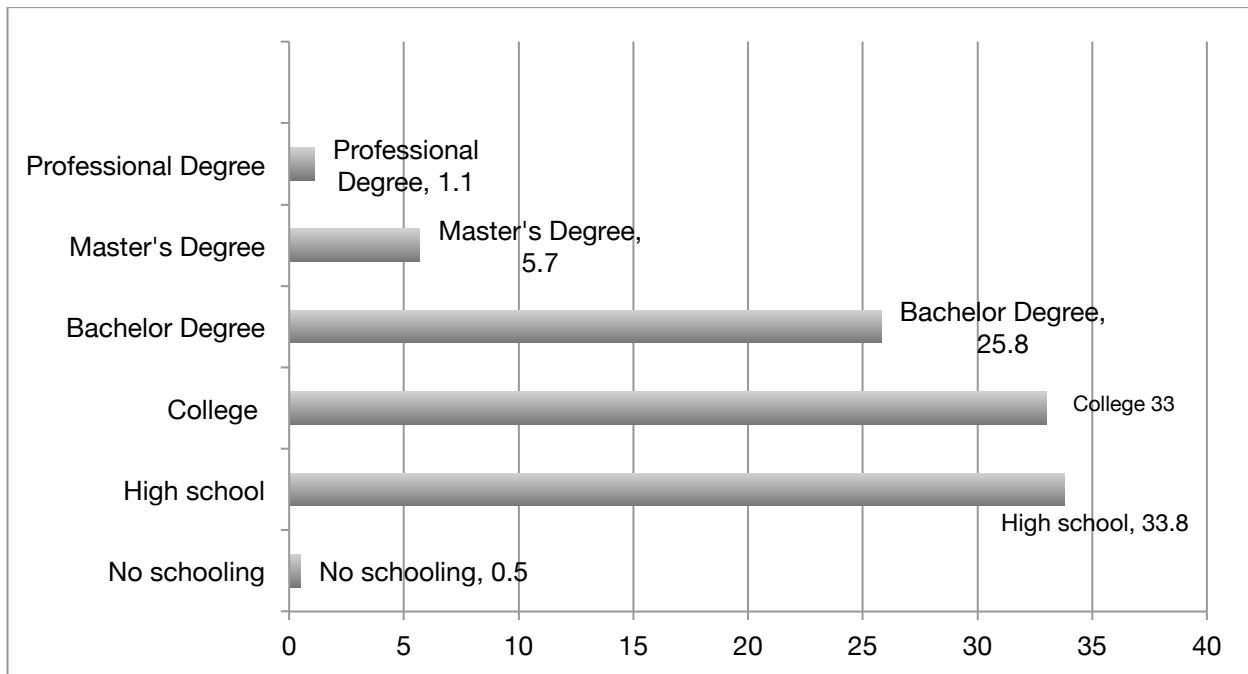
**Figure 7 – Regional Response Breakdown**



(n = 1,131)

This population-based survey experiment captured a well-educated sample. More than half of this study's respondents completed a college education or a bachelor's degree (see Figure Eight for a complete breakdown of education levels).

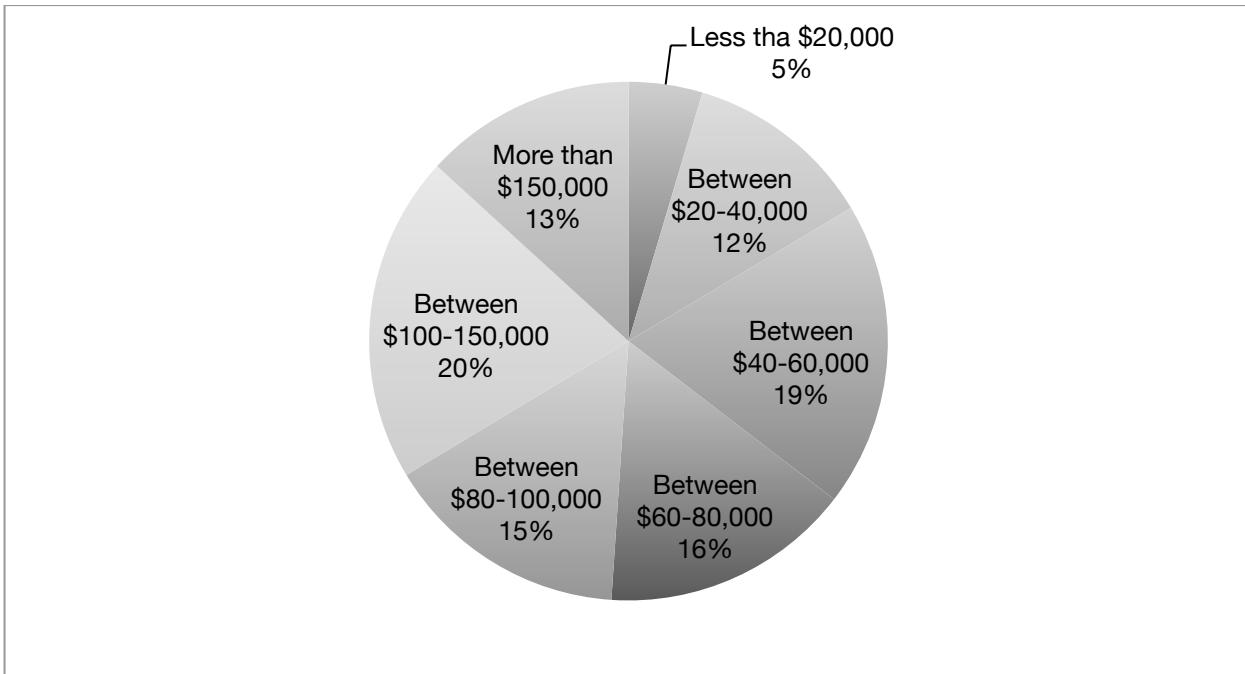
**Figure 8 – Education Levels**



(n = 1,131)

More than half (54.4%) of respondents were employed (full-time, part-time or self-employed) or in school. Six per cent of respondent were unemployed. Nearly four in ten (39.1%) respondents were retired when they participated in the population-based survey experiment in the fall of 2016. On average, most respondents were middle class, earning a median income between \$60-80,000 CAD (see Figure Nine for a complete picture of the income levels of respondents). Notably, respondents were somewhat informed about Canadian institutions and politics, with more than two-thirds getting three out of five knowledge questions correct ( $M = .6405$   $SD = .20888$ ). Yet, this study's statistical analysis found no statistically significant associations between individual's knowledge score and other variables under the microscope in this research.

**Figure 9 – Income Levels**



(n = 1,131)

Notably, more than two-thirds (69.5%) of respondents indicated that they were somewhat (24.3%) or very interested (45.2%) in politics. Less than a third (30.4%) of respondents registered that they were not at all interested (18%) or not very interested (12.4%) in political matters. Respondents also self-identified as slightly more left (mean 4.7%) than right when asked to place themselves on the left/right spectrum of politics. This study's *horse race* political question found that four in ten (40.1%) of respondents, at the time, favoured voting for the ruling Liberal Party of Justin Trudeau (see Table Six for a complete breaking down of voter intentions).

**Table 6 — Partisan Support**

<b>Vote Intention</b>	<b>%</b>
Liberal Party	40.1
Conservative Party	22.9
New Democratic Party (NDP)	6.2
Green Party	3.6
Bloc Québécois Party	4.2
Other Party or Candidate	0.9
Do Not Know	13.4
No Intention to Vote	2.7
Intend to Spoil Ballot	5.4
Not Eligible to Vote	0.7

(n = 1,131)

Female respondents self-identified as more liberal than conservative than males when prompted to place themselves on a 10-point left/right spectrum,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1131) = 12.320$ ,  $p = .001$  (see Table Seven for a complete breakdown of percentages and counts).

**Table 7 - Gender Left/Right Ideology<sup>36</sup>**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Left — % / Count</b>	<b>Right — % / Count</b>
Female	71.1% / 320	28.9 / 130
Male	60.9 % / 415	39.1% / 266

(n = 1,131)

This research's findings correspond with other national survey data from around the same time this study's questionnaire was *in the field* in late September and early October 2016. In the

<sup>36</sup> For easier statistical analysis, the 10-point left/right scale was broken into two groups: one to five was grouped as left and six to 10 was grouped as right.

summer leading up to this population-based survey experiment, the Liberal Party averaged 47.3 per cent support in federal polls (Grenier 2016). Support for the ruling Liberals dropped over the fall of 2016, suggesting — perhaps — that this population-based survey picked up on the government’s falling support.

Overall, respondents scored low in terms of activism (participation in unions, demonstrating, signing petitions, etc.) with a mean score of 32 per cent. Nearly three-quarters (74.1%) of respondents indicated that they accessed news media several times a day. The remaining — almost quarter (24.8%) — of respondents reported accessing news media once a day or once a week. Newspapers (41.9%) were the main source of news, followed by radio (23.8%), television (17.6%), blogs and alternative news sources (9.9%), and social media (6.9%). Self-reporting media use is, however, problematic for researchers (Iyengar and McGrady 2007). The experimental treatment used in this research aims to overcome this deficiency. Having painted a picture of the respondents who participated in this research, I now wish to outline how I plan to analyze the population-based survey experiment data, before I address more issues concerning this method’s limitations.

### **3.20. Data Analysis**

As with this study’s CA, the analysis of this work’s population-based survey experiment was mindful of the debate surrounding causality. This research is grounded in attempting to highlight probabilistic relationships (Kellstedt and Whitten 2013). Statistical analysis is used to interpret the respondents’ answers (Fowler 2009; Groves et al. 2009; Bryman 2012; Fink 2013). As with the content analysis, this study’s analysis began with simple — but telling — frequencies. Inferential statistical analysis enables this work to make conclusions about the statistical significance of its findings — and most importantly, make determinations about the “real” differences between the media treatment groups in this research (Fink 2013: 115).

The data from this population-based survey also lends itself well to correlations between respondents and their responses. As chapter five details, this research aims to understand the differences between groups exposed to different media treatments. Inferential statistical

techniques such as the Pearson Chi-square and ANOVA are used to test this work’s research questions (Nordstokke et al. 2011). Chapter five concludes with a binary logistic regression model as a means to predict the confluence of statistically significant factors that potentially predict Canadians’ opinions about the war in Afghanistan. This type of analysis allowed me to consider “individual-level variations on relevant political dimensions” associated with experiential knowledge and popular wisdom (Berinksy 2009: 64). The conventional .05 level of significance is used in this research as an indication of statistical significance (Bryman 2012).

### **3.21. Limitations**

There are limits to this study’s population-based survey experiment, of course. Like traditional experiments, some scholars (Barabas and Jerit 2010) criticize survey experiments for not being *natural* and overestimating *effects* because the treatments are only temporary or “one-shot exposures” (Barnhurst and Mutz 1997: 150). Barabas and Jerit (2010: 226) concluded that researchers need to be cautious about knowledge claims “when extrapolating from survey experiments.” Other critics (Kinder 2007) contend that framing experiments, in particular, inflate their perceived influence because the message (or treatment) is blatant to respondents, priming their answers to survey questions.

Brewer and Gross (2010: 168) call on media and communication scholarship to turn to the “world outside” in search of the impact of media frames. This work attempts to overcome criticism of *laboratory effect* by embedding its experiment in a routine online survey. Moreover, this work enhances its external validity by exposing respondents to natural treatments. The content analysis, as I stressed before, informed the media samples that this study used as treatments.

To be sure, though, questions persist about whether experimental treatments are influenced by respondents’ attitudes and life experience (Mutz 2011). As well, media framing treatments may be unrealistic because frequently the influence of frames are often negated by competing frames in the real world (Sniderman and Theriault 2004). Mutz (2011: 152), however, insists that random assignment cancels out such “extraneous influences.” Moreover, as this research’s

theoretical foundation and analysis makes clear, media *effects* are definitely not a linear relationship – but likely a confluence of factors including media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential factors (Gamson 1992).

While surveys and this research's population-based survey experiment does offer insight into *what* respondents think, the method, admittedly, does not always provide a clear picture of *why* respondents feel or think a certain way. Compared to interviews or focus groups, surveys or online population-based survey experiments do not provide rich, descriptive detail about why people feel the way they do or the thought process that led them to their opinions (Bryman 2012). As well, population-based survey experiments are prone to missing data. Respondents in this research did not answer all the questions<sup>37</sup>. As well, I was not able to probe respondents about their opinions. There was no opportunity to scrutinize or explore the answers of respondents. Simply put, there was no follow-up with respondents about their answers. In my conclusion, I offer a number of thoughts about the research that can overcome the limitations of this research's findings.

As I noted in the introduction, I am also well aware of concerns about the reductionist qualities of surveys and experiments. Boiling complex public discourse down to statistics is not without its problems (Habermas 1974[1964]; Lewis 2001). It is also difficult to assess the true feelings of Canadians about their country's involvement in Afghanistan years after the military mission ended. Yet as chapter five argues, this research's experiment data does offer insight – consistent with theory and other empirical findings – into the factors that likely shaped Canadians' attitudes about the wars in Afghanistan. These factors, I contend, continue to influence current views about Canada's military – and represent meaningful insight into future overseas ventures for Canadian Forces. Moreover, my findings provide solid foundation for subsequent qualitative research that may yield more descriptive understandings of Canadians' opinions about their military and their international role. I detail that potential research trajectory also in my conclusion.

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<sup>37</sup> Thirty-six respondents were excluded from this research because they did not complete the entire survey.

### **3.22. Conclusion**

This chapter explained how both a content analysis and a population-based survey experiment are used to assess the research questions posed in the previous chapter. The content analysis helps to answer this research's questions surrounding the factors that influenced media coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. It evaluates the news media as a proxy of public discourse about the war in Afghanistan. This study's content analysis specifically measured four shaping variables: (1) framing; (2) news values; (3) fact checking; (4) and indexing. The analysis focused on how these factors potentially shaped news coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. Chapter four outlines the CA's main findings and offers a detailed discussion about this work's data.

This study's population-based survey experiment offers a means to test the potential influence of media messages and journalistic fact checking on Canadian news consumers. The survey data also helps to explain how a confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge best explains Canadians' attitudes concerning their military and its combat role in Kandahar. Chapter five details and analyzes the findings generated by this study's population-based survey experiment. The coming chapter turns to this research's content analysis findings and analysis.

## **Chapter Four: “But it is not getting any safer!”**

### **4.0. Introduction**

This chapter details and analyzes this research’s content analysis ( $n = 900$ ) findings. It answers this study’s first four research questions:

**R1.** How was Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan framed in the news media?

**R2.** What role did news values play in shaping news content?

**R3.** How do journalists (if at all) fact check the preferred media frames of the military and government leaders surrounding Canada’s military efforts in Afghanistan?

**R4.** What role does indexing play in shaping the news media’s coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan?

As I detailed in the introduction, Canadian government and military leaders attempted to strategically frame the media coverage of the war in Afghanistan. The “frame-building” process (de Vreese 2005: 52) surrounding the news coverage of Afghanistan involved both the external frames of government and military leaders as well as the internal framing factors of the news media. This research’s content analysis ( $n = 900$ ) offers insight into the mediated dynamic of framing Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan. The preferred frames of government and military officials are present in three-quarters of the news coverage of the war. My content analysis found scarce counter-hegemonic positions represented in the news coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan. This study’s data highlights that while journalists overwhelmingly indexed their news and analysis to elite sources, they frequently *fact checked* the frames sponsored by government and military leaders. To do this, journalists largely used elite criteria and the stated goals of officials to critique or impeach the media frames of military and government leaders. Moreover, much of the fact checking focused on the government and military’s execution of its policies, such as making Kandahar safer. Events in Afghanistan,

especially the deteriorating security, I argue, spurred journalists to fact check the frames — and especially the improving security frame — sponsored by government and military leaders. In terms of a contribution, this research challenges, in part, the indexing norm (Bennett 1990), adding more evidence to the argument supporting an events-driven conceptualization of news media counter-framing (Wolfsfeld 1997; Baum and Groeling 2010a; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Porpora et al. 2010; Speer 2017). This research's findings also support arguments surrounding news media coverage being bounded by elite debate (Hall 1980; Hallin 1986; Bennett 1990; Entman 1991; Schudson 2001). This research's data also suggests that most of the coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan was episodic and event-oriented rather than thematic and contextual.

For the sake of simplicity and coherence, this chapter blends both its research findings and its analysis. The data is presented first, followed by a discussion. In an effort to address my first research question about how Canada's military mission in Kandahar was framed in the news media, this chapter starts by outlining and interpreting the focus of the Canadian news media's coverage of Afghanistan. After that, I take on my second research question concerning the shaping quality of news values on reporting and analysis about the conflict. From there, I assess my third research question concerning how journalists fact checked the media frames sponsored by government and military officials. I conclude this chapter by examining the role indexing played in shaping the news coverage of the war in Afghanistan. As a means of structuring and theoretically grounding this chapter's data and analysis, I use the three levels of Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of influences model that I outlined in my theory chapter (see Table Eight).

**Table 8 — Three Levels of the Hierarchy of Influences Model**

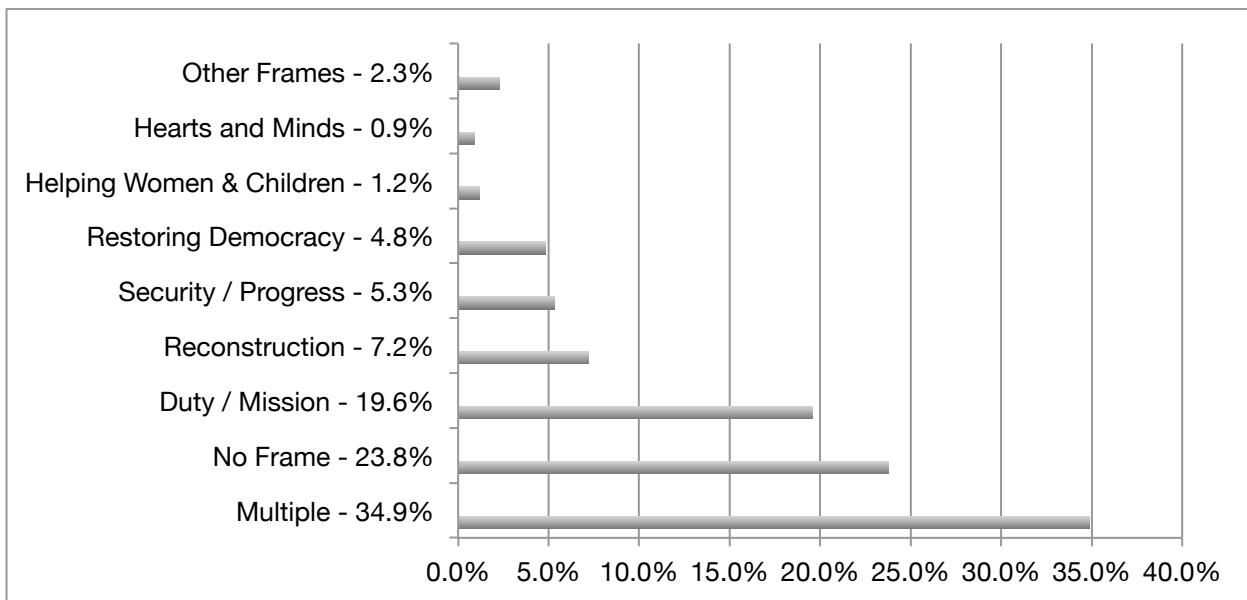
Level	Definition	News Media Shaping Value or Phenomenon
Social System	Ideology	Ideology / Horizon of Possibility Framing Normative Conceptions of Journalism
Routines and Practices	Rules, Habits, Forms, Methods and Patterns	Counter-framing and Fact checking News values
Social Institution	Institutions	Embedding journalists with military Indexing

#### **4.1. Framing and Focus of News Media Coverage of the War in Afghanistan**

The coming pages address this work's first research question: **(R1)** How was Canada's military mission in Afghanistan framed in the news media?

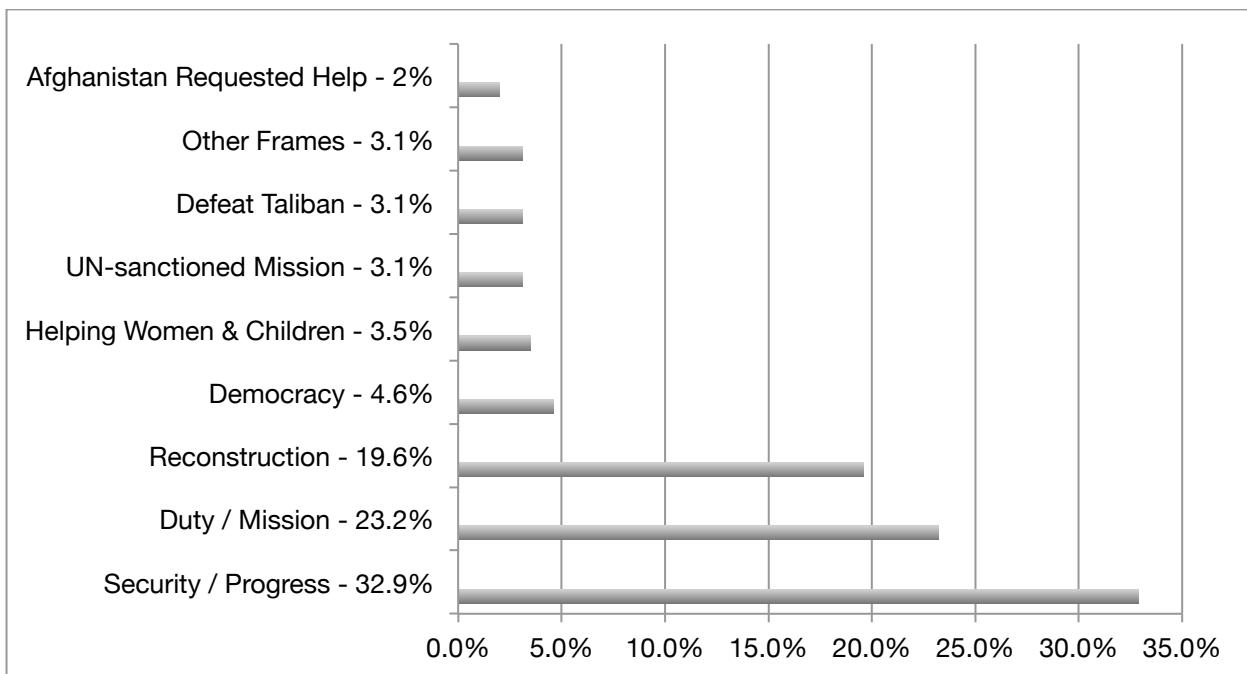
As outlined in the introduction, and detailed more thoroughly in the preceding methods chapter, the government and military officials clearly attempted to *systematically* author the media messages coming out of its officials' mouths. Not surprisingly then, the media frames sponsored by government and military leaders are present at least once in 76.4 per cent of the news media coverage about the conflict in Afghanistan (see Figure 10). This research's content analysis counted multiple frames in one-third (34.9 %) of all the coverage of the war in Afghanistan (see Figure 11). News and commentary about the war in Afghanistan frequently, for instance, coupled reconstruction with safety and security frames (49.7%),  $c^2(1, N = 900) = 187.136, p = .001$ . A *National Post* story, for example, links redevelopment with security, quoting an expert as saying “[y]ou just cannot have reconstruction and development unless there's security. It all works together”(Goodspeed 2007: np).

**Figure 10 - Government / Military Frame**



(n = 900)

**Figure 11 – Multiple Preferred Government / Military Frames**



(n = 1,003)

By means of an example, a 2006 column in *The Globe and Mail* entitled “Are we mice or men?” highlights a number of preferred government and military media frames, exhorting MPs debating an extension to the military mission to view the conflict as an ethical obligation or duty. The editorial (which is worth quoting at some length) argues that the “evil” insurgents must be resisted with force.

“For years, our representatives have stood at podiums around the world to preach Canada’s commitment to peace, democracy, justice, women’s rights and a better deal for the poor. Afghanistan is the place to put our money where our mouth is. If we shirk our duty there, then all the fine speeches about how “the world needs more Canada” are nothing but talk.

Afghanistan needs more Canada in the worst way. Its struggle to recover from decades of civil war, foreign occupation and tyranny is under threat from a resurgent Taliban and their allies in terror. Canada and its partners in the international stabilization force are the only thing keeping hope for that recovery alive.

Canada’s mission has two aims: The first is to help Afghans rebuild their country and create a working representative government. The second is to repel those, like the Taliban, who seek to derail that effort and put the country in medieval chains again” (Gee 2006: np)

As the example above makes plain, multiple frames sponsored by government and military leaders showed up — mixed together — in the new coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Government and military leaders frequently framed their media messages about the military mission in terms of progress surrounding goals such as improving security and helping to redevelop Afghanistan. In 2008, for example, Defence Minister Peter MacKay lauded the momentum and success of Canadian Forces during a visit to Kandahar.

“We’re seeing roads being built, bridges completed in areas where, because of the security situation and concerns, those projects couldn’t have occurred just a year ago,” MacKay told journalists in Afghanistan” (Moore 2008: np).

Notably, the defence minister dismissed a United Nations report released that week suggesting a rise in insurgent activity when challenged by journalists. “Of course the insurgency remains a real challenge,” MacKay conceded.

“But you have to look at it in relative terms. You have to do a retrospective occasionally, look at where we were five short years ago, two years ago and then gauge what some of these reports are saying. By North American standards, there’s obviously a lot of work to

do. By Afghan standards, I would suggest they've come a long way and they're continuing to make very positive steps forward" (Moore 2008: np).

Later on in this chapter, in the section concerning fact checking, I outline how progress — achieving the government and military's stated goals surrounding improving security — became a proxy, of sorts, by which journalists fact checked the stated goals of government and military leaders.

#### **4.2. Little Counter-framing or Counter-hegemonic Coverage**

Only a small fraction (2.7%) of the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan was found to be counter-hegemonic (Pratt 2004). Notably, as well, the news media's coverage of the war in Afghanistan was overwhelmingly (90%) episodic compared to thematic (10%). This research's content analysis discovered few critiques of militarism and Canada's combat role in Afghanistan. Independent of the prevalent fact checking of government and military framing of the conflict, which I address later in this chapter, the news media rarely questioned hegemonic positions concerning war and foreign affairs. The reporting and analysis that was counter-hegemonic mostly highlighted numerous concerns about human rights and the treatment of Afghan detainees (73%). Writing for *The Globe and Mail* about turning Afghan detainees over for torture, columnist Rick Salutin (2009) charged that the practice would spark recrimination among Muslims and inspire more terrorism.

"By attacking and occupying two Muslim countries instead of selectively pursuing a small band of terrorists, decision-makers caused great, mounting danger to their own people, as well as devastating two societies. They must have known these would be the results. I have never been able to believe they didn't realize it. They went ahead because the gains to be made outweighed in their minds the costs.

In the case of the United States, the gains might have been in terms of oil, as well as ideology. In the case of Canada, the stakes may be pettier: to curry favour with the U.S. or rebuild what was seen as a wrecked military.

Who really cares? It ought to have been foreseen and probably was. No good could come of this war" (Salutin 2009: np).

Salutin was not alone — but his forceful questions about the rationale for the war, as this research's analysis of the Canadian news media found, were rare. Most of the coverage, as I will

argue in the coming section, conformed to hegemonic positions and the “sphere of consensus” (Hallin 1986: 117) concerning Canadian foreign policy and the country’s military role in Afghanistan.

#### **4.3. Episodic Focus of Coverage**

As noted above, nine in 10 stories were episodic or driven by events. Nearly six in 10 (58.3%) stories or commentaries about the conflict in Afghanistan focused on combat, death and injuries, military equipment and reconstruction and Canada’s development effort. Eighteen per cent of the coverage equated Canadian soldiers and the military mission to a heroic or noble effort. Nearly four in 10 (38.9%) of the sponsors of this noble and heroic framing originated with government and military sources,  $c^2(9, N = 900) = 286.748$ ,  $p = .001$ . As well, journalists themselves (17.9%) also framed soldiers in these brave terms in some of their coverage,  $c^2(9, N = 900) = 286.748$ ,  $p = .001$ . Of note, the majority of this framing came in editorials or commentaries (27.4%), Letters to the editor (13.8 %) and features (37.5%). Only 16.6 per cent of news coverage suggested soldiers or the mission was brave or heroic,  $c^2(3, N = 900) = 10.468$ ,  $p = .017$ .

Nearly a quarter (23.6%) of the coverage framed the conflict in a moral tone. That is, the military mission was framed as a sacrifice or an effort elevated to a duty to *help* Afghanistan or part of Canada’s international effort in the *war on terror*. In a media sample from the fall of 2007, for instance, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said Canada had “a moral responsibility [in Afghanistan] (CBC 2007). Of note, most (84.8%) of the moral framing appeared in editorials, commentaries or letters to the editor, suggesting editorial writers, columnists and members of the public adopted the preferred media frames of government and military leaders,  $c^2(3, N = 900) = 50.219$ ,  $p = .001$ . Again — not surprisingly — nearly three in 10 (29.8%) of this *moral talk* was sponsored by government and military leaders,  $c^2(7, N = 900) = 248.984$ ,  $p = .001$ . Having outlined this research’s data concerning hegemonic media framing, I now transition to offering an analysis of my findings.

#### 4.4. Analysis: Social System Level – Influences on News Coverage

In line with Shoemaker and Reese's (2013) hierarchy of influences model, this work's data highlights the shaping imprint of the social system or ideology on the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. This research's data reveals scant truly counter-hegemonic representations that actively created "an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society in preparation for political change" (Pratt 2004: 332). The news content surrounding combat operations in Kandahar was clearly shaped by dominant ideology (Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Hallin 1994; Gitlin 2003 [1980]; King and Wells 2009). The "ideological environment" surrounding the war pervaded the news coverage, producing a largely hegemonic interpretation of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan in the reporting and analysis about the war (Hall 1982: 65). There is clear evidence that views outside the usual elite consensus were excluded from the news media's representation of the conflict (Hallin 1986; Bennett 1990; Entman and Rojecki 1993), resulting in the "triumph of establishment perspectives — the status quo — in political discourse, and the acceptance of the ruling elite's worldview as "common sense"" (King and Wells 2009: 17). To be sure, as the coming section on sources and indexing also makes clear, critics of the war (counter-hegemonic voices) were conspicuously absent from the news media account of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. My research's data adds to the evidence that the news media largely adheres to the "sphere of legitimate consensus" (Hallin 1986: 117) when covering war.

Analogous to Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony, Canada's governing Conservative Party and the military officials subordinate to them — using sophisticated public relation techniques (Brown 2003) — attempted to articulate a *common sense* view about the war in Afghanistan. As I spelled out in my first chapter, government and military leaders (through the media) tried to systematically define a way of talking publicly about Canada's military role in Afghanistan. Stephen Harper telegraphed this *horizon* repeatedly. Remember, the day after securing a minority Parliament in the 2006 general election, the prime minister-designate lauded the Canadian soldiers deploying to Kandahar, calling them courageous defenders of democracy (Kirton 2006: 37).

Months later, in a House of Commons debate about extending the mission, Harper linked Canada's military role in Kandahar to the global *war on terrorism*.

"The events of Sept. 11, 2001 was a wake-up call, not just to Americans but to people in all free and democratic nations. Two dozen Canadians were killed as result of the attacks on the twin towers. Canada is not safe from such attack, and we will never be safe from such attacks as long as we're a society that defends freedom and democracy" (CBC 2006d: np).

Flowing from the limited *horizon* of what is "sayable" about war and foreign policy, government and military leaders produced media frames to talk about the war in the news media (Laclau 2006: 114). Media frames, such as *helping to make Kandahar safer*, were used to "temporarily fix meaning and ways of understanding" to advance the political agenda of garnering public support for the combat operation (Cammaerts 2016: 30). As my research's data shows, Harper and other government and military officials succeeded, in part, in getting the news media to echo and amplify their preferred media framing of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Ideology or the *horizon* clearly influenced how the war in Afghanistan and Canada's military was framed in news coverage. Moreover, it is important to note that the government and military's media frames were stripped of their ideological tone and infused with a *common sense* value (van Dijk, 2008). *Canadian Forces were helping to restore democracy and helping women and children*. Journalists, arguably, internalized the frames sponsored by elites, *naturalizing* their rhetoric and endowing it with a common sense (Reese and Lewis 2009: 777; see also Schudson 2002). As Althusser (1984: 49) contends, the impact of ideology results in "the practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by ideology." "Common sense tends to be articulated as objective truth and as rational, and thus as anti-ideological" (Cammaerts, 2015: 5). To be sure, the government and military's *common sense* media frames, exclude "alternative" — counter-hegemonic — understandings of war (Jackson 2005: 178).

Many academics and experts were, though, offering counter-hegemonic interpretations of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan early on in the conflict. International law expert Michael Byers (2006: np) told Members of Parliament and Senators soon after combat operations in Kandahar started in 2006 that Afghanistan "was the wrong mission for Canada", arguing that Canadian foreign policy should concentrate on peacekeeping instead. Academics

also questioned Canada's tactics in Afghanistan (Greaves 2008), while others doubted whether NATO countries such as Canada were equipped to deal with Afghanistan's counter-insurgency, concluding the military organization's "expectations of success were not realistic" (Kay and Khan 2007: 163). Furthermore, a number of aid agencies also publicly chastised Canada for its focus on combat over reconstruction and development (Kairos 2007)<sup>38</sup>. Counter-narratives and arguments contrasting the government and military's preferred media framing of the conflict were publicly available. Despite this, my research's data clearly underscores that the news media offered few counter-hegemonic interpretations of the Canada's military mission in Afghanistan, sticking instead, for the most part, to the usual events-oriented coverage that focused its critiques on assessing the progress of government and military framing of the conflict.

There was far too much episodic coverage and not enough thematic coverage, questioning and challenging hegemonic understandings of Canada's involvement in the conflict and the political economy of war (Keen 2011). Most of the news coverage, as this content analysis found "reproduce[d] the attitudes of the powerful" (Fowler 1991: 23), raising questions about journalism's supposed normative role as a watchdog in democracy if the coverage of Afghanistan mostly echoed elite positions. All too frequently, though, there are normative discrepancies between the *what ought to be* and the *what is*, as Gramsci (1971: 172) observed.

This work's data highlights how larger macro or structural forces such as the interests of the military and the industries that support it were not widely challenged in the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. The media's bias for violence over non-violence is clear (Roach 1993). After all, the "news media [are] not well disposed to peace. The war correspondent has no equivalent peace correspondent..." (Spencer 2005: 1; see also Carruthers 2011: 32). To be sure, the coverage of the conflict failed "to identify the metanarratives or grand strategies that explain the link between different wars over extended periods of time" (Boyd-Barrett 2004b: 25). Because the news and commentary about

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<sup>38</sup> The Harper government halted spending on Kairos in 2009 because of the aid group's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some leaders of Kairos suspect the aid organization was politically targeted and then audited by Canada Revenue Agency (Curry 2014).

Afghanistan was largely episodic and lacked thematic values such as context (Saideman 2016), critical assessments were, therefore, absent from the coverage of the conflict (Lewis et al. 2006). As Lewis (2004: 308) concluded about the news coverage of Iraq, much of the reporting and analysis about the war in Afghanistan was also “focused on [the] progress of the war at the expense of broader contextual issues.” Aligned with Iyengar’s thinking (1991: 137), the episodic news coverage produced by Canadian journalists, arguably, “trivialize[ed] … public discourse” – and allowed the news to become a “spokes[person] for dominant groups and their ideology.” Additionally, the predominance of episodic coverage, presumably, silenced important critical questions about war in mediated public discourse. “There is not one but many silences,” Foucault (1990: 27) argues, “and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.” This privileging — through absence — also represents an intangible power that is “most effective when least observable” (Lukes 2005 [1974]: 1).

Because of the predominance of events-oriented coverage, government and military leaders were, arguably, able to more easily define and frame the war and Canada’s role in making it appear natural.

“[T]hose who run the dominant institutions secure their power in large measure directly and *indirectly*, by impressing their definitions of the situation upon those they rule, and, if not usurping the whole of ideological space, still significantly limiting what is thought through society” (Gitlin 2003 [1980]: 10; italics in original).

It is beyond the scope of a content analysis to understand why journalists conformed to hegemonic interpretations of the war. Yet, the literature suggests that journalists, fearing *flack* from elites, frequently produce content in line with dominant ideology because they fear the *flack* that inevitably comes from not conforming to hegemony (Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]). To be sure, Canadian journalists knew they were being watched by government and military leaders (Pugliese 2009). There were clear rules about what journalists could report. Some journalists were even kicked out of the embedding program for breaking the rules (ABC 2006). It is a fair assumption that journalists policed themselves, ultimately echoing and amplifying the preferred media frames of government and military officials. After all, there are limits of journalistic critique – and things the news media dare not question because “news routines are skewed toward representing demands, individuals, and frames which do not

fundamentally contradict *the dominant hegemonic principles* (Gitlin 2003 [1980]: 270-71; original in italics).

With respect to public relations and spin, this research's data highlights how government media messages influence journalists and the coverage they produce (Cook 1998; Meyer 2002; Graber 2003; Carruthers 2011). Government and military leaders relied on public relations techniques to frame the war in an effort to advance their political agenda. There are normative implications related to this political communication. As the section on fact checking later in this chapter shows, government and military leaders often inflated or hyped the progress Canadian Forces were making in Kandahar. This torqued spin left journalists definitely less trusting of officials (DeCillia 2009). The next chapter also argues the spin may have left many in the public cynical about the government and military's intention concerning Afghanistan.

This research's data suggests the ideological environment in which news media content are produced limits and constrains the coverage journalists produce about war (McCullagh 2002: 53). With respect to my first research question (**R1**), I conclude that Canada's military mission in Afghanistan was framed largely in the news media in hegemonic terms. This research adds to the existing evidence supporting the shaping power of ideology on news content (Hall et al. 1978; Gitlin 2003 [1980]; Hallin 1994; Shudson 2001; Shoemaker and Reese 2014). This evidence, of course, raises questions about journalism's normative watchdog role in democracy, which I address near the end of this chapter. First, though, I need to presage that discussion about journalism and democracy by presenting and analyzing this study's findings concerning news values and fact checking and indexing.

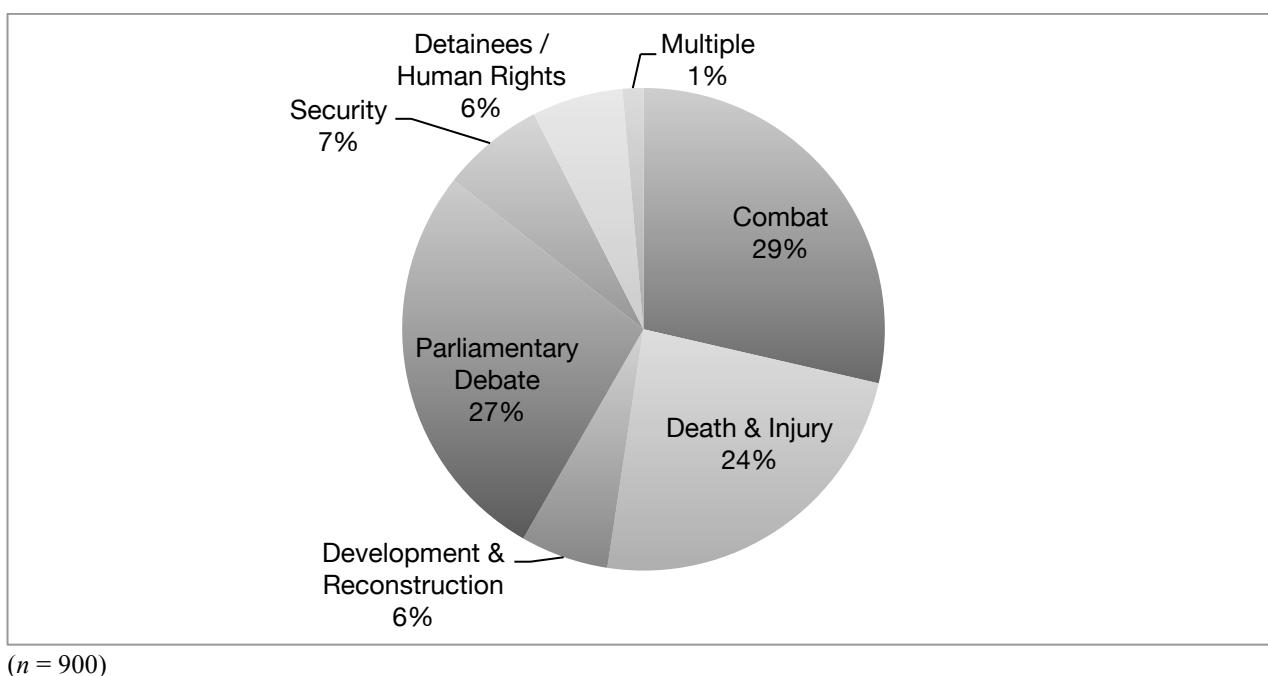
#### 4.5. News Values Influence

This section focuses on this study's second research question: (**R2**) what role did news values play in shaping news content?

As I noted in the previous section, 90 per cent of the coverage was episodic. This content analysis only found that one in ten stories was thematic. The news coverage of Canada's

military mission in Afghanistan was overwhelmingly driven by events. The focus of the reporting and analysis was trained largely on combat, death and injuries, military equipment and reconstruction and development efforts, comprising nearly six in ten (58.3%) stories or commentaries about the conflict (see Figure 12). The protracted parliamentary debate about when Canadian Forces should leave Kandahar accounts for more than a quarter (27.3%) of the focus of the news media coverage of Afghanistan. Almost three in ten (29%) of the stories and commentaries about the conflict in Afghanistan spotlighted personal stories about Canadian soldiers serving in Kandahar. More than three-quarters (76.9 %) of the entire coverage of the conflict highlights the violence in Afghanistan. (The coming analysis provides a number of examples to paint a fuller picture of these findings.)

**Figure 12 – Focus of News Coverage**



#### 4.6. Analysis: News Values Influence

Journalists covering the war in Afghanistan clearly favoured some stories over others. Event-driven stories about combat, death and injuries were the focus of near six in ten stories and commentaries about the war. Akin to Galtung and Ruge's (1965) understanding of news values, this work's content analysis found that certain stories — certain narratives — were clearly prized

over others. Three news values (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 171) definitely imprinted a shaping power on the news media's reporting and analysis of the war, with a clear focus on: (1) timeliness; (2) conflict and controversy; and (3) human interest.

The episodic coverage detected by this research's content analysis is, of course, consistent with the timeliness imperative of news (Fowler 1991). The growth of 24-hour online publications and the increasing demands of profit-motivated news, has increased the demands for more content (McChesney 2002; McChesney and Nichols 2010). As a result, journalists are increasingly focused on events. It stands to reason then that stories about combat, death and injuries became staples of the news media coverage of the war in Afghanistan between 2006-2009. There is, of course, the "obvious appeal" of the "drama of conflict" (Tumber and Webster 2006: 16). As this content analysis found, ramp ceremonies<sup>39</sup>, whereby an honour guard carries the remains of a dead soldier to a waiting plane on the Kandahar Airfield, were featured prominently in the news media. The repatriation ceremonies often led TV and radio news bulletins. Moreover, the solemn occasions lent themselves to vivid narratives:

"Eight young men, some of them with their own battle wounds, carried the coffin of the 131st Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan to the cargo plane that will carry his body back to his loved ones in Canada.

The ramp ceremony held at dusk here Friday was much like the many that preceded it. But, for the troops who were closest to Private Jonathan Couturier, it was an evening of intense grief.

They hugged and wiped tears from their eyes after bidding goodbye to their 23-year-old comrade - a soldier who was remembered by his commanding officer as polite, helpful, and someone who "wouldn't kill a spider" (Galloway 2009: np).

To be sure, this study's data underscores that there was a clear stress in the Canadian news media between 2006-2009 on narratives (Uko 2007) or "narrativity" (Jacobs 1996: 373) that framed Canadian soldiers and the military mission as heroic or noble.

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<sup>39</sup> Embedded journalists complained constantly that their main purpose at the Kandahar Airfield was *death watch* (Bergen 2009). Even during my own time as an embedded reporter, numerous editors and news executives told me that they did not want me off the base too much in case I missed the death of a Canadian soldier.

The news values of conflict and controversy were also prominent in the coverage. An abundance of news coverage about the conflict highlighted the precarious security in Afghanistan, conforming with journalism's emphasis on tension (Uko 2007) and the so-called negative (Sabato 1991; Patterson 1996; Capella and Hall Jamieson 1997; Baum and Groeling 2010b). Moreover, the ongoing political debate amongst MPs about extending Canada's military mission in Afghanistan represented nearly a third of the coverage about the combat operation — and corresponds well with the news media's focus on *horse race* politics and process over policy (Bennett 2012).

To be sure, elite disagreement — and inter-party disagreement, especially (Baum and Groeling 2010a) — is a staple of political news coverage and the Canadian news media diligently highlighted the disagreement about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan within the Liberal Party. Similarly, the controversy over the treatment of Afghan detainees — and disagreement amongst Canadian politicians over prisoners — also highlights the news media's propensity to highlight conflict (Baum and Groeling 2010a). Journalists aimed their spotlight on the political debate between Canadian MPs, reflecting the "sphere of legitimate controversy" (Hallin 1986: 117). Opposition politicians naturally criticized the government's secretive and evasive answers concerning the military's transfer of captured insurgents to Afghan prisons were torture was likely happening. The news media, in turn, dutifully reported on the controversy. For instance, in early 2008, after it emerged that Canadian Forces had stopped their practice of handing battlefield detainees over to Afghan authorities that were known to torture prisoners, opposition MPs accused the government of a cover-up. News accounts from the time (as below) highlighted the conflict:

"The bombshell revelation spells more trouble for the minority Conservatives who were already under fire for what the independent panel called governments' lack of "candour" surrounding the mission.

Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion said the revelations prove Harper's government has been misleading Canadians about the military's handling of Afghan detainees" (MacCharles and Campion-Smith 2008: np).

Controversy was not the only news value that underpinned much of the coverage. Correspondents covering the war in Afghanistan also spotlighted the human interest and personal side of the war as well.

My CA found clear focus in the reporting and analysis on the personal or human-interest aspects of the war. There were numerous stories, for instance, about Canada's largest coffee and baked goods chain, Tim Hortons, operating in Kandahar. There were even stories when the iconic Canadian fast food restaurant ran out of doughnuts (CBC 2006e). This research's CA also discovered a clear emphasis on the personal heroics of Canadian soldiers serving in Kandahar. A *Globe and Mail* column in April of 2007, for instance, extols the bravery of 24-year-old private Jess Larochelle with the 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment:

“Of the many who behaved with courage and grace on Oct. 14, the day that a little fortified position called Strong Point Centre was attacked by the Taliban, probably no one else was spoken of with quite the same head-shaking admiration that accompanied the mere mention of Larochelle’s name.

This was a function of the grit and hard-headedness he had demonstrated but also of his tender years – he was, as his platoon commander Lieutenant Ray Corby later described him, this baby-faced kid who had just held it all together so magnificently.

When the Taliban attacked that Saturday, it was in a disciplined way and from multiple directions, using RPG fire and a heavy volume of small arms. Pte. Larochelle was alone in an OP, or observation post, in a defensive position on a hill where the Light Armoured Vehicle couldn’t go. Lt. Corby saw an RPG hit the OP and assumed the worst.

He conducted himself in exemplary fashion this day too, but by the time he was able to make it up to the OP to check on the lone soldier – Lt. Corby was only three weeks into the job as the 9 Platoon boss and one of his sections had just returned from leave – his gnawing concern appeared to be well-founded. The first time he called out, there was no answer. “The second time I yelled, I saw this little head pop up,” he said.

It was Pte. Larochelle, who in short order gave Lt. Corby covering fire so he could jump in the OP safely, then calmly briefed him on what he’d been doing – firing at the attacking enemy to the west with the machine gun and rocket launchers, then turning his back to the enemy and firing to the eastern flank to protect it.

Pte. Larochelle was almost out of ammo, and, as Lt. Corby said, would have been forgiven if in the circumstances he’d stopped firing and ducked down. But he never did” (Blatchford 2007b: np).

Akin to much of the coverage of the second Gulf War (Reese 2004: 249), whereby embedded journalists focused extensively on the story of soldiers and the “face of troops”, Canadian journalists in Afghanistan similarly concentrated much of their coverage on the *courageous*

military men and women serving in Afghanistan. Without a doubt, the heroic narrative made compelling stories for newspapers, radio and TV.

Arguably, as Henry L. Mencken once railed against, there was too much “sentimental human-interest scribblers turning out maudlin stuff about the common soldier” (Menchen, as quoted in Desmond 1984: 463) at the expense of more substantive and thematic coverage about Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan. Similarly, this type of storytelling about the conflict in Afghanistan corresponds with Hallin and Gitlin’s (1993) observation that the news media highlights sentimental ties between *heroic* soldiers at the front and people back in the homeland during times of war. The Canadian news media’s coverage of Afghanistan also parallels Taylor’s (1995: 235) observation that war:

“produces a stream of human stories of tragedy and heroism; they involve the deployment of troops and weapons in a manner which makes for exciting copy and pictures; they invoke heightened emotions of patriotism, fear anger and euphoria; and they involve winners and losers.”

In line with this chapter’s arguments concerning the influence of ideology on news content, this research’s data suggests that news values also produced hegemonic interpretations of the conflict in Afghanistan in the news media. From the government and military’s perspective, the abundance of troop-focused coverage, arguably, framed the war in favourable terms with likeable — and relatable — everyday soldiers fighting *heroically* for their country against a *war on terror*. As my theory chapter outlined, the focus on the personal often flows from the attachment embedded reporters have for the soldiers they are covering.

“[T]he journalists not merely observed their subjects, but lived their lives and shared their experiences, and those experiences were of such emotional intensity that the form of prose which journalists use to take the reader into that experience – the ‘I was there’ form – provided not only a window for the reader, but also a door for partiality irrespective of any desire to remain the detached professional outsider” (Morrison and Tumber 1988: 96).

It is important to highlight this type of storytelling because it is a strategy with a political aim. Journalist Brian Stewart, who covered the conflict in Afghanistan, contends senior Canadian Forces officials strategically (and with considerable acumen in their execution) set out to try to “manipulate” news coverage by highlighting every day soldiers and their *heroism* (Stewart, as quoted in DeCillia 2009: 30). As a U.S. military commander in charge of press relations during

the first Gulf War boasted, the narrow focus of embedded reporters on soldiers produced a “soda-straw view of the world” (James DeFrank, as quoted in Rid 2007: 152; see also Carruthers 2011: 233; Tumber 2009). No doubt, embedding has its benefits for the military. Journalists Jeff Gralnick puts it well:

“Remember... you are not being embedded because that sweet old Pentagon wants to be nice. You are being embedded so you can be controlled and in a way isolated” (Gralnick, as quoted in Tumber and Palmer 2004: 51)

News coverage that focuses on the narrative of war and personal stories, arguably, perpetuates hegemony. Clearly, this type of reporting about war is “more desirable” for officials than the old-fashioned way of control through censorship and “striking a blue pencil through undesirable material, demanding post facto corrections, or attempting to snatch back newspapers that have already been distributed” (Carruthers 2011: 7). Commensurate with Hall et al.’s (1978: 56, 76) thinking, this CA offers more evidence that the news media do not relay government propaganda in the usual transactional form — but instead frequently take on government and military leaders’ framing, perpetuating cultural touchstones with a “taken-for-granted” quality that ultimately represented an “amplification spiral.” Regrettably, this type of events-oriented, episodic storytelling ignores bigger structural questions and perpetuates elite interests (Boyd-Barrett 2004b). With respect to my second research question (**R2**), I conclude that news values shaped, in part, the news coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan, producing largely sympathetic accounts of Canadian soldiers. The coming section transitions now to considering how another journalistic routine and practice, fact checking, also shaped news content about Afghanistan.

#### **4.7. Fact checking Government and Military Leaders’ Frames**

This research’s third research question attempts to measure the extent of fact checking in the news media’s coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan:

**R3.** How do journalists (if at all) fact check the preferred media frames of the military and government leaders surrounding Canada’s military efforts in Afghanistan?

More than three-quarters (76.5%) of the news media reporting and analysis containing a preferred government or military frame prompted a journalistic fact check,  $\chi^2(1, N = 900) = 390.035$ ,  $p = .001$ . Typical of this approach, *The Globe and Mail*'s Graham Smith challenges Canada's Chief of Defence Staff claims that Canadian Forces were helping to improve security, writing: "Canada's top soldier has dismissed the growing violence in Kandahar as 'insignificant,' *contradicting all public data* and highlighting the *growing gap* between Canada's upbeat view of the war and the *sober analysis* from other NATO countries" (Smith 2008a: np; italics added). Smith's story (worth quoting at some length) goes on to impeach the top general's claims:

"General Walter Natynczyk, Chief of the Defence Staff, has frequently claimed troops are making progress, but during a visit to Afghanistan this weekend he offered his first specific comments on the number of Taliban attacks.

In Kandahar province we're generally along the same lines as we have been the past few years," General Natynczyk said. "Looking at the statistics, we're just a slight notch, indeed an insignificant notch, above where we were last year."

Pressed by journalists to back up his claim, Gen. Natynczyk turned to his commander of all overseas forces, Lieutenant-General Michel Gauthier, who gave a figure that initially appeared to support the general's assessment. A comparison of figures from June, 2007, and June, 2008, shows violence was similar during the two months, he said.

"They're within 3 or 4 per cent of each other, so certainly not a marked increase in any way shape or form," Lt-Gen. Gauthier said.

The lieutenant-general later corrected himself, saying the comparison was, in fact, limited to the first days of July. He provided no other data. Neither of the two senior Canadian officers explained why they based their assessments on a span of days, instead of following the practice of most security analysts who examine months and years.

Gen. Natynczyk's claim that violence has not significantly increased in Kandahar does not fit any of the published statistics, all of which show major increases in Taliban attacks since 2005" (Smith 2008a: np)

The news story<sup>40</sup> then details statistics refuting or fact checking the general's claim about improving security.

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<sup>40</sup> Cohen (2009: 188), of note, lauds the journalists who wrote this story in his book *Critical Thinking Unleashed*, suggesting American journalists would have done well to be more skeptical of American officials' claims of WMD in the lead up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

This study's statistical analysis confirmed an association between this type of official media framing and fact checks sponsored by journalists (63.9%,  $p < .001$ , FET). Journalists themselves (and not opposition politicians or critics of the war) presented the largest and most sustained challenge to government and military media framing in the reporting and analysis about Afghanistan. Simply put, journalists fact checked the media preferred frames of government and military leaders. The challenges by journalists grew over time, too. In 2006, slightly less than half (49.8%) of the news media coverage about Afghanistan contained a fact check of a government or military frame. Challenges to government and military leaders' framing grew to 64.4 per cent in 2007; dropped to 56.7 per cent in 2008; and then rose to 62 per cent in 2009,  $\chi^2(3, N = 900) = 11.266, p = .011$ .

Notably, the largest percentage of fact checking (56.9%) focused on challenging government and military leaders' claims of improving security. After that, 16.3 per cent of fact checking focused on the government and military's execution of its stated goals. Much of this fact checking questioned if the government and military were making progress on military and development goals in Kandahar. For instance, a 2007 story entitled "Afghan aid an exercise in feeling good", disputes Prime Minister Stephen Harper's claims of "making progress" to help reconstruct Afghanistan (Ivison 2007: np). The story highlights a recent Canadian Senate report suggesting Canada's reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan were "sparse" and "unsatisfactory" (Ivison 2007: np). Moreover, the news report also quotes an aid expert who contends Canada's development efforts in Kandahar are "so minimal as to be non-existent" (Ivison 2007: np). To be sure, though, improving security, as the coming section spells out, was the considerable focus of journalistic fact checking.

#### **4.8. Violence & Safety and Security**

More than three-quarters (76.9%) of news and commentary mentions the seemingly perpetual violence and precarious security in Afghanistan. In a *Globe and Mail* feature about training Afghan police officers, for example, the story ends pessimistically, stressing that insurgents were increasingly killing Canadian soldiers with suicide bombers and roadside improvised explosive devices (Koring and Dobrota 2007). Mentions of the deteriorating security in Afghanistan increased from 76.1 per cent in 2006 to 77.8 per cent in 2007. Concerns about security rose

again to 82.8 per cent in 2008 before falling below the four year average of 76.9 per cent to 70.9 in 2009,  $c^2(3, N = 900) = 9.610, p = .022$ .

Deteriorating security became a perpetual theme in the narrative and fact checking about Afghanistan. In 2009, for instance, a feature story in *The Globe and Mail* highlighted how the precarious safety in Kandahar had some women wishing for the relative security — but repression — of the Taliban regime.

“Over the past eight years, Canada alone has spent \$10-billion in its effort to rebuild Afghanistan; improving the situation of women in Kandahar – the most fundamentalist of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces – was originally an intended byproduct of the mission.

But lately, deteriorating security has forced Kandahar’s women to begin forfeiting gains they only recently won: They are quitting jobs instead of seeking them, dropping out of class rather than signing up, slipping on burkas instead of shedding them. And despite constitutional guarantees and legal changes aimed at providing equality to women and ending practices such as bride buying, the status of women these days is little changed from that of their forebears” (Leeder 2009: np).

There was a clear association between the mention of safety or security (85.4%) in news and analysis about the war and a fact check (overwhelmingly authored by a journalist),  $c^2(1, N = 900) = 51.130, p = .001$ . Notably, the data shows no statistical association between a journalist’s location and their propensity to fact check government and military frames. Journalists in Canada (58.8%) and embedded reporters in Kandahar (58%) fact checked government and military frames with almost the exact same regularity.

#### **4.9. Analysis: Reality Versus Government and Military Media Framing**

My findings support the contention that the journalistic routine and practice of fact checking shaped news coverage of the war. Corresponding to other research (Tuchman 1978a; Gans 1979; Mermin 1996; Dobbs 2012; Graves 2016; Graves et al. 2016), this CA’s data indicates that the journalistic routine and practice of holding decision makers accountable (Jones 2009) shaped the coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan. This research’s findings, I contend, supports theory and evidence (Baum and Groeling 2010a; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Speer 2017) suggesting that dramatic events offer journalists and opportunity to counter-frame events and issues.

From the onset of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan in 2006, journalists covering the combat operations fact checked government and military media frames. In addition, there was a clear association between frame contestation by journalists and mentions of safety and security in the news coverage. Canadian Forces were, simply put, not making the volatile region of Kandahar safer as government and military officials kept claiming. Journalists, in turn, compared government and military leaders' media frames against their own observations or *the facts* in Kandahar to "determine" the truthfulness of official framing (Uscinski and Butler 2013: 163). They were resisting and contesting the common sense hegemony about the war articulated by government and military leaders (Gramsci 1971).

Canadian journalists' propensity to fact check the claims of government and military leaders were also likely influenced by the acrimonious relations between the new Conservative Government and the news media (DeCillia 2009). The Harper government's public disdain for the news media (Wilson 2006; Martin 2010; Harris 2014; Saideman 2016), arguably, heightened the adversarial relationship between journalists and officials, leading news professionals to be more suspicious of officials' framing of the war. A panel of expert Canadians appointed by the Conservative government to study Afghanistan concluded, in fact, that the Harper government "failed to communicate with Canadians with balance and candour" about the conflict (Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan 2008: 20). Journalists experienced that lack of sincerity first hand.

Canadian journalists covering the conflict felt they were being spun by government and military leaders (DeCillia 2009). Journalism and political communications represents a two-way street, of sorts. To be certain, political actors need to carefully manage their relationship with the media in order to increase the chances of their preferred media frame(s) being adopted by journalists (Entman 2004). In line with Habermas' pragmatics of human communications, all communication (no matter how asymmetrical) is "essentially derived from the basic form of dialogue and must be seen as relationships between active human subjects" (Hallin 1994: 20). To that end, journalists walk a delicate balance of appealing to sources for information but not wishing to appear to be co-opted (Hallin 1994).

“They must maintain the integrity of their relationship with their audience and also the integrity of their own self image and of the social relationships that make up the profession of journalism. Maintaining these relationships requires a certain minimum of honesty” (Hallin 1994: 32).

In the aftermath of the abject failure (and co-opting, arguably) of American journalism in the lead up to the second Gulf War (Massing 2005; Bennett et al. 2006, 2007), Canadian journalists were on guard against government *spin* and misinformation (DeCillia 2009). Overly optimistic claims about progress and improving security likely became a *red flag*, of sorts, for journalists to critique. Canadian journalists likely felt compelled to respond in a more aggressive — fact checking — fashion.

This study’s data also adds to the evidence supporting Baum and Groeling’s (2010b: 34) contention that news coverage of war evolves over time with an increasing focus on the “discrepancies between” the preferred media frames of government and military officials and reality in the war zone. Journalists, after all, are interpreters (Zelizer 1993; Schudson 2013) — and dramatic events “may encourage journalists to *take the initiative*” to counter-frame events if they conflict with their own observations (Speer 2017: 298; italics in original). “If the text frame emphasizes in a variety of mutually reinforcing ways that the glass is half full,” stresses Entman (1993: 56), “the evidence of social science suggests that relatively few in the audience will conclude it is half empty.” Baum and Groeling’s (Baum and Groeling 2010a: 10) elasticity of reality theory holds that over time — as the media gains more knowledge about the conflict they are covering — they “have the opportunity to retrospectively assess the reliability of prior elite rhetoric” (see also Brody 1994). Unlike the war in Iraq that Baum and Groeling (2010b) studied, where journalists only began counter-framing the war after no WMD was found and a volatile insurgency erupted, *reality asserted itself* at the beginning of combat operations in Kandahar in 2006.

Canadian reporters covering the conflict in Kandahar began weaving their observations about the precarious security in Afghanistan into their coverage from the start of Canada’s combat role in Kandahar. The Canadian news media’s coverage of Afghanistan “parallel[ed] objective indicators of reality” that Canadian journalists witnessed themselves from the onset of Canadian

Forces' combat operations in southern Afghanistan (Baum and Groeling 2010b: 188). The indexing hypothesis holds that elite disagreement is necessary for the news media to increase their critical accounts of events and issues, especially in the realm of foreign affairs (Bennett 1990). Dramatic events, as this research's data shows, can also precipitate journalistic counter-framing. This work's findings also bolster evidence in support of Entman's (2003: 415) cascading activation model that explains how "interpretive frames" can originate from journalists, who are "not entirely passive receptacles for government propaganda." My findings, in line with Speer (2017), raise questions about the indexing hypothesis' predictive qualities and add further evidence backing an event-driven conceptualization of the potential for counter-framing by journalists. (I return to an updated concept of indexing later in this chapter, but before that, I discuss the underlying motivations for fact checking in the coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.)

As I noted earlier, the violent insurgency in nearby Iraq and the failure to find WMD seeped into the consciousness of Canadian journalists, *inoculating* them to what they perceived as *spin* concerning the conflict in Afghanistan. While fact checking has recently come under the spotlight because of Donald Trump's presidency, the practice represents a decades-long *interpretive turn* (Schudson 1993; Zelizer 1993; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Schudson 2013; Barnhurst 2014) in journalism. In the last decade, U.S. news organizations such as FactCheck.org and PolitiFact institutionalized fact checking (Graves 2016). The practice has emerged as an "antidote to the stenographic reporting" that allowed the Bush administration to peddle its dubious justifications for invading Iraq (Graves 2016: 62). To be sure, the failure to find WMD represented an important intellectual *break* (Allan and Zelizer 2004: 224) for journalists, offering news professionals an opportunity to "destabilize hegemonic discourses and identities" about their craft and its practices (Carpentier 2005: 209). This research's data suggests that reporting and analysis about Afghanistan should be viewed as part of the growing interpretive style (Schudson 2013) and fact checking form (Graves 2016) of journalism. In the aftermath of one of journalism's great failures to effectively challenge the Bush administration's rationale for invading Iraq, reportage about the war in Afghanistan comports with the increasing propensity of journalists to fact check elites' claims, especially about war (Dobbs 2012).

This work's findings suggests that the continuous fact checking — and focus on deteriorating security — became a theme or trope throughout all the coverage, suggesting the possibility of pack journalism, whereby journalists cue off one another creating a meta-narrative shared by most news professionals (Mendelsohn and Crespi 1970; Hall Jamieson and Waldman 2004; Kovach and Rosentiel 2014). Baum and Groeling (2010b) found that the deteriorating security, after time, became a shorthand, of sorts, for journalists covering the Iraq war. This research's data highlights a prevailing media narrative took root quickly concerning Canada's military role in Afghanistan: that is, Kandahar was unsafe — and security was deteriorating. A column published a year into the conflict, in the summer of 2007, entitled "Canadian troops forced to start from scratch" sums up the futility of keeping Kandahar safe infused in much of the news coverage:

"Like Sisyphus, the Greek mythological figure condemned to push a boulder up a hill every day only to see it roll right back down, Canadian soldiers here are trapped in a loop that has the fourth iteration of troops battling for the exactly the same ground their predecessors in southern Afghanistan fought to take.

...

Canadians have been fighting and dying for the same pieces of ground in the same two volatile areas — the lush plains of the notorious Zhari and Panjwai districts that border the Arghandab River — just west of the provincial capital since February, 2006.

The pattern is always the same: The Canadians invariably win the military battle, send the Taliban and the various warlords and drug criminals who are their natural allies on the run, hand over to the fledgling Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and then find most of their hard-fought gains are lost in the fetid stew of corruption, ineptitude and tribal quarrels that remains the norm in this part of the country" (Blatchford 2007a: np).

This column is also representative of how Canadian journalists inserted their own observations instead of the usual he said/she said practice of quoting the *other side* to challenge government and military media frames. Compared to the domestic journalists covering the conflict (and political debate surrounding the war), embedded journalists did not have readily available sources in Kandahar to critique the government and military's framing. Lacking access to critical voices, embedded correspondents in Afghanistan, in line with professional norms, often used their own reporting (what they knew and saw) to "challenge the official version of events" (Cook 2005: 106).

It is also important to highlight that Canadian journalists used elite criteria and definitions to fact check the frames sponsored by officials. Government and military leaders' frames were consistently assessed by elite-defined and administered "objective" rules, laws, standards and codes (Ettema and Glasser 1989: 2). This way of impugning elite frames, in effect, turned larger questions about the government and military's motivations and actions into quantitative or scientific demands. While the news media may have fact checked the frames sponsored by elites, those frames still structured the stories, commentaries and editorials they produced. Elite frames provided the intellectual scaffolding for journalistic production. "Journalists' reliance on elite sources," Nelson, Clawson and Oxley (1997: 238) concluded, means that even when journalists "dispute the sources' assumptions or conclusions, they still construct the story in terms established by that source," meaning elites have considerable power to frame news even when the news professionals contests their preferred interpretation.

As Bennett (2012) has argued, the news ritual of assessing and challenging political actors' objectives produces distorted coverage. When journalists fact checked government and military framing, they still incorporated — and even highlight — the frames sponsored by political actors in their coverage. This practice, arguably, moves beyond storytelling to producing "meaning in the service of power" (Thompson 1990: 7) and questions the power journalists possess to challenge, as Baum and Groeling (2010b) describe. Contradicting a media frame, after all, enviably evokes the frame (Lakoff 2004). This conclusion, of course, dovetails with my previous arguments concerning the overwhelming hegemonic coverage produced by Canadian journalists about the conflict in Afghanistan. I offer a lengthier discussion about the implications of this practice for normative watchdog notions of journalism later on in this chapter.

With respect to my third research question (**R3**), I conclude that journalists robustly fact checked the preferred frames of military and government leaders surrounding Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan. Yet, as I have argued, this practice does not represent a truly counter-hegemonic expression. As the beginning of this chapter made clear, the overwhelming body of news coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan was confined to a "sphere of consensus" (Hallin 1986: 117) about the conflict and Canada's international role. Simply put, fact checking

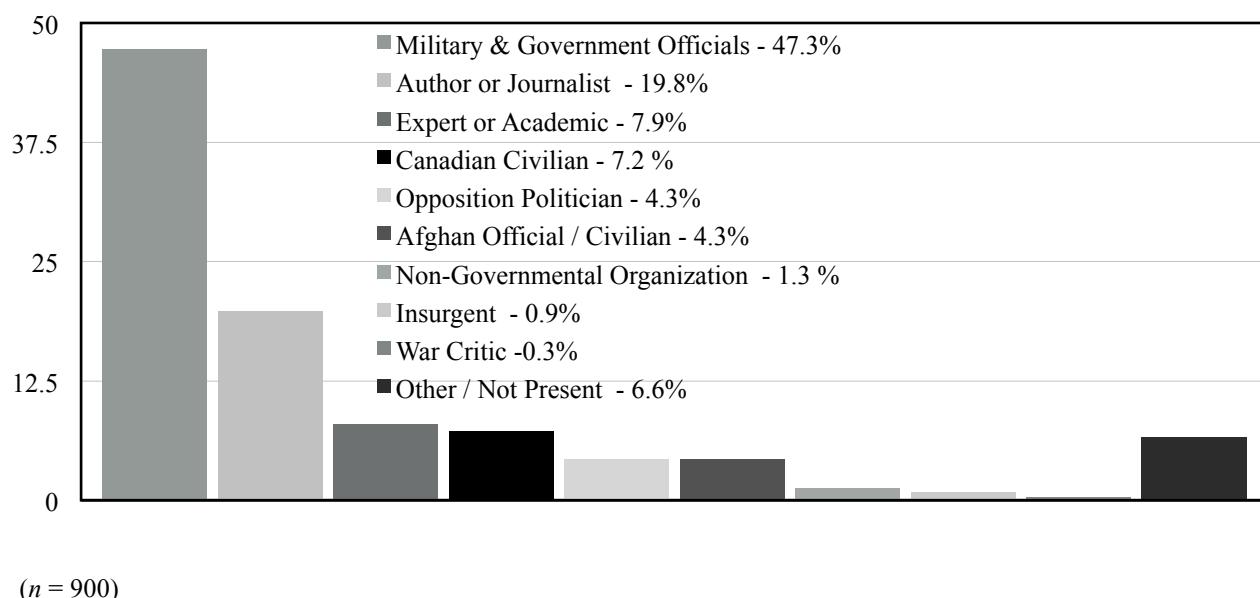
also does not push beyond hegemonic boundaries. The next section transitions to outlining and analyzing my findings concerning indexing.

#### 4.10. Indexing

Research question four considers the shaping power of indexing: **R4.** What role does indexing play in shaping the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan?

Consistent with what one might expect about news coverage of a war, military and government officials comprise nearly half (47.3%) of the primary sources in the news media about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan (see Figure 13).

**Figure 13 – Primary Sources**



Journalists comprised nearly two in ten (19.8%) of the primary sources in the reporting and analysis of Afghanistan. In much of this reporter-led news content about the conflict, broadcast journalists were reporting live from the war zone on radio or television. Both CTV and CBC made considerable use of reporter-only so-called rants for radio or ROCs (Reporters on Camera) for television to convey breaking news from the battleground. Compared to expensive satellite

time for live reports, the reporter-only pre-packaged stories were easy and economical to send back to newsrooms as compressed audio or video digital files using the Internet.

Experts and academics (7.9%) represent the third largest group of primary sources. Average Canadians were also used as primary sources in 7.9 per cent of the media coverage. Typical of this, Canadians were reflected in *Vox Populi* (voice of the people or so-called *streeters*) to reflect public mood about the war. At a repatriation ceremony in 2007 for six dead Canadian soldiers, for instance, a CBC Radio story quotes a young man questioning the mission as the death toll escalated.

“The loss that Canada is taking is it really a good thing for them to be over there? And if, you know, they don't see that they're going to solve problems over there, it might be a good idea to, you know, maybe get out” (Stoffel 2007: np).

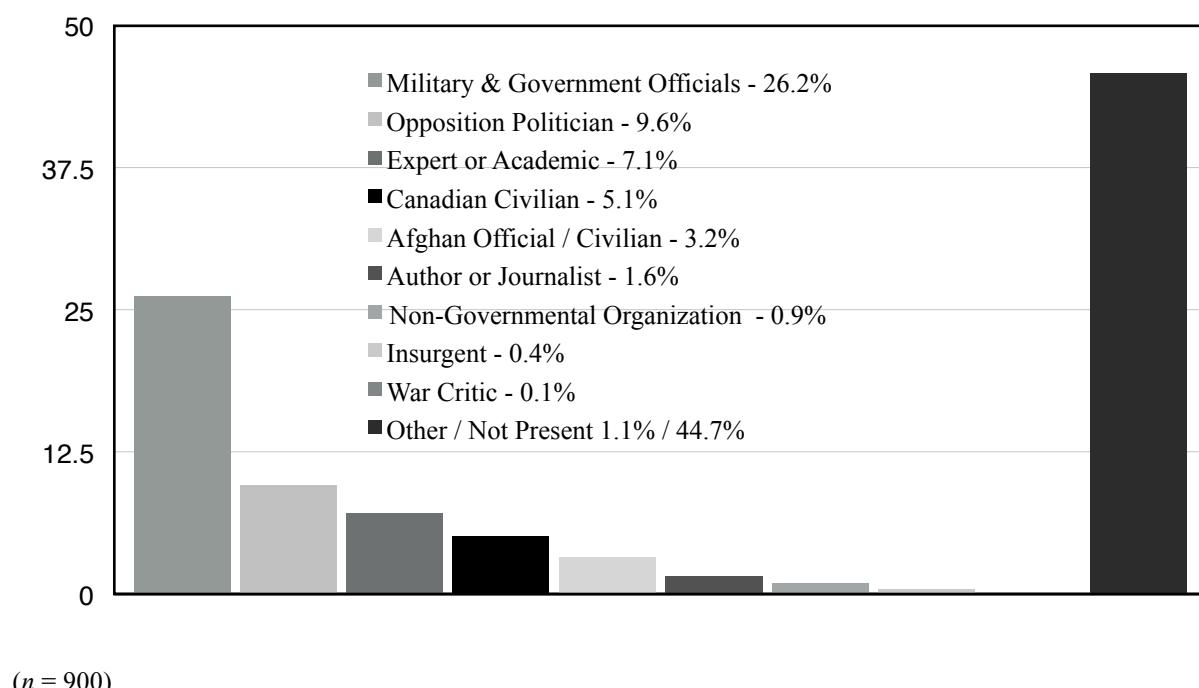
Afghan civilians were present in 4.3 per cent of the news media. In a 2008 *Globe and Mail* story highlighting how hunger was on the rise despite aid efforts, a Kandahar man is quoted about increasing food prices. “Sometimes the children cry, and we give them a bit of bread,” he told the newspaper reporter, “but we cannot give them enough. Maybe we will start begging or stealing, I don't know” (Smith 2008b: np). Canadian opposition politicians were only found in 4.3 per cent of the reporting and analysis about Afghanistan. As well, critics of the war were negligible (0.3%) as primary sources. Of note, voices outside of the government and military (opposition politicians, academics, non-governmental organizations) did, however, increase as a percentage of primary sources from 22.4 per cent in 2006 to an average of 27.7 per cent for the four years,  $c^2(9, N = 900) = 17.5111, p = .041$ . Government and military leaders clearly, though, dominated the coverage as primary sources. It was a slightly different story when it comes to secondary sources.

#### **4.11. Indexing: Secondary Sources**

More than four in ten (44.7%) news media accounts of Afghanistan did not include a secondary source (see Figure 14). When media coverage does contain a secondary source, official government and military officials again comprise the largest percentage at 26.2 per cent. Opposition politicians made up 9.6 per cent of secondary sources. In 2007, for example, New

Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jack Layton called on the government to withdraw Canadian Forces from Afghanistan immediately. “The strategy we’re following,” Layton told reporters, “is wrong; we should take our troops out” (Freeman 2007: np).

**Figure 14 – Secondary Sources**

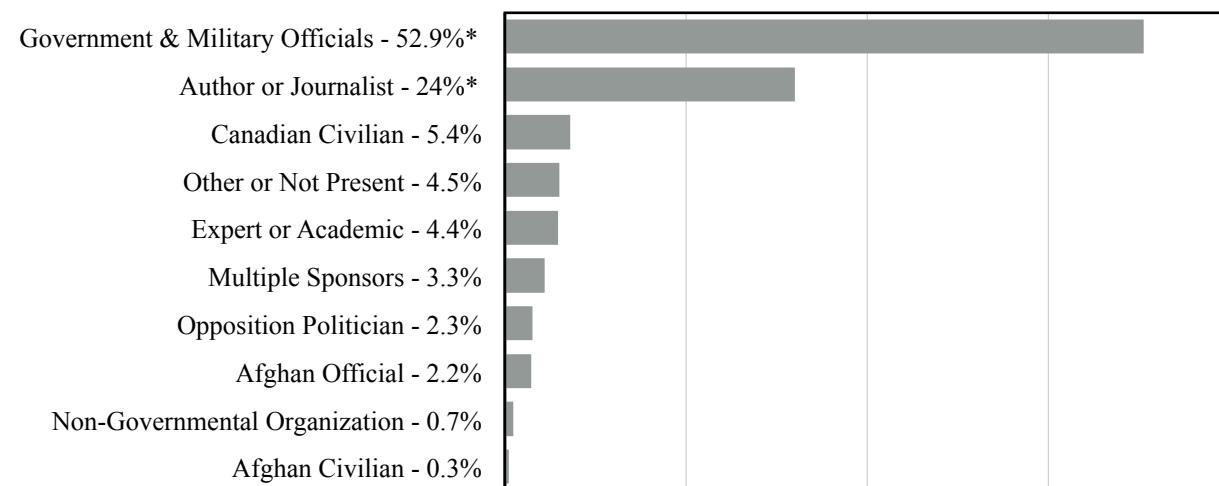


Experts and academics were present as secondary sources in 7.1 per cent of the Canadian news media’s coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan. Average Canadians were found in 5.1 per cent of the reporting and analysis. Afghan officials and civilians comprised 3.2 per cent of secondary sources. Non-governmental organization sources, such as the International Red Cross, were presented in less than one per cent (0.9%) of the news media about the conflict. Critics of the war were almost non-existent as secondary sources at 0.1 per cent of the coverage. Insurgents, interestingly, had a higher chance of being used as a secondary source at 0.4 per cent. Similar to what my content analysis found with primary sources, voices outside of the government and military increased as secondary sources in media coverage from 22.9 per cent in 2006 to an average of 27.6 per cent between 2006-2009,  $c^2(9, N = 900) = 25.131, p = .003$ . Primary and secondary sources played an important role, as the coming section details, in terms of frame sponsorship.

#### 4.12. Frame Sponsorship

When a preferred media frame of government and military leaders is present in news and analysis about the conflict, government and Canadian Forces officials are, not surprisingly, the largest (52.9%) sponsors of these frames (see Figure 15). A newspaper headline from 2008, for example, quoting military leaders, reads: “Fine Canadians, courageous men; Three slain soldiers are remembered for their bravery, dedication and love of adventure” (Moore 2008: np). In the story, Prime Minister Harper praises the dead soldiers’ “selfless service” to Canada, “while helping to ensure a brighter future for the Afghan people” (Moore 2008: np).

**Figure 15 - Frame Sponsor**



(n = 900)

Journalists covering the war echoed frames sponsored by government and military leaders, too. News professionals (24%) were the second largest sponsor of preferred government and military media frames. This adoption of the government and military’s preferred frame(s) often came in commentaries and editorials. In a column entitled “A soldier’s motto: Always come back for your friends”, *The Globe and Mail*’s Christie Blatchford, for example, extols Warrant Officer Willy MacDonald bravery, describing how the soldier “with machine-gun fire and RPGs raining down on him” helped his wounded comrades (Blatchford 2009).

#### **4.13. Embedded Journalists vs. Non-embedded Journalists Use of Sources**

Not surprisingly, journalists embedded with Canadian Forces turned to sources that were readily available in Afghanistan: that is, government and military leaders. Statistical analysis (two-sided Fisher's exact test) determined that embedded journalists relied more heavily on military (34.2%) sources than journalists in Canada (16%),  $p < .001$ , FET. Journalists in Afghanistan also featured government sources in their coverage at a slightly higher rate (18.8%) compared to journalists in Canada (18.2%),  $p < .001$ , FET. As noted above, opposition politicians were rarely primary sources in the news media. This was particularly pronounced in coverage from embedded journalists with only 3.5 per cent of primary sources being opposition politicians. In most of this type of content generated by embedded correspondents, visiting delegations of MPs and Senators to the KAF were primary sources. In early 2007, for instance, opposition Members of Parliament touring the Kandahar Airfield complained that the Conservative government trumped up security concerns to purposely restrict their access to reconstruction and development efforts outside the secure military installation of KAF. Liberal MP and foreign affairs critic Ujjal Dosanjh criticized the ruling Conservatives, questioning if the defence minister had:

“ordered the general not to let us go out of the wire because of safety reasons. I thought that was the kind of decision that one makes on an operational basis. The general makes that decision. What does the minister know about safety sitting in Ottawa?” (Smith 2007).

Journalists (mostly based in Ottawa on Parliament Hill) were more likely (6.3%) to include opposition politicians as primary sources in their coverage than embedded journalists in Afghanistan,  $p < .001$ , FET. In terms of secondary sources, embedded journalists again relied heavily on government (8.3%) and military officials (20.6%). Canada-based journalists also featured government sources (10.8%) as secondary sources in their coverage, but were much less likely to use military officials (8.2%) than their counterparts in Afghanistan,  $p < .001$ , FET. Opposition politicians as secondary sources were also more frequently found in Canada-based stories (13.8%) compared to coverage with an Afghanistan dateline (7.8%),  $p < .001$ , FET.

As might be expected, nearly five in ten stories or commentaries (46.8%) from Canadian-based journalists focused on the political debate about the military mission. In contrast, embedded

journalists in Afghanistan focused on the politics of the war at a lower rate (19%),  $\chi^2(18, N = 900) = 120.172$ ,  $p = .001$ . Embedded journalists mostly focused on the military (31.4%) and deaths and injuries (28.9%),  $\chi^2(18, N = 900) = 120.172$ ,  $p = .001$ . In terms of episodic versus thematic coverage, there was no statistically significant difference between embedded (81.8% / 18.2%) and Canada-based journalists (86.6% / 13.4%). Most of the news content — no matter who generated it or where it came from — was overwhelmingly tied, as I pointed out earlier, to events.

#### **4.14. Analysis: Indexing**

The forthcoming pages interpret the shaping power of indexing on Canadian media coverage of the war in Afghanistan. I begin by evaluating embedding's influence. Second, I analyze the shaping power of indexing on coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. This section engages with the broader debate in media and communications scholarship concerning the power of official sources or dramatic events to shape news content. In the one camp (Tuchman 1978a; Hallin 1986; Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Bennett 1990, 2012; Gitlin 2003 [1980]; Bennett et al. 2006, 2007), officials are endowed with considerable influence over shaping media discourse. On the other side (Wolfsfeld 1997; Baum and Groeling 2010a, 2010b; Porpora et al. 2010; Speer 2017), dramatic events afford more (but not complete) power to the news media to counter-frame events and issues. The coming pages do not refute the indexing hypothesis — but argues that a more refined conceptualization of indexing's shaping influence on news content is required in media and communication scholarship.

#### **4.15. Indexing and Embedding**

There were, no doubt, practical reasons for why so many government and military officials were quoted in coverage from Afghanistan. Journalists embedded with Canadian Forces clearly turned to the sources that were readily available in Afghanistan: military leaders, mostly and government officials, secondly. Statistical analysis determined that embedded journalists relied more heavily on military sources than journalists who covered the issues and events surrounding the war from Canada. This conclusion is rather prosaic, of course. In many cases, journalists in

Afghanistan only had access to military sources. Correspondents embedded with Canadian Forces during military action (or battles) mostly only had access to military personnel<sup>41</sup>.

Journalists in Canada, of course, had easier access to different (more critical) sources and, therefore, used them more frequently. Journalists need sources (primary and secondary) to produce content quickly and efficiently. Information must come from somewhere. Furthermore, journalists are increasingly expected to produce news — and lots of it (Davies 2009; Fenton 2010; Freedman 2010; McChesney and Nichols 2010; Zelizer 2017). The churn of everyday news forces journalists to turn to easily accessible sources, usually officials. Just as journalists often gravitate towards the easiest frame for their stories (Entman 1991), they also frequently turn to sources who are right in front of them. This is especially true when news breaks. It is not surprising then that this research's data shows that embedded Canadian journalists mostly quoted government and military officials.

The lack of opposition voices in Afghanistan may also explain, in part, the propensity to fact check government and military media frames. As a routine, journalists want to balance their coverage. Without the *other side* to the story easily available in Kandahar, news professionals no doubt felt a compunction to balance their stories with counterpoints to official rhetoric. Mermin (1996) posits that when there is consensus, journalists search for conflict. This, in turn, usually results in critiques of how elites execute their policy decisions. Absent critical voices to include in their stories, journalists, undoubtedly, wanted to include “conflicting possibilities” surrounding the efforts of “officials to achieve the goals they had set” concerning, for instance, security or development (Mermin 1996: 191).

This research's findings about embedded journalists' reliance on military and government sources, of course, correspond with an institutional perspective on the news media. In line with ample scholarship (Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978a; Fishman 1980; Cook 1994, 2005) highlighting

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<sup>41</sup> Embedded journalists, of course, had access to communication such as cell phones, computers and even the Internet with the help of portable satellites. They also employed so-called fixers (local Afghan journalists and interpreters) who could gather information to supplement their embedded coverage. There was even the possibility of calling a Taliban spokesperson for comment.

the relationship between institutions and the news media, embedded journalism, arguably, represents the ultimate form of *listening post* news production, whereby journalists live and work alongside military personnel. There is a political economy, as well, to the embedding arrangement. News organizations invest considerable resources and money in attaching their news professionals with the military. In return, news managers expect their embedded journalists to produce compelling war stories. Journalists, in turn, know to churn out the *copy*.

As detailed in my theory chapter, embedding gets routinely criticized as propaganda dressed up as news (Knightly 2003 [1975]; Keeble 2004). Critical scholarship legitimately questions the frequent sympathetic, jingoistic and patriotic tone of news and analysis produced by embedded correspondents. All too often, the coverage echoes and amplifies the spin of government and military leaders waging the war, failing to live up to normative conceptions (Allan and Zelizer 2004). Carruthers (2011: 9) sums up the disparity between theory and the reality of war coverage well:

“[I]n wartime we’re apt to see how starkly media practice contradicts liberal theory. Far from subjecting patriotic jingoism to withering critiques, skewering xenophobic or outright racist representations of foreign antagonists and challenging whether it’s necessary to tackle an international dispute with guns and bombs, media outlets, often appear positively eager to act as war’s cheerleaders. Just when deliberative democracy cries out for vigorous debate, media may seem at their most supine and credulous.”

This research offers a slightly different insight into embedding than usually offered in media and communications research, highlighting that while Canadian journalists covering the war alongside military forces did largely gravitate towards official sources, they also consistently fact checked or challenged government and military rhetoric about the war in Afghanistan. Yet, as this chapter’s earlier section on the social system (or ideology) makes plain, the challenges of journalists only went so far. As well, there was a glaring absence of counter-hegemonic voices and thinking in the news coverage about the conflict. Key questions about the war and the justifications for international conflict did not get asked.

Admittedly, it is difficult to make definitive conclusions about the impact of embedding on Canadian news content based on this research’s content analysis. Understanding how embedding influences journalists’ decision-making requires different methods, such as interviewing or observing embedded reporters. Knowing why journalists produced the types of

stories they produced is unknowable with this study's content analysis. But this research's data sheds light on what types of coverage Canadian journalists covering the conflict produced. In line with this research's data, Lewis et al. (2003) and Lewis (2004) concluded that while embedded journalists covering the invasion of Iraq in the second Gulf War showed no bias, their coverage highlighted the narrative or *story* and ignoring critical questions about the war. The same is true with the Canadian news media's coverage of the war in Afghanistan.

Canadian officials did not hide their hopes that embedding journalists with military personnel would promote a positive image of Canada's armed forces and its war efforts in Afghanistan (Canadian Expeditionary Forces Canada 2006). To be certain, political actors often "take great pains to generate support for waging war, enlisting mass communication media to help bolster the case" (Carruthers 2011: 6). This research's CA illustrates well how the *cohabitation*, of sorts, between the Canadian media and military produced content that frequently painted Canadian Forces in patriotic, noble and heroic terms. Having considered the impact of indexing surrounding embedded journalists, I now wish to consider the potential impact of elite disagreement on shaping news and analysis about the war.

#### **4.16. What Unified Elite?**

Traditional indexing theory holds that elite disagreement often leads journalists to be more critical in their coverage (Hallin 1986; Bennett 1990). As detailed in my theory and methods chapter, this research disentangles elites, viewing them not as a monolithic bloc but competing factions. Conceptualizing government and military leaders as one bloc and other political actors as another *side* is helpful. This study's data illustrates well how disagreement amongst different sections of Canadian elites likely fuelled criticism of the war in the news media. To be sure, this work' data surrounding primary or secondary sources shows that elites do not represent a singular — and unified — bloc. All too frequently, elites are represented as some sort of consolidated — and singular — hegemonic force. This work adds to the evidence that elites are not always unified — but different blocs fighting to articulate a common sense (Gramsci 1971).

In contrast to the U.S. where there was more consensus — both bipartisan support and Congressional authorization of force for both the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq — there were clear battle lines and different perspectives amongst political actors represented in Canada's Parliament (Bratt 2007). Canada's House of Commons was split over the question of Afghanistan. For the most part, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party wanted to pull Canadian Forces out of Afghanistan immediately. Controversial parliamentary motions extending the mission were largely brokered between the ruling Conservatives and the official opposition Liberal Party (BBC 2008). Even some Liberals, who initially committed Canadian troops to Kandahar while in power in 2005, questioned Canada's commitment to the conflict while in opposition (Gross Stein and Lang 2007).

Discussing U.S. foreign policy, Senator Arthur Vandenberg famously contended that “politics stops at the water’s edge” (Vandenberg, as quoted in Baum and Groeling 2010b: 5). Vandenberg’s aphorism does not apply to Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan. Debate over the war became a *wedge* issue of sorts. The governing Conservatives used the parliamentary debates over extending the mission as a means of distinguishing itself from other parties in the minority Parliament. In the spring of 2006, for instance, the Conservatives surprised the House of Commons with an unexpected — and immediate — vote on extending and expanding Canada's involvement in Afghanistan (Bratt 2007). As the governing Conservatives surely expected, the Quebec nationalist Bloc Québécois and the left-leaning New Democratic Party opposed the motion. The Conservatives’ political calculus worked, *smoking out* the divided Liberal Party who had approved the mission while in government the year before (Saideman 2016). The vote exposed a split in the Liberal party, highlighting the party’s *flip flop* on the war and, arguably, making them look weak to some Canadian voters. Longtime political analyst John Ibbetson declared the party not ready to govern:

“[T]he [Liberal] [P]arty that led this country through the Second World War, that took us to Korea and to Kosovo, is in shambles, split on Afghanistan and in the midst of a leadership campaign. So while leadership candidate Michael Ignatieff declared his “unequivocal support” for the new deployment, John McCallum announced his intention to vote against it, saying, “This whole process is insulting”” (Ibbetson 2006: np).

Canada's military mission in Afghanistan became a hot political issue — and a political *hammer*, of sorts, for the Conservatives to beat their opponents with. The governing party wrapped itself

in the Canadian flag, depicting itself as defender of Canadian values and its opponents as weak, dithering and unpatriotic. Conservatives, in fact, branded the leader of the NDP “Taliban Jack” for suggesting NATO negotiate a peace deal with the insurgents (Walkom 2007: np). As this research’s CA data shows, journalists aligned their coverage to this debate, highlighting and focusing on the parliamentary debate about extending military operations in Kandahar. Journalists, to be sure, reflected the “sphere of legitimate controversy” (Hallin 1986: 117) surrounding Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan. As the political debate about the war heated up, journalists, predictably, reflected the “growing strains and division” amongst political actors about the conflict, offering “far higher amounts of critical news coverage without abandoning objective journalism” norms (Tumber and Palmer 2004: 163; see also Hallin 1986). This is, of course, to be expected. The news media, after all, prizes conflict and tends to over-represent elite disagreement as part of a “professional incentive that shapes journalists’ standards of newsworthiness” (Baum and Groeling 2010b: 5).

While not as well represented as government and military leaders in the news coverage of the war in Afghanistan, opposition politicians clearly had an influence on the tone of it. The inclusion of opposition politicians in coverage of the war is associated with government or military preferred frames being fact checked in the news media. Journalists usually did the fact checking – but often the news professionals challenged government and military leaders’ claims of progress and improving security with critiques offered by opposition MPs. For instance, in a *Globe and Mail* story entitled “Weakness in mission exposed, critics say”, Liberal foreign affairs critic Bob Rae stressed that Canada’s efforts to make the volatile region of Kandahar safer were being hampered by the open Afghan-Pakistan border that allowed insurgents to move back and forth easily. Rae told the newspaper:

“The fact of the matter is, not only is al-Qaeda working on both sides of the border... but the intellectual, the military, the financial support of the Taliban is, if anything, stronger in Pakistan than it is in Afghanistan” (Clark 2007: np).

In this case, and others, the opposition was positioned as part of the journalistic fact check to the government and military media framing of the war. In addition, journalists often backed up the opposition’s counter-framing with statistics about the war’s progress or facts they had observed themselves in Kandahar. The story above, for example, adds more details, gleaned from the

reporter's own observations and knowledge, about how the unpredictable border between Pakistan and Afghanistan was putting Canadian troops in greater danger.

The political fallout from the invasion of Iraq south of the border in the United States in 2006 and 2007 also likely compounded Canadian opposition to the war in Afghanistan. U.S. President George W. Bush's handling of the Iraq war made him increasingly unpopular in 2005 and 2006, enabling American journalists to be more critical of the rationale for the war (Bennett et al 2007). Bush was also extremely unpopular in Canada after 2004 (Azzi and Hillmer 2016). Canadian political actors — and journalists — were no doubt aware of the growing public skepticism about the two wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) both internationally and at home. In addition to the full-blown civil war in Iraq, the insurgency in Afghanistan was heating up 2006. Politicians often make calculated decisions about whether to support war based on their perceived sense of the potential success of the conflict (Berinsky 2009). Canadian journalists cued to the growing unease of opposition politicians, fuelling their fact checking of the Harper government's media framing of the war.

Opposition politicians, who did not support combat operations in Afghanistan, likely felt emboldened to speak more critically about the war given public opinion polls suggested Canadians had grown wary — quickly — of the military mission in Afghanistan in the first year (The Strategic Counsel 2007). Entman (2003, 2004), in fact, predicts legislators are often *vocal* or *silent* about war based on the public's mood. Public discontent, in turn, gets reflected in the news media. Entmans's (2003, 2004) cascading activation concept holds that government officials, such as the U.S. president, have more framing power when their frames are congruent with public views of issues and events. As well, the framing of Canada's combat mission in Kandahar was not consistent with traditional notions of Canadian Forces as peacekeepers. It is conceivable that opposition politicians' framing represented a more "exciting, compelling, and controversial storyline" than the media framing offered by government and military leaders (King and Wells 2009: 19). As I argue in the coming section, indexing's power to shape media coverage to the contours of elite debate is more nuanced than originally posited by Bennett (1990).

#### 4.17. An Updated Conception of Indexing's Effect

In line with the traditional account of the indexing hypothesis (Bennett 1990), Bennett and his colleagues (2007: 30) continue to argue that the U.S. news media all too frequently slavishly adheres to “stenographic reporting” (see also Bennett 2012). The researchers concluded that journalists *failed*, for instance, to adequately interrogate the Bush administration’s questionable rationale for invading Iraq in 2003. Moreover, Bennett et al. (2006) contend that journalists ignored clear evidence and alternative sources pointing towards U.S. soldiers torturing Iraqi detainees at the Abu Ghraib Prison.

“[T]he mainstream news generally stays within the sphere of official consensus and conflict displays in the public statement of the key government officials who manage the policy areas and decision-making processes that make the news” (Bennett et al. 2007: 49).

This work’s data highlights somewhat contradictory evidence concerning the debate about indexing. On the one hand, the dramatic and precarious security situation in Kandahar afforded journalists covering the conflict more latitude to fact check and counter-frame the conflict in opposition to the preferred frames of government and military officials (Wolfsfeld 1997; Lawrence 2000; Entman 2003, 2004; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Porpora et al. 2010; Speer 2017). Yet, journalists used elite criteria to critique government and military frames, perpetuating, arguably, hegemonic interpretations of the war (Iyengar 1991; Lakoff 2004).

Bennett et al.’s (2007) amended conception of indexing does offer certain circumstances under which indexing does not automatically translate into news coverage merely echoing and amplifying elite debate. Factors such as events, technology, investigative journalism and counter-spin offer opportunities for journalists to challenge hegemonic interpretations of war. The deteriorating security in Kandahar, I contend, spurred Canadian journalists covering the conflict in Afghanistan to fact check the preferred media frames of government and military leaders. The precarious situation in the war-torn country was beyond the media framing control of Canadian government and military leaders, enabling journalists covering the conflict to fact check the frames offered by government and military leaders. Wolfsfeld (1997: 167) similarly found that dramatic events of the 1987 Palestinian intifada spurred the U.S. news media to adopt

the “injustice and defiance frame” over the Israeli government’s “law and order frame” even though the latter had more political and economic power.

If, as this CA’s data suggests, journalists are challenging the frames of government and military officials from the onset of conflicts and fact checking has become common place in the news media, this work’s findings raises questions about indexing theory’s predictive applications given how Canadian journalists were fact checking government and military frames from the start of the conflict — and not “over time” as they acquired more “information about the event and develop[ed] alternative information sources” (Baum and Groeling 2010b: 5). Future media and communication scholars should consider if indexing always forces media coverage to adhere to the forms of elite debate and whether journalists require elite disagreement to counter-frame news events.

Bennett et al. (2007) also contend that investigative journalism offers the news media a chance to stray from elite media frames. The controversy over the treatment of Afghan detainees also figured prominently in the coverage of Afghanistan. Allegations of mistreatment of Afghan detainees, of course, starkly contradicted government and military leaders’ media frames of noble Canadian soldiers helping Afghanistan restore democracy and human rights after decades of war. *The Globe and Mail*, as I stressed earlier in this chapter, doggedly pursued the story. In 2008, for instance, the newspaper uncovered internal government documents suggesting that despite government assurances to the contrary, Afghan detainees captured by Canadians were still being tortured in Afghan prisons. The government tried to keep the inspection reports secret – but *The Globe and Mail* unearthed the records.

“In one harrowing account, an Afghan turned over by Canadian soldiers told of being beaten unconscious and tortured in the secret police prison in Kandahar. He showed Canadian diplomats fresh welts and then backed up his story by revealing where the electrical cable and the rubber hose that had been used on him were hidden.

“Under the chair we found a large piece of braided electrical cable as well as a rubber hose,” reads the subsequent diplomatic cable marked “secret” and distributed to some of the most senior officials in the Canadian government and officers in the Canadian military” (Koring 2008: np).

Without a doubt, the newspaper's persistent investigation offered a degree of counter-hegemonic framing absent in much of the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.

Certainly, despite the over-reliance on official sources, events in Afghanistan and enterprising reporting surely diluted the usual impact of indexing on media discourse about war. With respect to my fourth research question (**R4**), I concluded that indexing played a shaping — but not definitive — role in the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. This research adds to the debate surrounding the effect of indexing. The indexing hypothesis, as I have argued, requires a more nuanced understanding given this work's findings. Elite disagreement can lead news coverage to incorporate more counter-frames — but dramatic events can also spur journalists to challenge the official framing of events and issues. Moreover, journalists do not always require time to begin challenging elite frames as Baum and Groeling (2010b) contend. As the practice of fact checking becomes more commonplace, elite discourse may not continue to hold the shaping power it once had on news coverage. Yet, as I have argued, fact checking does represent a true counter-hegemonic expression. Having answered my four research questions, I now wish to turn to the implications these findings present for normative conceptions of the news media.

#### **4.18. Normative Conceptions of the News Media**

The debate over journalism's role in democracy is well established in the literature (Gans 2003; Fenton 2010; McChesney and Nichols 2010; Taras 2014; DeCillia and McCurdy 2016). This research illustrates how the news media can play different roles at the same time. This study's data found the Canadian news media playing at least three roles — (1) monitorial; (2) facilitative; and (3) collaborative — in the coverage of Canada's combat operations in Afghanistan. This section outlines these instances and discusses them with a mind to positioning the recommendations I make for journalists and news organizations in my conclusion.

In line with Carey's (1987) normative conception of journalists stimulating public debate in democracy, there is little doubt that some of the news and commentary focused on explaining

Canada's role in the volatile region of Kandahar. Some of the coverage sought to interpret Afghanistan and Canada's military mission (Christians et al. 2009). A lengthy feature in *The National Post* in the fall of 2007, for instance, weaves a compelling narrative about the Canadians trying to rebuild the war torn country.

"Donald McNamara, a retired Brigadier-General, visited Kandahar last year, a few weeks after the attack in Panjwaii that killed Pte. Williamson and Sgt. Tedford. He was shocked at the level of distress he saw there.

"All military deaths are tragic," says Brig.-Gen. McNamara, now a director at the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies. "But I think there is some undue emphasis placed on them, on this side. It's a kind of selfishness. Canadians must really try to understand what it's like in Afghanistan right now. It is a desperate place."

The debate about the current mission in Kandahar, he says, is focused too narrowly on the costs: Canadian lives, injuries and money spent" (Hutchinson 2007: np).

The feature goes on to detail the precarious security of the country — but ends optimistically:

"Trained by Canadian soldiers and police officers, the national army and police now patrol areas of Panjwaii, including Route Summit, which was completed this year.

Afghan farmers have returned to their crops. It is harvest time in Panjwaii. Carts trundle along asphalt, past Strong Point Centre, or what's left of it. Gone, likely, are the rough wooden crosses that were pounded into the soil, one for Blake Williamson, one for Darcy Tedford. The road is their memorial: It will last for decades" (Hutchinson 2007: np).

Arguably, this type of news coverage added, meaningfully, to the public discourse about the conflict. As I contend in my final chapter, the Canadian public would benefit from more of this type of journalism that takes its facilitative role seriously.

As the previous section on fact checking made plain, there are also numerous examples of Canadian journalists adopting a monitorial or watchdog role (Christians et al. 2009) in their coverage of Afghanistan. Journalists did *fact check* the government and military's framing of the war. Bennett and colleagues (2006: 469) stress that journalists can have "moments of independence" — but that ultimately subsides to a "general pattern of compliance with government news management." This work supports, in part, that contention. Yes, journalists did fact check the frames sponsored by government and military leaders. But, journalists relied on elite criteria to challenge officials' frames (Ettema and Glasser 1998).

News and analysis containing fact checking still integrated and spotlighted the frames sponsored by government and military leaders. The binary ritual of using elite benchmarks to impeach the media frames sponsored by government and military leaders perpetuated hegemonic interpretations of the conflict (Ettema and Glasser 1998a, 1998b). Contradicting a frame inevitably evokes the frame (Lakoff 2004). “[I]f you negate a frame,” linguist George Lakoff said in an interview, “you have to activate the frame, because you have to know what you’re negating. If you use logic against something, you’re strengthening it” (Lakoff, as quoted in Rosenberg 2017: np). In many ways, government and military sponsored frames repeated in the media — even if they are contested — become “connected to and implicit in practical life” (Gramsci 1971: 330).

Canadian journalists might argue that their challenges to military and government frames exemplify their role as a watchdog, critical and independent of officials in line with the monitorial role of the news media (Christians et al. 2009). But, a lot of the fact checking concerning Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan questioned the government and the military’s ability to execute it stated goals to, say, *make Afghanistan safer* or *rebuild the war-torn country*. The fact checking often focused on the lack of progress by Canadian Forces to make Kandahar safer. This type of critique, as Mermin (1996) argues, challenges officials’ efficacy — but not policy decisions or hegemonic positions about war. Mermin (1996: 181) contends this type of coverage “makes only a limited contribution to the public sphere.” Similarly, Orr (1980: 31) argues that this type of contestation of elite rhetoric by journalists is ultimately performative and “exhausts the potential for... serious critical engagement.” Ultimately, the news media’s fact checking restricted the “scope of debate by focusing on the policy’s execution, not its underlying assumptions or justifications” (King and Wells 2009: 14).

Canadian journalists struggled with how to deal with government and military frames that ran counter to what they had observed about the situations in Afghanistan. Journalists, as a rule, feel compelled to tell *both sides* of the story. As a result, they frequently position the questionable frames of elites as plausible, even when they are suspicious of their truthfulness and the agenda of those sponsoring them. As a reporter told Gans (1979: 130): “we don’t deal in facts but in attributed opinions.” Canadian new professionals likely felt compelled to highlight government

and military leaders' framing of the war because of professional norms — and rigid ethical codes that regulate the practice of journalism. However, this “occupational ideology,” as Reese (1990: 390) labels it, ensures meaning is often constructed to perpetuate hegemony (Thompson 1990).

American journalists recently struggled to deal with U.S. President Donald Trump’s ludicrous — and baseless — claim that former President Obama had *wiretapped* his phones at his New York-based Trump Tower. As Maza (2017: np) argues satirists and comedians have done a much better job unmasking Trump’s false claims immediately while mainstream “news networks spent countless hours hosting panel debates and interviews with government officials trying to investigate whether Trump’s conspiracy theory might have merit.” Intriguingly, Young et al.’s (2017) recent experimental work found that humorous videos are an effective means of countering factually inaccurate perceptions amongst audiences. Commenting on Trump’s wiretapping claims, Sophia McClellan, the author of *Colbert’s America* and co-author of *Is Satire Saving Our Nation?* argues “the news media sort of seems like it has to take it seriously in order to be taken seriously” (McClellan, as quoted in Maza 2017: np). McClellan urges journalists to move beyond the binary dialectic of presenting elite rhetoric or frames as credible when they know they are clearly not.

“We think the journalist’s job is to show all sides of the story. But the journalist’s job is to show the truth. And sometimes, in this case, going after the truth is going to be funny because the lies are so absurd that you can’t help but laugh” (McClellan, as quoted in Maza 2017: np).

As this work’s data shows, the news media needs to be more thoughtful about how it challenges hegemonic framing of issues and events by elites. (I return to recommendations concerning fact checking in the concluding chapter.)

The abundance of events-oriented coverage over thematic (substantive and contextual) coverage further compounds concerns about the collaborative role (Christians et al. 2009) of Canadian journalists’ coverage of the war in Afghanistan. Episodic coverage, arguably, perpetuates hegemonic interpretations in the news media (Iyengar 1991). Journalists and their editorial leaders need to pay more attention to how episodic reporting can unwittingly perpetuate dominant meanings. Journalistic rigour requires more than simply using official yardsticks or

values to discredit the frames of sources, especially when journalists know that elite claims are without merit. This type of journalism is too reductionist, too simplistic. Ethical and dogged journalism requires more imagination, nuance and complexity. Informative journalism, hoping to challenge hegemonic framing, requires “more than what is contained within the powerful boundaries of the frame” sponsored by elites (Durham 2001: 134).

There are not just two sides, for instance, to climate change. The BBC, by means of an example, was criticized in 2011 for its “over-rigid” application of impartiality in its coverage of climate change, giving “undue attention to marginal opinion” (BBC 2011: 5). The British public broadcaster also came under fire for its overzealous *impartial* coverage of the Brexit campaign in 2016, forcing its journalists “to supply... phoney balance... to give the appearance of debate” (Bennett 2016: np). This form of journalism, argues Fallows (2016: np), presents politics and public policy as a *he-said/she-said, everyone is to blame* affair that occludes deeper understandings and leaves citizens “even more fatalistic and jaded about public affairs.”

The problems detailed above concerning journalistic fact checking presents a worrying potential consequence for participatory democracies such as Canada (Lewis 2001). Influence, after all, begins with politicians constructing the context and information people will use to make political decisions. Journalism in the facilitative and monitorial role aims to inform citizens so that they can make knowledgeable decisions in a democracy. If journalists rely on elite criteria — the justifications or promises of political actors — to challenge the frames sponsored by officials, the public may be left with only hegemonic definitions of events and issues to consider. To be sure, this form of critique perpetuates hegemonic interpretations (Iyengar 1991; Ettema and Glasser 1998a 1998b; Lakoff 2004). Moreover, there is compelling evidence that highlighting and challenging false claims in news coverage, in fact, confuses audiences, leading them to “misremember” lies as truth (Skurnik et al. 2005). The coming chapter raises numerous concerns about audiences’ reactions to episodic news coverage.

As this CA’s findings highlight, fact checking the rhetoric of elites is not enough because news coverage all too often relies on official frames to structure (usually episodic) stories about the war. This ultimately ensures that the meaning of news coverage is closely aligned with the

dominant political and economic power system. Collaboration does not imply censorship. “Collaboration,” Christians et al. (2009: 197) stresses, “represents an acknowledgement of the state’s interest – to which the media accede either passively or unwittingly, reluctantly or wholeheartedly – in participating in the choices journalists make and the coverage they provide.”

#### **4.19. Conclusion**

This chapter outlined and analyzed this research’s content analysis findings. This research’s CA assessed four research questions concerning framing, news values, fact checking and indexing. While journalists largely indexed their coverage to government and military sources, they did challenge, to a degree, government and military messages. Canadian journalists fact checked the preferred frames of government and military leaders, using elite criteria and benchmarks, failing ultimately to clearly challenge dominant positions. Moreover, news values — and the predominance of episodic coverage — also shaped the news coverage in hegemonic ways. Because the news coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan was largely episodic and lacked a counter-hegemonic imagination, journalists failed to challenge more fundamental structural issues and justifications for the war.

Akin to Hallin’s analysis (1986) of the Vietnam War, Canadian journalists ultimately ended up echoing and amplifying the government and military’s common sense about the conflict in Afghanistan. It is during times of war when democracies and citizens need critical and autonomous journalism the most (Jensen 2003). Episodic, event-oriented coverage provides only “scattered morsels” and not sufficient information and context to allow the public to “gain wide understanding as a sensible alternative to” the interpretations sponsored by government and military leaders (Entman 2004: 17). “Too much of the press,” argues *The Guardian’s* Katherine Viner (2016: np), “often exhibited a bias towards the status quo and a deference to authority.” As this study data shows, Canadians and democracy were ultimately not well served because journalists did not offer a more complete and critical account of Canada’s military role in a distant war. Having completed my analysis of the phenomena that shaped the news coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan, the subsequent pages transition now to reviewing and

analyzing the data that emerged from this research's population-based survey experiment that assesses, in part, the impact of media message on public opinion.

## **Chapter Five: Putting it All Together**

### **5.0. Introduction**

This chapter provides both an overview of this research’s population-based survey-experiment ( $n = 1,131$ ) data and an analysis surrounding the “frame-setting” (de Vreese 2005: 52) process that potentially influenced Canadians’ opinions about the war in Afghanistan. It begins by first assessing the impact of fact checking in the news media on Canadian audiences. Second, it assesses the influence on public opinion of Canadians’ attachment to peacekeeping. This chapter then transitions to evaluating the impact of various demographic and social and political aspects — what Gamson (1992) called experiential factors — influencing Canadians’ opinions about the war in Afghanistan. I conclude this chapter by offering a binary logistic regression analysis designed to explain the potential confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge that likely shaped public attitudes about Afghanistan. Like the previous chapter, this empirical chapter also integrates data and analysis.

As I stressed in both my introduction and my methodology chapters, my interpretation of this study’s population-based survey experiment makes careful knowledge claims. I offer supplementary evidence (survey and focus group data, for instance) and other scholarship and commentary to supplement my analysis.

This chapter seeks to assess four of the eight research questions posed in my theoretical chapter:

**R5.** How (if at all) does journalistic fact checking influence audiences’ judgments about war?

**R6.** How are audiences influenced (or not at all) by the popular wisdom concerning peacekeeping?

**R7.** How are Canadians’ attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts influenced (or not at all) by experiential knowledge?

**R8.** How does the confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge potentially shape Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts?

Akin to Gamson's (1992) metaphorical imagery of a *forest* of issues that people navigate to arrive at their political decisions, I believe it is useful to imagine Canadians similarly making their way through a *wilderness* of media messages, popular wisdom and their own experiential knowledge to arrive at their beliefs concerning the war in Afghanistan. As the coming pages argue, media messages may have played a part in attitude formation about the conflict — but popular wisdom and experiential knowledge (Gamson 1992) or “predispositions” (Zaller 1992: 6) also had an influence on public opinion about the conflict. While this study’s experiment data points to no immediate impact of journalistic fact checking on support for the war, my data does suggest a small — statistically significant — influence on individuals exposed to news stories that highlight improving security in Kandahar. To begin this chapter, I consider the potential impact of fact checking on news audiences.

### **5.1. Fact Checking & Support for the Military Mission**

This work’s fifth research question (**R5**) attempts to measure the impact of journalistic fact checking on audiences:

**R5.** How (if at all) does journalistic fact checking influence audiences’ judgments about war?

As described in the methodology chapter, respondents ( $n = 1131$ ) were equally divided into (and randomly assigned to) four treatment groups and one control group. Table Nine details the level of support Canadians had for their country’s military mission in Afghanistan after being exposed to a media treatment (or no treatment for respondents in the control group).

**Table 9 – Treatment Group & Level of Support**

	<b>Control Group Support</b>	<b>Security 1 – Frame Support</b>	<b>Security 2 – Frame Support (with fact check)</b>	<b>Reconstruction 1 – Frame Support</b>	<b>Reconstruction 2 – Frame Support (with fact check)</b>	<b>Overall Support</b>
<b>Count</b>	228	227	225	225	226	1131
<b>Missing</b>	903	904	906	906	905	0
<b>Mean</b>	3.93	3.81	3.59	3.63	3.66	3.724
<b>Median</b>	4	4	4	4	4	4
<b>Std. Deviation</b>	1.586	1.673	1.691	1.881	1.639	1.696
<b>Variance</b>	2.514	2.8	2.86	3.3537	2.688	2.877
<b>Skew</b>	-0.393	-0.371	-0.193	-0.210	-0.1.97	-0.274

(n = 1,131)

Mean support amongst Canadians is lower in all treatment groups containing a fact check than in the control group. Support for the war in Afghanistan was highest in the control group that received no media information about the conflict. Notably, though, support for the war increased slightly in the reconstruction story treatment group containing a fact check (M = 3.66, SD = 1.69) than in the treatment group containing only the government and military media frame about rebuilding Afghanistan (M = 3.63. SD = 1.88).

Notably, there is no statistically significant difference between support for the conflict in Afghanistan between all the groups. A non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis Test found no statistically significant difference between individuals exposed to stories containing fact checks and those who did not ( $H (4) = 1123, p = .654$ ). Simply put, fact checking in the news media had no statistically significant influence on people's support for the war (see Table 10 for a breakdown between each group). Admittedly, I did not measure whether people changed their minds based on the journalistic fact checking or whether they believed the correction. This is a limitation that I return to in my section on recommendations for future research in the next chapter. (I also revisit the impact of news stories with preferred government and military frames — and no

journalistic fact checking — in the concluding section of this chapter outlining and assessing the confluence of factors that potentially shaped Canadians' attitudes about the war.)

**Table 10 - Treatment Groups & Hypothesis Test of Independent Samples**

Treatment Groups	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Walis Test Sig.
Treatment: Security frame - with no fact check	0.307
Treatment: Security frame - with fact check	0.140
Treatment: Reconstruction frame - with no fact check	0.754
Treatment: Reconstruction frame - with fact check	0.979

This research's data suggests<sup>42</sup> partisan identification may play a role in the interpretation of news coverage containing fact checking. Even after being exposed to a news sample containing a fact check, Conservative and Liberal supporters are overwhelmingly more supportive of the Canadian military's combat efforts in Kandahar than New Democratic, Green and Bloc Québécois supporters (see Tables 11 and 12).

**Table 11 — Security Frame with Fact Check**

Party	Low Support % / n	High Support % / n
Conservative	12.5% / 6	87.5 % / 42
Liberal	38.8% / 33	61.2% / 52
New Democratic	66.7% / 10	33.3% / 5
Green	77.7% / 7	22.3% / 2
Bloc Québécois	100 % 7	0% / 0

(n = 164)  $\chi^2(8, N = 164) = 41.057$ ,  $p = .001$

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<sup>42</sup> For the sake of simplicity, the six-point Likert Scale of support for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan was divided into two groups: low support and high support.

**Table 12 — Reconstruction Frame with Fact Check**

Party	Low Support % / n	High Support % / n
Conservative	10% / 4	90% / 36
Liberal	40% / 44	60% / 66
New Democratic	57.1% / 8	42.9% / 6
Green	66.7% / 6	33.3% / 3
Bloc Québécois	75% / 9	25% / 3

(n = 185)  $\chi^2(9, N = 185) = 34.711, p = .001$

The data also reveals a small uphill positive correlation between support and respondents who identified themselves as on the right of the ideological spectrum,  $r(1128) = .350, p < .01$ . The coming pages transitions to interpreting these findings.

## 5.2. Analysis: Influence of Journalistic Fact checking

This research's data suggests journalistic fact checking has no impact on Canadians' support for the war in Afghanistan. There is no statistical difference in support for the war between individuals exposed to news reports highlighting the preferred frames of government and military leaders and others who read news accounts containing information that fact checked official frames. To be certain, my findings concerning fact checking comport with recent studies suggesting fact checking in news has little impact on audiences (Kuklinksi et al. 2000; Skurnik et al. 2005; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Pingree 2011; Nyhan and Reifler 2012, 2015; Nyhan et al. 2017). Undoubtedly, the human brain is stubborn. Ample literature (Westen 1985; Haidt 2003; Lakoff 2004; De Waal 2005; Westen 2007; Druckman and Bolsen 2011) highlights how people ignore information that is not in line with their beliefs. Be it confirmation bias (Nickerson 1998) or filter bubbles (Resnick et al. 2013) people often seek out information — and news media (Warner and Ryan 2011) — that substantiate their views. Misconceptions are robust — and people are often unwillingly to be persuaded by new information (Lakoff 2004).

The current news media environment may also even be exacerbating this phenomenon. Recently, long-time journalist Carl Bernstein, made famous for his role in the Watergate scandal,

proclaimed that the fractured media environment — where conservatives generally watch the all-news cable network Fox and liberals watch MSNBC or CNN — has created what he called a “cold civil war” in the United States. The legendary journalist asserted that it is “becoming impossible” to have a “fact-based debate” because of the current ideologically divided configuration of the American news media (Bernstein, as quoted in Thomsen 2017: np). “Different sets of viewers,” he added, see CNN and Fox as “representing different truths” (Bernstein, as quoted in Thomsen 2017: np).

In line with Kuklinksi et al. (2000), this work’s data suggests that factual information aimed at correcting or challenging political *spin* or misinformation has little influence on audiences. Fact checking, even with competing claims, could be leading Canadian audiences to doubt what is true because the news media does not clarify the veracity of both sides’ assertions (Pingree 2011). The news media’s fact checking about Canada’s military role in Afghanistan may have even backfired, reinforcing ideological positions and views (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). This research’s data suggests that partisan identification may lead some Canadians to disregard journalistic fact checking. This study shows that Conservative and Liberal Party supporters exposed to journalistic fact checking are more positive about the war than other partisans, suggesting predispositions are more important than new information. Individuals, stresses Berinsky (2009: 84), disregard “new information in favour of more important considerations”, including partisanship, group identities and the media messages of partisan leaders. “In the battle between facts and partisanship,” writes Berinsky (2009: 124), “partisanship always wins.”

*“People tend to resist arguments that are inconsistent with their political predisposition but they do so only to the extent that they possess the contextual information necessary to perceive a relationship between the message and their predisposition”* (Zaller 1992: 44; italics in original).

People essentially respond to new information not based on argument<sup>43</sup> but “their values and predispositions” (Zaller 1992: 47). In a contest between facts and partisanship, Gaines et al. (2007) similarly concluded that party loyalty invariably triumphs (see also Berinsky 2009).

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<sup>43</sup> For the sake of simplicity, the six-point Likert Scale of support for Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan was divided into two groups: low support and high support.

To be sure, ideologically motivated supporters can sometimes disregard facts, despite knowing that they are true. Nyhan et al. (2017), in fact, recently concluded that Donald Trump supporters understood the discrepancies between what the then presidential candidate said and the truth, but that disconnect did not alter their support for him. Support is often influenced by tribal loyalty and not factual fidelity. Partisans may take journalistic “corrections literally, but apparently not seriously” (Nyhan et al. 2017: 17).

With respect to my fifth research question (**R5**), I conclude (that journalistic fact checking does not have an immediate influence on news audiences’ attitudes about war. This research supports other arguments and evidence (Kuklinksi et al. 2000; Skurnik et al. 2005; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Pingree 2011; Nyhan and Reifler 2012, 2015; Nyhan et al. 2017) questioning the efficacy of fact checking in the news.

I hope findings such as this do not deter journalists from fact checking elite rhetoric. As I make clear in my conclusion, the practice is important and can be improved. Moreover, not all fact checking falls flat with audiences. Fridkin, Kenney and Wintersiek (2015), notably, found that fact checking does have consequences on some segments of the public. Negative fact checks, which impeached the truthfulness of claims made in political advertisement, were more influential than positively framed corrections. To be sure, the fact checks offered to respondents in this research were mild, raising the question if more pronounced — and aggressive — fact checking might have had a bigger impact on audiences. Similarly, van der Linden et al. (2017: 1) concluded that an emphasis on consensus about science can “inoculate” individuals against misinformation from climate change deniers. Their experiment ( $n = 2167$ ) found that warning people in advance about the political motives of groups and people spreading misinformation “protect[ed]” people against accepting false information. Lewandowsky et al. (2013: 399) also found that emphasizing scientific consensus “neutralizes the effect” of misinformation about climate change.

Baum and Groeling's (2010a) intriguing assessment of American public opinion concerning the Iraq War found that elites — and especially President George W. Bush — had considerable shaping power over attitudes concerning the conflict in the Middle East. As the war waged on —

and success seemed fleeting — that advantage dissipated as “reality” collided with the public’s increasing negative information about the war. Public opinion in the U.S. concerning the conflict was “elastic”, argue Baum and Groeling (2010a: 434), “allowing alternative frames to challenge the administration’s preferred frame” (see also King and Wells 2009). The Bush Administration’s framing power dissipated as news coverage increasingly challenged frames sponsored by government and military officials. The drip, drip, drips of the news media’s fact checking slowly changed people’s attitudes about the war. Arguably, journalistic fact checking matters “not through Watergate-style exposés but via thousands of small factual interventions” (Graves 2016: 227). Perhaps, research should focus on the long-term impact of journalistic fact checking; not short term, one-shot exposure. (I offer some suggestions about future research and consider the utility of fact checking in the recommendations of my concluding chapter.)

At its most simple level, changing minds relies on *receiving* new information and then *accepting* the recently digested information, which results in an opinion change (Zaller 1992). Fletcher and colleagues (2009) concluded that Canadians who accepted government and military leaders’ framing of the war (those individuals who agreed with the government and military’s media frames about the war) were more positive about Canada’s military role in Kandahar. Yet, Fletcher and his colleagues (2009) concluded that information was only one part of the calculus about support for the war in Canadians’ minds. As I noted in my methods section, this research’s knowledge score was not significantly correlated with attitudes about the war. But as the coming pages details, predispositions (how people feel about peacekeeping compared to armed combat) and emotion (pride in the mission) are strong predictors of support for the war. The ensuing pages turn to evaluating those potential influences. I begin with the possible influence of popular wisdom on attitudes about the war.

### **5.3 Popular Wisdom and Peacekeeping**

This section aims to address this research’s sixth question (**R6**). It considers: How are audiences influenced (or not at all) by the popular wisdom concerning peacekeeping? This study’s population-based survey experiment data reveals that Canadians have a clear preference for the role of their military. A majority of respondents expressed a resounding desire to see

Canadian Forces be used solely for peacekeeping (50.7%). Only 4.3 per cent of Canadians believe the military should be deployed solely for armed combat. The remaining 45 per cent revealed a desire to see Canadian Forces used for both peacekeeping and combat. When forced to choose between peacekeeping and armed combat, individuals overwhelmingly (78.5%) preferred using their country's military for peacekeeping instead of armed combat (21.5%).

Female Canadians are overwhelmingly more supportive of seeing Canadian armed forces used exclusively for peacekeeping (86.4%) compared to armed combat (13.6%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 1112) = 38.298, p = .001$ . While at a slightly lower level than women, male respondents were also more supportive of a peacekeeping role (70.4%) compared to armed combat (29.6%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 1112) = 38.298, p = .001$ .

Region also plays an important role in determining Canadians' attitudes toward the role of Canada's military. Across Canada, three-quarters (76.7%) of Canadians register a preference for using Canada's military solely for peacekeeping over armed combat (23.3%),  $\chi^2(3, N = 1108) = 120.134, p = .001$ . It is a different story in Quebec. Individuals living in the mostly French-speaking province prefer that Canadian Forces be used exclusively for peacekeeping (84.8%) instead of armed combat (see Table 13 for a complete breakdown of peacekeeping compared to armed combat by region).

**Table 13 - Regional Breakdown & Military Role**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Armed Combat - %/n</b>	<b>Peacekeeping - %/n</b>
Atlantic Canada	21.1 / 16	78.9 / 60
Quebec	15.2 / 49	84.8 / 274
Ontario	29.2 / 113	70.8 / 274
West and North	23.3 / 258	75.2 / 242

(n = 1093)

The interplay between political interest and views on the military are significant (84.8%) and noteworthy. Canadians who professed little or no interest in politics are more likely to indicate a preference for peacekeeping over armed combat for the country's military,  $\chi^2(3, N = 1112) = 24.837, p = .001$  (Table 14 offers a breakdown of political interest and peacekeeping compared to armed combat preferences).

**Table 14 – Political Interest & Military Role**

Political Interest	Armed Combat - %/n	Peacekeeping -%/n
Not at all interested	11.7 / 24	88.3 / 182
Not very interested	21.5 / 29	78.5 / 106
Somewhat interested	22.5 / 58	77.8 / 203
Very interested	28.8 / 147	71.2 / 854

(n = 1112)

There is a strong association between Canadians' placement on the left/right ideological spectrum and their attitudes about Canada's military role and its combat mission in Afghanistan. Individuals who placed themselves on the left side of the ideological classification system, overwhelmingly (88.6%) prefer to see Canada's military used exclusively for peacekeeping,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1112) = 162.577$ ,  $p = .001$ . Canadians who identify as right of centre were less inclined to choose peacekeeping over armed combat. Notably, however, a majority (54.7%) of right-wing Canadians do prefer that the country's military be used for peacekeeping,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1112) = 162.577$ ,  $p = .001$ .

As might be expected, given the findings concerning fact checking and voter preference, partisan identification is also connected with Canadians' views about the country's armed forces' role. In comparison to Liberal party voters (16.3%) and New Democratic Party supporters (10.1%), a majority of respondents who said they would voter for the Conservative Party of Canada (55.9%) prefer to see Canadian Forces used for armed combat over peacekeeping,  $\chi^2(9, N = 1112) = 230.949$ ,  $p = .001$  (see Table 15 for a complete breakdown of voter intention and armed combat versus peacekeeping role).

**Table 15 – Voter Intention - Armed Combat Versus Peacekeeping**

<b>Voter Intention</b>	<b>Armed Combat % / n</b>	<b>Peacekeeping % / n</b>
Liberal Party	16.3 / 42	90.4 / 394
Conservative Party	55.9 / 146	44.1 / 115
New Democratic Party (NDP)	10.1 / 7	89.9 / 62
Green Party	4.9 / 2	95.1 / 39
Bloc Québécois Party	8.7 / 4	91.3 / 42
Other Party or Candidate	54.5 / 6	45.5 / 5
Do Not Know	18.5 / 27	81.5 / 119
No Intention to Vote	29.4 / 10	70.6 / 24
Intend to Spoil Ballot	19.7 / 12	80.3 / 49
Not Eligible to Vote	28.6 / 2	71.4 / 5

(n = 1112)

Individuals who scored higher on the activism scale were also more likely to want to see Canada's military used for peacekeeping over armed combat,  $\chi^2(8, N = 1112) = 16.789, p = .032$ .

Of note, Canadians who felt a higher degree of pride in the military's combat mission in Afghanistan overwhelmingly (83.8%) prefer to see Canadian Forces used primarily for armed combat,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1076) = 111.608, p = .001$ . Similarly, those Canadians who express a higher degree of comfort in seeing Canadian Forces return to Afghanistan in a combat role (58.4%), prefer to see the country's military used solely for armed combat as well,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1110) = 143.135, p = .032$ .

Support for the war in Afghanistan was, not surprisingly, highest amongst Canadians who prefer an exclusive armed combat role for Canadian Forces (85.7%), compared to those who prefer a peacekeeping one (14.3%). This research's data found no statistically significant association between age, education, income and media use and Canadians attitudes about whether the country's military should be used for peacekeeping or armed combat. Having sketched this research's important findings concerning peacekeeping, I now turn to analyzing the data.

#### 5.4. Analysis: Popular Wisdom About Peacekeeping

“The image of a Canadian soldier wearing his blue beret, standing watch at some lonely outpost in a strife-torn foreign land, is part of the modern Canadian mosaic, and a proud tradition” (General Paul Mason, as quoted in Whitworth 2005: 89).

Along with geography and histories, nations share “myths and memories” (Smith 1991: 43). As I noted in the onset of this thesis — and as this research’s data clearly confirms — peacekeeping is wrapped up in the very fabric and identity of Canadians. The ideal of peacekeeping is at the heart of the Canada’s “imagined community” (Anderson 1991: 6) and, arguably, one of the “core myths” (Francis 1997: 10) of the country. Peacekeeping is a “proud Canadian tradition” (Dorn 2005: 27), part of “our genetic code as a nation” (Off 2000: 2) and continues as a current priority for Canada’s military (Government of Canada 2017). Previous research contends peacekeeping defines, in part, many Canadians’ “national identity” and represents something to be “celebrated” (Dorn 2005: 7). This work, similar to Fletcher and his colleagues (2009), not surprisingly, found that a majority of Canadians who favour a peacekeeping role for Canada’s military, were less supportive of the country’s combat operations in Afghanistan between 2006-2011. Moreover, this study’s data highlights that those Canadians who support peacekeeping are much less inclined to want to see Canadian Forces return to a combat role in the South Asian country.

To be sure, Canadians’ narratives about peacekeeping correspond with Gamson’s (1992) understanding of popular wisdom. As this research’s data makes plain, the popular beliefs — or “ideology of consensus” (Fowler 1991: 49) — surrounding peacekeeping remains potent for many Canadians. These findings underscore that the peacekeeping is, arguably, intrinsic to Canadians’ concept of themselves, “draw[ing] upon its important historical myths and cherished symbols, that give expression to its most elevated aspirations and its loftiest ambitions” (King and Wells 2009: 8).

For many Canadians, peacekeeping is one of those distinctions, like universal healthcare, that distinguishes themselves from Americans. Contrasts or differences between Canadians and their southern neighbour, sociologists have long posited, often end up defining Canadians’ identity (Lipset 1990; Langlois 1999). A national survey of Canadians in 2017 confirmed many people in the northern country want to actually increase the differences between themselves and Americans, revealing that only two in ten Canadians believed the country “should try to be more

like the United States<sup>44</sup>” (Anderson and Coleto 2017: np). Peacekeeping definitely sets Canadians apart from their neighbours in the U.S.

This study’s data also highlights that Canadians who expressed little or no interest in politics accepted the traditional popular wisdom of Canada as a peacekeeping nation. Canadians who pay less attention to politics, no doubt, spend little time critically evaluating foreign affairs and the role of Canada’s military overseas. Politically disinterested Canadians, as this data suggests, likely rely on shortcuts and heuristics (Scheufele and Scheufele 2010), turning to their “shared knowledge of what “everyone knows” about the altruisms of peacekeeping to arrive at their attitudes concerning the role of Canada’s military (Gamson 1992: 123-24). Low-information citizens frequently use heuristics or elite cues in the place of meaningful information to form political opinions (Popkins 1991). Ample research has shown that poorly informed individuals use cues from elites or media discourse to form attitudes (Lupia 1994; Pokins 1991; Sniderman, Brody Tetlock 1991; Berinsky 2009). In line with this study’s data, Fletcher and colleagues (2009) also found that Canadians who knew the true nature of Canada’s combat role in Afghanistan were more supportive of the military mission than those who did not. This study, however, found no statistically significant association between education and media use and support for a peacekeeping role over armed combat.

As noted earlier, support for Canada’s military mission in Kandahar dropped precipitously in the first 12 months of the conflict (CTV 2007). This research clearly highlights that Canadians prefer to see their military used for peacekeeping instead of armed combat, suggesting Canadians may have rejected the perpetual combat associated with Kandahar because it was incongruous with many Canadians’ “predispositions” (Zaller 1992: 6) of Canadian Forces *keeping the peace* in distant places around the world. For many, the media representations of their military in Afghanistan were, arguably, incompatible with their traditional common sense (Gramsci 1971) view of the Canadian military. The constant cacophony of combat video from Kandahar was likely discordant with Canadians’ conventional understanding or popular wisdom (Gamson

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<sup>44</sup> The national online survey of 1,500 Canadians drew from a representative panel of nearly a half million Canadians. Online surveys are not truly random, of course. ABACUS DATA estimates that the margin of error for a comparable probability random sample of 1,500 Canadians would be +/- 2.6 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

1992) associated with their military. After all, the news media “can become an articulator of concern when the images presented interact with other information that questions the validity of policy” (Morrison and Tumber 1998: 349). Canadians’ attitudes about the war in Afghanistan likely tapped into existing popular wisdom about Canada’s military. Similar to Shen (2004: 400), this work’s data suggests pre-existing opinions matter: that is, people are only likely to accept media fables if they resonate with existing beliefs and knowledge.

As noted before, national surveys of Canadians detected a quick decline in public support over the first year of the war (The Strategic Counsel 2007)<sup>45</sup>. In one year, opinions shifted dramatically with two-thirds (66.5%) of Canadians opposed to combat in Kandahar. Fletcher et al.’s (2009) Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis of this polling data concluded that a desire to see Canadian Forces used for peacekeeping is a statistically significant predictor of lower support for the conflict in Afghanistan. Yet, their analysis found that the influence of peacekeeping as a predictor of support for the war versus armed combat fell considerably from 2006 to 2007, suggesting that other factors, such as experiential knowledge, also played a role in influencing attitudes about the war.

It is notable, particularly for this research’s arguments about peacekeeping, that public support was high for the more traditional stabilizing force role in Kabul between 2003-2005 (Saideman 2016). Conversely, Canadians’ opposition grew intensely to the frequent and fierce firefights in Kandahar between 2006-2011. Public support, however, increased, when Canada stopped combat in Kandahar and transitioned to training Afghan soldiers in Kabul between 2012-2014 (Boucher and Nossal 2015). Clearly, Canadians appear to prefer peacekeeping roles over armed combat. This research’s data also confirms that Canadians remain “highly committed to the “Canada-as-a-peacekeeper” ideal” (Boucher and Nossal 2015: 195). Comparable to this research’s data, Letourneau and Massie (2005) contend that the lack of consensus amongst Canadians is largely attributable to the military mission in Kandahar straying from historic configurations of Canadian Forces as peacekeepers. This shaping factor is most pronounced amongst people living in Quebec.

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<sup>45</sup> The polling firm surveyed 1,000 Canadians between July 12 and July 16, 2007. The margin of error was +/- 3.1 per cent 19 times out of 20 (CTV 2007).

My data clearly shows that most Québécois are decidedly less enthusiastic about Canada's military role in Afghanistan than the rest of the country. Living in Quebec is a strong predictor of decreased support for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. Canada's military role in Afghanistan was controversial, to be certain, in the predominantly French-speaking province (Saideman 2016). Opposition to Canada's military mission in Afghanistan averaged 66 per cent in Quebec — and ran as high as 77 per cent between 2006-2011 (Boucher and Nossal 2015). This experiment's data also underscores that most Québécois are less proud of the mission and more supportive of peacekeeping than other Canadians. Quebecers also remain less likely to want to see Canadian Forces return to Afghanistan in a military role. Aligned with Turenne and her colleagues' (2016: 274) contention, this research's data adds evidence to the argument that Canada's military mission in Kandahar "was something to be opposed" in Quebec. An editorial in the *Montreal Gazette* after troops from the Quebec City area had deployed to Afghanistan in the summer of 2007, by means of an example, suggested the firm opposition amongst Québécois to combat in Kandahar was not a surprise.

"Quebecers have consistently been the most pacifist of Canadians, from the time of the Boer War more than a century ago. Opposition to the Afghanistan campaign is no doubt intensified by the streak of anti-Americanism in Québécois society, and by the misconception that the Afghanistan mission is a U.S. operation, when in fact it is run by NATO with the participation of 36 other countries along with Canada" (Montreal Gazette 2007: np).

Similar to this research's data, Rioux's (2005) analysis of national survey data since the Second World War concluded that, amongst Canadians, Quebecers are more likely to oppose military spending and less likely to support armed conflict. For historical and sociological reasons, Rioux (2005: 6) contends that Québécois possess "traditionally dovish attitudes towards military and defence issues, causing them to express more anti-military opinions than English-speaking Canadians." While Boucher and Roussel's (2008) analysis of survey data contradicts the perceived "conventional wisdom" of "French-Canadians being more dovish" (Rioux 2005: 5) or "pacifist" (Granatstein 2007: 121), the researchers, akin to this study's data, concluded that Quebecers clearly prefer UN-backed peacekeeping operations over combat.

Considering the evidence presented here concerning my sixth research question (**R6**), I concluded that that popular wisdom concerning peacekeeping has a profound influence on

Canadians' attitudes about their country's military and its adventures overseas. This work's evidence adds to the scholarly argument surrounding the importance of Canadians' popular wisdom (Gamson 1992) and predispositions (Zaller 1992) shaping political opinions. Having offered an analysis of the importance of the influence of popular wisdom, this chapter now progresses to considering the role of experiential knowledge in attitudes formation about war.

### **5.5. Experiential Knowledge and Canada's Military Mission in Afghanistan**

This study's seventh research question (**R7**) examines the impact on experiential knowledge on Canadians' attitudes towards the war in Afghanistan: How are Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts influenced (or not at all) by experiential knowledge?

This research's population-based survey experiment data<sup>46</sup> clearly shows that most Canadians are proud of Canada's combat role in Afghanistan between 2006-2011,  $M = 5.7$ ,  $SD = 3.341$ . As well, support amongst Canadians for the mission — assessed on a six-point Likert scale — gravitated towards more supportive than less supportive,  $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.651$ . People across the country are less inclined to see Canada's military return to Afghanistan in a combat role,  $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ . Male Canadians (57.7%) also express a higher degree of pride in Canada's military mission in Afghanistan (2006-2011) compared to their female counterparts (49.7%)<sup>47</sup>,  $c^2(1, N = 1097) = 6.811$ ,  $p = .009$ . Overwhelmingly, both male (67.2%) and female (76.7%) Canadians expressed disagreement with the idea of having Canadian Forces return to Afghanistan,  $c^2(1, N = 1129) = 11.873$ ,  $p = .001$ .

Age is largely insignificant in relation to most of the dependent variables of interest for this study. There is a statistically significant — but weak uphill positive linear relationship — between age and pride in the mission,  $r(1097) = .179$ ,  $p < .01$ . Older Canadians indicated they

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<sup>46</sup> The six-point Likert scale was broken into two groups for easier statistical analysis. Group one comprised those respondents who strongly disagree, somewhat disagree and slightly disagree. Group two included those who slightly agree, somewhat agree and strongly agree.

<sup>47</sup> For easier statistical analysis, the 10-point pride scale was broken into two groups: one to five was grouped as low pride and six to 10 was grouped as high pride.

are more proud of Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan than younger individuals. As well, my statistical analysis revealed nothing worth noting about education and employment status.

Akin to popular wisdom concerning peacekeeping, region is a notable determinant when assessing dependent variables measured by this work's population-based survey experiment. People living in Quebec consistently stand out as a significant variable determining perceptions of Canada's military and its role in Afghanistan. As discussed in the previous section, Quebecers are decidedly less proud of Canada's military efforts in Kandahar (2006-2011) than other Canadians. Across the country, on average, Canadians expressed more pride (54.4%) than less (45.6%) when asked to gauge their pride in Canada's military mission in Afghanistan,  $\chi^2(3, N = 1093) = 41.262$ ,  $p = .001$ . Six in ten people from Quebec (60.1%), however, say they feel little or no pride about Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan (see Table 16 for a regional breakdown of pride in Canada's military role in Afghanistan).

**Table 16 - Regional Breakdown - Pride in Canada's Afghanistan Mission**

Region	Less Pride - % / n	More Pride - % / n
Atlantic Canada	49.4 / 38	50.6 / 39
Quebec	60.1 / 187	39.9 / 124
Ontario	37.1 / 142	62.9 / 241
West and North	40.7 / 131	59.3 / 131

( $n = 1093$ )

Right of centre Canadians (70.8%), not surprisingly, express more pride in Canada's military mission than those who identified as left of centre (45.5%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 1097) = 64.497$ ,  $p = .001$ . Consistent with the right/left divide, those on the right side of the spectrum (45.8%) also expressed a higher willingness to see Canadian Forces return to Afghanistan in a military role than those who self-identified as left of centre (20%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 1129) = 82.903$ ,  $p = .001$ . Pride in Canada's combat operations in Kandahar (2006-2011) is also highest amongst Conservative Party voters (80.1%) compared to the national average of 54.5 per cent for other partisans,  $\chi^2(9, N = 1097) = 166.583$ ,  $p = .001$  (see Table 17 for a breakdown of partisanship and pride). Left of centre party supporters, such as New Democratic Party (31.3%), Green Party (21.1%) and Bloc

Québécois (16.3%), are decidedly less proud of the military mission than Liberal Party voters (56.8%). Conservative Party supporters (56.7%) are also much more supportive of the idea of Canada's military returning to Afghanistan than the national average of just 29.1 per cent,  $c^2(9, N = 1129) = 147.747$ ,  $p = .001$ .

**Table 17 – Partisanship and Pride**

Political Party	%
Conservative Party	80.1
Liberal Part	56.8
New Democratic Party (NDP)	31.3
Green Party	21.1
Bloc Québécois Party	16.3

( $n = 1,131$ )

Given the left/right and partisan split, it is intuitive that there is a relationship between Canadians' activism score (their willingness to protest, sign petitions, be involved with unions, etc.) and how it also plays a role in perceptions of Canada's military and its five-year-long combat mission in Kandahar. The data also shows a statistically significant — but very weak uphill negative linear relationship — between higher activism and pride in the mission,  $r(1097) = -.153$ ,  $p < .01$ . I now transition to analyzing this data.

## 5.6. Analysis: Experiential Knowledge and Canada's Combat Role in Kandahar

“The story of how people construct meaning,” writes Gamson (1992: 9), “is, in fact, a series of parallel stories.” This discussion seeks to illuminate the *story* of experiential knowledge influencing Canadians’ opinions about the war in Afghanistan. This study’s data illustrates well how individual experience — Canadians’ identities, their politics, and their emotions — shape how people think about Canada’s military operation in Afghanistan. This section of the chapter attempts to interpret how the *privileged experience* and *firsthand knowledge* of Canadians

influenced their attitudes about the war (Gamson 1992). I begin by briefly evaluating the role of gender. Second, I interpret the influence of political preferences and partisan politics on thinking about the conflict in Afghanistan. Finally, I evaluate the importance of emotion (or pride) in Canadians' feelings about their country's military mission in Afghanistan.

### 5.7. Gender

The literature concerning political communication and gender is well established. It should come as no surprise that this research's data underscores the gendered differences in Canadians' attitudes towards war. Like so much scholarship, political thinking — and foreign policy opinions, in particular — are decidedly gendered (Conover and Sapiro 1993; Bendyna and Finucane 1996; Everts 2002; Eichenberg 2003; Eichenberg and Read 2015)<sup>48</sup>. Like their American counterparts (Eichenberg 2003), this research clearly shows that Canadian women are less militaristic than men. Female Canadians are less supportive of the war in Afghanistan than males — and keener to see Canadian armed forces used exclusively for peacekeeping than men. As well, Canadian women were less proud of Canada's military missions in Afghanistan than men. Still, gender's influence on attitudes towards Canada's military and its use is relevant when considering how experiential knowledge influences political attitude formation.

This work's findings dovetail with Fletcher and his colleague's (2009) analysis of survey data about the conflict in Afghanistan. That research concluded that gender was a significant predictor of support for the war. Canadian women grew more disenchanted with the conflict over time. Like this research, Fletcher et al. (2009) contend that understanding the gender gap is not as simple as male versus female preferences — but requires folding in how men and women were differently influenced by both their predisposition and the information they received<sup>49</sup>. Canadian women, for instance, who held an interventionist view concerning Canada's military

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<sup>48</sup> Conover (1988), notably, argues that feminism predispositions eclipses gender in determining feelings toward political issues. This research is incapable of assessing that argument.

<sup>49</sup> While this research's data found statistically significant associations between gender and preferences for the role of Canadian Forces, for instance, this work's binary logistic regression analysis (detailed later in this chapter) did not show that gender is a statically significant predictor of support when holding a number of other independent variables constant.

were decidedly more receptive to government and military media frames about the war in Afghanistan (Fletcher et al. 2009). Eichenberg and Read (2015: 243) urge researchers to move beyond “binary, gender-based characterizations” in their analysis of gender and public opinion and fold in individual-level associations and connections to offer a more nuanced picture of gender’s role in attitudes towards conflict and international relations. To that end, the next section takes up interpreting other experiential knowledge that influenced how Canadians viewed the conflict in Afghanistan.

### **5.8. Politics and Attitudes Towards the Conflict in Afghanistan**

It is, of course, not remarkable that politics and partisanship plays a role in Canadians’ attitudes towards their military and its role in Afghanistan. Those on the right are: (1) more supportive of Canada’s military; (2) more proud of the military’s combat mission in Kandahar; (3) more willing to return to a combat role in the South Asian country; and (4) bigger proponents of using Canadian Forces for intervention in foreign conflict. This study’s data falls in line with surveys conducted during the height of the conflict (The Strategic Counsel 2006a, 2007). Fletcher and his colleagues’ (2009) analysis, similarly, concluded that party support was rather static in 2006 and 2007. Conservative Party supporters were decidedly more positive about the war than those Canadians who preferred centrist or centre-left parties.

As outlined in the introduction — and detailed in the previous chapter — Stephen Harper (and his Conservative government) championed Canada’s military mission and the soldiers fighting in Kandahar in the first year of the conflict. In line with Gramsci’s (1971) understanding of hegemony, and detailed in the previous chapter, the Conservatives attempted to articulate a *common sense* about the war and Canada’s military role in it. Harper and his government described the conflict as part of a noble effort (Nossal 2010), compatible with “standing up for... core Canadian values” (Harper 2006: np). Afghanistan, essentially, became “Mr. Harper’s war” (Bratt 2007: 5). Moreover, debate over the war became a “political football” (Boucher and Nossal 2015: 74). The Conservative Party used the conflict to advance its political agenda early on in its tenure as government, using a parliamentary debate in 2006 over extending the mission to expose division in the opposition Liberal Party (Saideman 2016). Theory suggests that

partisan Conservatives, no doubt, *tuned in* to the prime minister's messages about the war (Berinsky 2009).

The conflict came to define, in many ways, Harper and his Conservative Party. The issue drew a distinction between Conservatives and other political parties. Partisan Conservatives likely cued to their leader's rhetoric (Zaller 1992; Berinsky 2009). They embraced it, identified with it – and adopted it as their own thinking about the war, as this research's data suggests. Conservative Party supporters were more supportive of the war than other partisans. This work's findings add evidence to the argument that domestic partisanship is a significant predictor of support for war (Gaines et al. 2007; Jacobson 2008; Berinsky 2009). This study's findings suggest foreign policy — just like domestic politics — is shaped largely by partisanship. “[A]ttachment to and enmities towards political relevant groups, argues Berinsky (2009: 62) “provide the baseline reaction towards a war.” Intriguingly, Loewen and Robinson's (2010) analysis of voting data and individual survey data produced compelling evidence that Conservative supporters were more supportive of the conflict in federal constituencies that had experienced the death of a local soldier.

In general, individuals look to “credible elites” for “guidance” to sort out complicated events or issues (Druckman 2001: 1061) — and partisans, in particular, turn to party leaders to help form opinions (Zaller 1992; Berinsky 2015). “[R]elatively subtle partisan messages,” contends Baum and Groeling (2010b: 131) can, in fact, “have large effects on opinion, even in high-salience issue areas like war and national security and among well-informed politically attentive partisans on the lookout for political manipulation and bias.”

“[W]hen citizens observe elites engaging in partisan bickering about the merits of a policy, they tend to choose sides, largely though not perfectly along partisan lines” (Baum and Groeling 2010b: 3).

These opinion formation *short cuts or heuristics* (Popkins 1991; Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Baum and Groeling 2010b) saves individuals time while allowing them to arrive at opinions that they believe coincide with their partisan self-interest. Simply put, people prefer messages that are consistent with their party loyalties and political values (Sniderman and Theriault 2004; Chong and Druckman 2007; Castells 2009). As this study's data shows, the

connected factors of ideology and party identification are consistently found to be the most significant correlations influencing attitudes towards foreign policy (Holsti 2004). This impact is likely heightened by the growing schism between Canadian political parties.

Canada's political system has grown increasing polarized in recent years (Johnston 2008, 2014). Many Canadians live in echo chambers, of sorts, where they only get exposed to information that is congruent with their own beliefs. In 2012, long-time pollster Frank Graves, president of EKOS Research Associates, told the *Montreal Gazette* that in his analysis of decades of polling data, Canadians have moved away from their usually centrist political positions.

"In terms of the whole panoply of issues, from foreign policy to economic policy to crime and justice policy to issues about parliamentary democracy, I have never seen Canadians this polarized" (Graves, as quoted in Scott 2012: np).

Canadian political parties have also moved away from the centre, leaving their supporters with less and less in common with other Canadians who support other parties on the other side of the right/left ideological spectrum (University of Toronto 2012).

"Obviously in the past people had party loyalty and they disliked the other parties. But ... they didn't hate the other parties in a visceral way. I think what you see now is a strong polarization between opposing camps ... I think as a society we could become more divided" (Chris Cochrane, as quoted in University of Toronto 2012: np).

As the political landscape grows more polarized and parties become progressively more homogenous — economically, racially, religiously, geographically — partisans acquire stronger ideological and position cues from their preferred party (Mason and Davis 2015). Zaller (1992) posits that polarization, coupled with elite disagreement, leads individuals to side usually with their partisan leaders.

This research's data points to a stacking, if you will, of identities (Rocca and Brewer 2002) associated with support for the conflict in Afghanistan. It appears that public opinion about the war was structured, in part, by social groupings (Converse 1964). Socialization "ties the attitudes" of individuals to the elites that they identify with, such as partisan leaders (Zaller 1994: 200). This work's data shows that older less-educated, right-leaning Conservative supporters, living outside of Quebec are more supportive of the war than other Canadians not sharing those demographic and socio-political factors. Conservative Party supporters were more proud of

Canada's role in Afghanistan and showed a stronger willingness to see Canadian Forces return to the country in a combat role.

“When multiple social identities come into alignment, this alignment strengthens the effects of these identities on behaviour, and strengthens the cognitive and motivational bases of ingroup bias and negative emotion by increasing the perceived differences between the groups, regardless of the true differences between them” (Mason 2013a: 1).

Understanding Canadians’ support for the war in Afghanistan, therefore, needs to account for multiple identities and factors. It appears, Canadians use their social groups as a reference to arrive at their attitudes about war (Berinsky 2009). Berinsky, in fact, argues that individuals use “group loyalties and enmities at the same time...” to arrive at attitudes about war that “accord with their predispositions” (Berinsky 2009: 72).

To be sure, this study’s data highlights that support for the war amongst Canadians represents a folding together of experiential factors (McCombs et al 2011). For many Canadians, a stronger affinity for the military and Canada’s war in Afghanistan flows not just from a single identity such as where they live or their gender — but also their party preference. This study’s data highlights a stacking of identities, associations and positions helping to entrench political attitudes. This interpretation, though, does not take into account the importance emotion plays in how Canadians view their military and the war in Afghanistan. In the coming section, I address the importance of incorporating pride into a more complete understanding of support for the war.

### **5.9. Emotion and its Role in Opinion Formation**

This research’s data reveals that Canadians’ emotional investment (their pride) in Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan also had a significant influence on attitudes about the war. This research’s population-based survey experiment found an uphill (positive) correlation between support for Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan and pride. Pride in Canada’s role in Afghanistan is also, not surprisingly, associated with a willingness to see Canadian Forces return to a combat role in South Asia. Experiential knowledge, such as emotion, “is valued precisely because it is so direct and relatively unmediated” (Gamson 1992: 126). Westen (2007: ix; italics in original) puts it well:

“[T]he vision of mind has captured the imagination of philosophers, cognitive scientists, economists, and political scientists since the eighteenth century — a *dispassionate mind* that makes decisions by weighing the evidence and reasoning to the most valid conclusions — bears no relation to how the mind and the brain actually work.”

Pride’s role in opinion formation concerning Afghanistan was an important shaping factor, arguably, because it allowed Canadians to incorporate their “past experience” and the evaluations they made about the country’s history with “contemporary circumstances” for a speedy evaluation of the war in Afghanistan (Marcus 2000: 221).

This research’s data also dovetails neatly with Damasio’s (1994) contention that emotion is instrumental in how individuals construct meaning. In contrast to cost-benefit political decision-making (Edwards 1977; Edwards and Newman 1986) and bounded rationality models (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 1974; Kahneman and Tversky 2000; Tetlock and Mellers 2002), this research’s findings illustrate how pride factored into how Canadians engaged with Canada’s military mission. This study’s empirical findings also adds to scholarship (Everts 2002; Berinsky 2009; Fletcher et al. 2009) urging researchers to steer away from entrenched debates over rational publics making deliberative political decisions (Page and Shapiro 1992). Mouffe (1999, 2000; 2005), as well, defends making space for conflict and agonistic pluralism, contending that not all politics is strictly rational. This research only assessed the role of pride in the mission. Anger may very well have played a role in Canadians’ attitudes about the conflict in Afghanistan. (I return to the possibility of evaluating anger in my concluding chapter’s suggestions about future research.)

With respect to my seventh research question (R7), I concluded that Canadians’ political opinions about the war in Afghanistan represent a mix of experiential knowledge. In particular, this study adds to the weight pointing towards the importance of emotion in opinion formation. The coming section examines the confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge on Canadians’ attitudes towards Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan.

## 5.10. Putting it All Together

This section addresses this research's eighth (and final) research question (**R8**): **R8.** How does the confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge potentially shape Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts?

As the previous section detailed, a number of demographic and socio-political variables (experiential factors) are associated with Canadians' views of Canada's combat operations in Afghanistan. The ensuing section assesses how media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential factors can possibly come together to produce Canadians' attitudes about the war in Afghanistan. To answer this question, I undertook a binary logistic regression analysis of the population-based survey experiment data to estimate or predict the relationship between the main dependent variable of support<sup>50</sup> for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan and the independent variables surrounding (1) media discourse; (2) popular wisdom; and (3) experiential factors. Table 18 details the impact of independent variables (while holding them constant) on the main dependent variable of support for the war in Afghanistan.

A Canadian with high levels of pride in the military mission increases the chances of that individual having high levels of support for the military mission in Kandahar by a factor of 1.458 or 79 per cent. Canadians on the right side of the ideological spectrum are more likely to be highly supportive of the military mission than those on the left by a factor of 1.15 times (12%). Residents in Quebec are less likely to be highly supportive of the military mission by a factor of -.686 times or, put another way, the probability of someone from Quebec not being highly supportive of the military mission is 60 per cent more likely than individuals from the rest of Canada. Moreover, those Canadians who prefer a peacekeeping role for Canadian Forces are also less likely to be highly supportive of Canada's military role in Afghanistan by a factor of -.576 times. That is, those individuals who prefer peacekeeping for Canada's military are 123 per

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<sup>50</sup> In an effort to simplify the predictive model — and eliminate the subtle differences between six levels of support in the Likert Scale — I divided respondents into two groups: (1) low support; and (2) high support. I then conducted a binary logistic regression analysis using SPSS to assess support for Canada's military role Afghanistan.

cent less likely to be highly supportive of the military mission in Kandahar than those Canadians who prefer an exclusive combat role for the military.

**Table 18 – Binary Logistic Regression Model: Support for Combat<sup>51</sup>**

Variable	Parameter Errors	Exp (B)
Peacekeeping Role Exclusively	-.552* (.240)	- 0.576
Treatment Group 2 (Security Frame no Fact check)	.475* (.243)	1.607
Pride in Mission	3.77*** (.028)	1.458
Quebec	-.377* (.198)	- 0.686
Left / Right Spectrum	.140*** (.035)	1.15
*p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 (n = 1135)		

Of note, individuals who were exposed to a news story featuring an improving security frame sponsored by government or military officials (with no journalistic fact checking) are also more likely to be highly supportive of the military mission in Afghanistan by a factor of 1.607 times than individuals exposed to the other media treatments. Expressed another way, Canadians exposed to a media frame highlighting improving security in Kandahar (with no fact checking) are 32 per cent more likely to be highly supportive of Canada's combat role in Afghanistan than respondents who read other news stories in this population-based survey experiment. Gender was not found to be a statistically significant predictor of support for the war when holding other variables constant. The coming pages discuss these findings.

<sup>51</sup> The Pseudo R-Square (Nagelkerke) is .421, suggesting that the 42 per cent of variance in the model is explained by the variables. This value is consistent with a good-fitting model (Kuha and Lauderdale 2014).

## **5.11. Analysis: Putting it All Together**

In line with Gamson's (1992) thinking about political attitude formation, this research's binary logistic regression analysis suggests that Canadians weave media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge into their political opinion formation. This work illustrates well that media are "just one among many resources that citizens may draw from their "tool kit" in working through public issues (Price et al. 2005: 205). The coming pages offer an analysis of the confluence of statistically significant independent variables that can predict support for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. I begin by evaluating the impact of popular wisdom and experiential factors on support. As I have already offered a detailed discussion of the role of peacekeeping, pride, Quebec and left/right ideology in opinions about the war in Afghanistan, I will restrict most of the coming analysis to evaluating the potential impact of the news media frames on Canadians' opinions about the conflict in Afghanistan. This study's data suggests government and military media frames *can* have some influence on thinking about the conflict – but it is not the only influence.

## **5.12. Popular Wisdom and Peacekeeping**

As this research's data highlights, Canadians have an overwhelming preference for seeing their armed forces used for peacekeeping over armed combat. This work's statistical analysis clearly shows that a preference for peacekeeping (instead of armed combat) is a significant predictor of support for the war in Afghanistan, when holding other factors constant. As I have argued early on in this chapter, many Canadians likely rely on the heuristics or mental shortcuts about peacekeeping to form their attitudes about the conflict in Afghanistan. It is a phenomenon echoed by other recent research.

Underscoring this work's data, a national survey (conducted around that same time as this population-based survey was surveying Canadians) concluded that nearly three-quarters of Canadians want Canadian Forces to play a role in future – even yet to be determined – UN

peacekeeping missions (CTV 2016)<sup>52</sup>. It is noteworthy that Canadians are so committed to the idea of peacekeeping that they are willing to support a mission without any knowledge about: (1) where Canadian Forces might be deployed; (2) the role of the military in the undetermined country; (3) and, intriguingly, the danger level of the potential mission. As I noted in the introduction, many Canadians — and even some political actors — initially believed Canadian Forces would be keeping the peace in Kandahar. This study's data — and the recent survey data mentioned above — suggests Canadians remain truly committed to the idea of peacekeeping. As this work makes plain, for many Canadians, *keeping the peace* is inherently viewed as “good” while other military endeavours are seen as “bad” (Wagner 2007: 54; italics in original).

### **5.13. Experiential Knowledge**

As this work's binary logistic regression analysis found, pride is a significant and robust predictor of support amongst Canadians for the war in Afghanistan, while holding other factors constant. Similar to this research's findings concerning pride, Fletcher and his colleagues' (2009) regression analysis evaluating the predictive power of a number of similar independent variables concerning support for the war in Afghanistan concluded that emotion played a crucial role in shaping attitudes about Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan. Fletcher and his colleagues observed that government and military leaders were only able to retain high support amongst those Canadians who expressed pride in the mission. Fletcher et al. (2009: 927) argue that “efforts to 'educate and inform' Canadians failed” because information, minus emotion, did not resonate with Canadians. This research, too, clearly shows that pride is an essential factor in political attitude formation about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. As Marcus (2003: 206), contends emotion is crucial to forming political opinions because “reason requires emotion not just to recruit its abilities but also to execute its conclusions.”

This research's binary logistic regression also found that living in Quebec is a statistically significant predictor of low support for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. As I argued above, a desire to see Canadian Forces used for peacekeeping is a powerful predictor of support

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<sup>52</sup> The national polling firm Nanos conducted a “national dual-frame (land and cell) hybrid telephone and online survey of 1,000” Canadians between September 24-27, 2016. The margin of error is reported as +/- 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

for Canada's military role in Afghanistan amongst Quebecers. Congruous with Roussel and Boucher (2008), this work's data adds to evidence that there are differences, while holding a number of independent variables constant, between English and French Canada when it comes to political attitudes about the country's military and its role overseas.

Additionally, as I argued above, partisan politics plays an important role in Canadians' opinions about the war in Afghanistan. Yet, party identification is not a statistically significant predictor of attitudes towards the conflict in this work's binary logistic regression analysis. Ideology, however, plays a role in how Canadians feel about the conflict. Canadians who self-identify as right on the ideological spectrum are more likely to support the military mission than those on the left. Canada's two main governing parties (Liberals and Conservatives) incorporate a wide range of individuals with diverse ideological positions (Johnston 2008). The Liberal and Conservative Party are *big tent* parties with supporters who identify as both left and right. This research's data found, for instance, that 20.7 per cent of Conservatives voters identified as left on the ideological spectrum. Ideology, therefore, as this research's data indicates, is a more statistically significant indicator of support for the war in Afghanistan than party identification. Having briefly evaluated the importance of peacekeeping, pride, Quebec and left/right politics as predictors of support for the war in Afghanistan, I now turn to a fuller analysis of the potential influence of some media frames on Canadians' attitudes about the conflict.

#### **5.14. Media Discourse and Canadian Attitudes Towards the Conflict in Afghanistan**

As I have noted a few times before, Canadians were initially enthusiastic about their military's involvement in Afghanistan. Some research (Boucher and Nossal 2015) suggests the declining support for Canada's military mission in Afghanistan after 2007 may have been influenced by the disagreement — and even ambivalence — about the war amongst political actors. As this research's content analysis makes clear, elites were not united about the mission, resulting in conflicting messages for the Canadian public. Saideman (2016) argues that the disjointed messaging and disagreement amongst Canadian politicians left the Canadian public confused. Yet, this study's data provides contradictory evidence, to be sure, about the influence of elite media messages. This work's binary logistic regression analysis found, while holding other

variables constant, that a story highlighting government and military frames about improving security in Kandahar (with no journalistic fact check) was a statistically significant predictor of increased support for the conflict.

Commensurate with other research (Zaller 1992; Zaller 1994; Mermin 1999; Western 2005; Berinsky 2009; Baum and Groeling 2010a; Baum and Groeling 2010b), this study's findings suggests that some Canadians are, indeed, responsive to elite media frames. It is possible that government and military media frames repeated in news coverage can sometimes act like a *recipe* that individuals use to *cook up* their opinions in a way that is compatible with elites' agendas (Kinder and Sanders 1996: 156). Some Canadians, my data suggest, incorporated the attributes highlighted in the media frames into their evaluation of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Gamson (1992: 118) observes that for some individuals, media are their "exclusive resource... used in the construction of meaning." As this study's content analysis discovered, much of the news media's coverage of Afghanistan was episodic, too. The media treatments in this study's experiment were also events-oriented. Iyengar (1991) concluded that episodic coverage frequently leads audiences to hegemonic interpretations. To be sure, audiences often "echo" the qualities and characteristics encapsulated in news stories (Rill and Davis 2008: 613). Canadians' attitudes about the conflict began with their own preconceptions and personal experiences, but they may also have been shaped — in some way — by news media frames. The restoring security in Afghanistan frame in this study's audience experiment came from a source with considerable authority (the defence minister). Individuals, as these data suggest, are sometimes swayed by what political actors say and do. Consistent with other research (Golan and Wanta 2001; Rill and Davis: 2008), this work suggests that audiences sometimes use the media frames sponsored by elites to form their political attitudes. This study also bolsters Entman's (2007) contention that when government and military officials give citizens something to think about, it may, indeed, be the first step in getting people to think and act in a certain way.

Yet, it is too simplistic to think that there is a direct, linear, relationship between the media frames of elites and acceptance by audiences (Livingstone 2000). As a predictor, exposure to the security frame treatment in this experiment was not the largest predictor in this study's statistical

model. At best, we can conclude that individuals sometimes incorporate elite media discourse into their opinion formation — but it is best to think of attitude formation as a confluence of predispositions and media messages. As Berinsky (2009: 69) argues, theories of “elite competition” about framing war — conducted largely through the news media — overcome the deficiencies of event-driven or success-dependent theories that predict public support for war — but they do not account for the multitude of factors influencing what people think.

People, of course, do not just make up their minds based on media messages alone — and are, in fact, frequently “influenced by pre-existing meaning structures” (Scheufele 1999: 105). That is, media messages might play a part in influencing individuals. More likely, though, the influence of media frames represents the sum of media messages and a confluence of other predispositions such as political leanings (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). Couldry (2004), as I stressed in my theory chapter, urges media and communication scholarship to de-centre media (and its power) and conceptualize our lives as media-related. This research adds to the weight of Gamson’s (1992: xi-xii) argument that:

“The mass media are a system in which active agents within specific purposes are constantly engaged in a process of supplying meaning. Rather than thinking of them as a set of stimuli to which individuals respond, we should think of them as the site of a complex symbolic contest over which interpretations will prevail. This culture system encounters thinking individuals, and political consciousness arises from the interweaving of these two levels.”

This work also highlights the importance of not overemphasizing the media’s role in constructing meaning (Silverstone 2007) — but instead imagining it as a site of contestation and negotiation (Gramsci 1971) for audiences. Scheufele (1999) urges media research to use multilevel analysis to understand the impact of an individual’s predispositions and media discourse (see, for example, McLeod and Pan 1989; Pan and McLeod 1991; McLeod, Pan, and Rucinski 1995). Scheufele (1999), in fact, highlights Gamson’s (1992: 67) call to examine “the interplay between two levels — between individuals who operate actively in the construction of meaning and socio-cultural processes that offer meanings that are frequently contested.”

Having considered a number of factors shaping Canadians’ attitudes towards the war in Afghanistan, I conclude — concerning my eighth research question (**R8**) — that opinion

formation about intervention in foreign conflicts are, in fact, best understood as a potential confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge. As I have argued, this research adds to the growing evidence that political attitude formation is best theorized as a complicated mix of factors. A sophisticated analysis of understanding how people arrive at political attitudes requires investigating many levels at the same time.

### **5.15. Conclusion**

Canadians' opinions about their military and the conflict in Afghanistan, as I have argued in this chapter, represent a confluence of media messages, experiential knowledge and popular wisdom. Attitude development happens at multiple levels. This work's data confirms a theoretical need to understand public opinion formation as complex and multifaceted. While fact checking in news appears to have no influence on Canadians, news stories highlighting improving security frames (absent journalist fact checking) can play a role in political attitude formation, when controlling for other factors. To be sure, media discourse is not the only influence on Canadians' opinions about war and their military. Popular wisdom about Canada's role as a *peacekeeping* nation underpinned many Canadians' evaluations of the conflict in Afghanistan. As well, Canadians' experiential knowledge — gender, politics and pride — also shape attitudes about Canada's role in Afghanistan. In line with Western (2005: 15), this research adds to the evidence that political opinions are "formed by a blend of information and predisposition." Having outlined and analyzed this study's main findings, I now wish to offer some concluding thoughts and recommendations in my final chapter.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

### 6.0. Introduction

As you know, the genesis of this thesis began on a rugged old road next to an ephemeral irrigation canal connected to the Arghandab River in Afghanistan. Despite the arid conditions of Kandahar, I remember feeling like I was constantly treading water in a churning ocean of military *spin* while embedded as a reporter with Canadian Forces. I worried about being a mouthpiece — a propagandist — for the Canadian military. I was also deeply skeptical about the justifications government and military leaders were offering about Canada's combat role in Kandahar. I feared myself — and my news colleagues in Kandahar — were not being aggressive enough in pushing back against the government and military leaders' media framing of the conflict.

The American media's recent failure to properly challenge U.S. President George W. Bush's bogus claims of Iraq's so-called Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) as a pretext to invade the Middle Eastern country, left me deeply skeptical of Canadian journalists' ability to resist the Canadian government and the military's framing of the war in Afghanistan. As well, I feared that embedding with Canadian Forces left me captured by the tunnel vision of embedding. As I reflect on my experience of reporting on the war now, I believe I only told part of the story in Afghanistan because I saw the war through the military's eyes. I also regret that Canadian audiences only received a very narrow view of what was going on in Afghanistan.

I also was curious about the influence of the media coverage on Canadians. Admittedly, at the time, I had a much less sophisticated conceptualization of the influence of the news media. Still, as a big consumer of public opinion data, I was curious to know how public opinion about the war shifted so quickly in the first year of Canada's military mission in Kandahar. The war in Afghanistan, to be certain, was different from what most Canadians were familiar with. After all, in the lead up to the deployment of Canadian Forces, the defence minister implied that Canadians would be peacekeeping in Kandahar. What I witnessed in southern Afghanistan was at odds with traditional popular wisdom of what Canadian Forces did overseas. I even began one

of my television reports about a major battle in Kandahar in the summer of 2006 with the line ‘This is definitely not peacekeeping’. I often talked with my colleagues in Kandahar (and my editors in Canada) about how Canadians would feel about seeing their soldiers fight a war instead of keeping the peace. I was also curious in the initial few months of the war about how Canadians would react to seeing dead soldiers come back from the war. This thesis reflects my scholarly attempt to sort out those two fundamental questions: what impact did government and military leaders’ media framing of the war have on journalists and the public?

This concluding chapter offers the denouement to this study. Its aim is to provide a resolution to the research questions I posed — and sketch a path forward for future research. This chapter begins by restating this study’s main empirical conclusions. From there, it switches to a brief discussion of this work’s main theoretical interventions. Subsequent to my comments about theory, I detail the methodological lessons I take from this research. After describing my methodological reflexivity, I transition to outlining a possible future research trajectory that flows from this study. As well, I offer a number of recommendations for journalists concerning fact checking as a practice. I conclude by offering some comments on the lessons that Canadian democracy can draw from this research.

## **6.1. Empirical Findings**

This section provides a brief summary of this research’s main empirical findings. To reiterate, this research posed one over-arching research question and eight sub-questions:

**MRQ.** Main Research Question: what impact did government and military frames about the war in Afghanistan have on journalists covering the conflict and the Canadian public?

**R1.** How was Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan framed in the news media?

**R2.** What role did news values play in shaping news content?

**R3.** How do journalists (if at all) fact check the preferred media frames of the military and government leaders surrounding Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan?

**R4.** What role does indexing play in shaping the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan?

**R5.** How (if at all) does journalistic fact checking influence audiences' judgments about war?

**R6.** How are audiences influenced (or not at all) by the popular wisdom concerning peacekeeping?

**R7.** How are Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts influenced (or not at all) by experiential knowledge?

**R8.** How does the confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge potentially shape Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts?

## **6.2. Framing Canada's Military Mission in Afghanistan**

My first research question (**R1**) examines how the conflict in Afghanistan was framed in the news media.

**R1.** How was Canada's military mission in Afghanistan framed in the news media?

More than three-quarters of the news coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan contained a preferred government or military frame. There was scant counter-hegemonic framing of the news coverage of the conflict. Plus, 90 per cent of the coverage was episodic and not thematic. Other than fact checking official frames, the news media rarely questioned hegemonic positions. The coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan did not often

stray from the spheres of “consensus” and “legitimate controversy” described by Hallin (1986: 117).

This research adds evidence to the argument that the social system remains an important influence on news production. This work’s data shows that the news and analysis generated about Canadian Forces’ combat operations in Afghanistan was clearly influenced by the social system in which it was produced (Hallin 1986; Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Hallin 1994; Gitlin 2003 [1980]; Shoemaker and Reese 2014). Views (and voices) outside the usual elite consensus and acceptable elite disagreement about withdrawing from Kandahar, for instance, were rarely included in the news media’s representations about the conflict (Hallin 1986; Bennett 1990). The government and military’s sophisticated public relation efforts succeeded, in part, because official media frames dominated the news coverage of the conflict. The news media’s reporting and analysis about Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan was clearly not “detached” from “society’s political, cultural and economic structures” (Carruthers 2000:15). The perpetuation of dominant discourse is further compounded by the types of stories — or news values — that the news media prize.

### **6.3. The Influence of News Values**

This research’s second question (**R2**) attempted to measure the influence of news values on news content.

#### **R2. What role did news values play in shaping news content?**

This study’s content analysis clearly demonstrates that news values (Galtung and Ruge 1965) shaped the type of coverage produced about Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan. The news media focused its spotlight on events (episodic coverage) over more contextual and analytical (thematic) reportage and commentary. An overwhelming 90 per cent of the coverage was episodic. There was a heavy emphasis (58.3%) on combat operations and death and injuries. This study’s content analysis discovered a clear emphasis on: (1) timeliness; (2) conflict and controversy; and (3) human interest (Shoemaker and Reese 2013: 171).

This research's data, as I argued in chapter four, clearly adds to evidence that news values — the types of stories and narrative that journalism prizes — reproduce hegemonic interpretations about the military and war. The Canadian news media's focus on *rank and file* soldiers fighting *heroically* to *make Afghanistan safe* perpetuated dominant positions and values in the news media. This CA's findings bolsters the argument (Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Bennett 1990; Bennett et al. 2006, 2007; Bennett 2012) that the news media sustain hegemonic interpretations and positions by amplifying the “cultural touchstones” embedded in government and military leaders’ media frames (Hall et al. 1978: 56). The echoing and amplifying of dominant values through media messages is further compounded, as I have argued, by the overwhelming prominence of episodic storytelling that ignores (or silences) bigger structural questions about war and foreign policy (Boyd-Barrett 2004b). And while journalists may claim that fact checking is an expression of counter-hegemony, this research's data suggests otherwise.

#### **6.4. Fact checking the Media Framing of Canada's Military Mission in Afghanistan**

My third research question (**R3**) explored how Canadian journalists fact checked the preferred media frames of the military and government surrounding Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan.

**R3.** How do journalists (if at all) fact check the preferred media frames of the military and government leaders surrounding Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan?

This study's data confirms that from the earliest days of the conflict, Canadian journalists fact checked government and military claims about the military mission in Kandahar. This research found a clear — and statistically significant — association between government and military frames and journalists fact checking. This research supports a more events-driven understanding of journalistic counter-framing (Speer 2017). Aligned with Baum and Groeling's (2010a, 2010b) elasticity of reality theory, I contend that the precarious security in Afghanistan led Canadian journalists to challenge overly optimistic framing of improving security and reconstructing the war-torn country of Afghanistan sponsored by government and military leaders. In its simplest form, Canadian Forces did not make the volatile region of Kandahar safer — and journalists reflected this. After all, journalists are interpreters. The media framing supported by

government and military officials was not consistent with what journalists were seeing with their own eyes. *Reality asserted itself* early on in the conflict in Kandahar (Baum and Groeling 2010a) – but the practice was not truly counter-hegemonic.

To fact check government and military media framing, journalists consistently assessed those frames against “objective” rules, laws, standards and codes (Ettema and Glasser 1989: 2). Official media frames were turned into quantitative or scientific criteria that journalists could assess. Was security really improving? Were reconstruction efforts really helping *everyday* Afghans recover after decades of war? While fact checking may have challenged officials’ media frames about the war, government and military frames, nevertheless, still structured much of the news coverage about the conflict. While journalistic routines dictate that reporters produce *objective* stories — “hover[ing] seemingly detached” — from their construction, they ultimately reproduce “dominant understandings and values, while simultaneously professing the ideological innocence of news so manufactured” (Carruthers 2000: 18; see also Pedelty 1995).

The government and military’s media frames still provided the intellectual scaffolding, if you will, that journalists used to frame their stories. In line with Bennett (2012), I contend that the journalistic practice of assessing government and military framing with elite criteria produced an incomplete picture of the war in Afghanistan for Canadian audiences. Fact checking what officials say, inevitably, incorporates — and even spotlights — the framing of political actors. Challenging a frame inevitably conjures up the frame (Lakoff 2004). I will offer a broader discussion about the implications of this media phenomenon later in this chapter. Before that, though, I wish to turn now to this research’s key findings concerning indexing.

## 6.5. Indexing the War to Officials

This research’s fourth research question (**R4**) assesses how indexing shaped the news media’s coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan.

**R4.** What role does indexing play in shaping the news media’s coverage of Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan?

This study's data confirms this conjecture. Canadian journalists overwhelmingly used officials as sources in their coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan. According to the traditional conceptualization (Bennett 1990) and even more recent research (Bennett et al. 2006, 2007), the propensity of journalists to index their coverage to officials leads to news coverage that generally echoes elite debate. This research's data, I have argued, suggests something different. The Canadian news media were aggressive about fact checking government and military leaders' claims about the war. The reporting and analysis about Afghanistan was not a stream of uncontested government and military *spin*. Journalists pushed back against official framing that did not match their observations and knowledge.

This tendency of Canadian journalists to challenge the framing of the war in Afghanistan by government and military leaders conforms, as I have argued, with the growing interpretive style (Zelizer 1993; Schudson 2013) and fact checking form (Graves 2016) of journalism over the last decade or more. It is important to emphasize that the violent insurgency in nearby Iraq and the failure to find WMD, arguably, spurred journalists covering the war in Afghanistan to be more skeptical. After American journalists failed to adequately critique the main justification of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Canadian journalists were on-guard, if you will, about officials' framing of the war in Afghanistan.

As well, Canadian political actors were not united about the war in Afghanistan. Similar to Hallin's (1986) seminal work concerning the news media's coverage of the Vietnam War, Canadian journalists were also sensitive to government and military consensus and disagreement about the conflict in Afghanistan. This research's data illustrates well that media coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan was fuelled, in part, by the elite disagreement over Canada's military mission Afghanistan. To be sure, Stephen Harper's minority government faced the prospect of facing an opposition-sponsored confidence motion over Canada's combat role in Kandahar. As a result, the Conservative government's survival hinged on the question of Canadian Forces' participation in Afghanistan. Journalists were, of course, attuned to this elite disagreement. The coming pages turns now to the potential influence of the news coverage on audiences.

## 6.6. The Influence of Journalistic Fact checking

My fifth research question (**R5**) evaluates if fact checking in news influences audiences' opinions about war. The data from this study clearly demonstrates that news fact checking does not have a statistically significant immediate influence on attitudes towards war. Similar to other research (Kuklinksi et al. 2000; Skurnik et al. 2005; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Pingree 2011; Nyhan and Reifler 2012, 2015; Nyhan et al. 2017), this work adds to the evidence that journalistic corrections do not spark the desired result in audiences. As noted in chapter five, it is possible that traditional (so-called *he said / she said*) reporting that features *both sides* and competing claims may have lead audiences to doubt the fact checking they encounter in news (Pingree 2011).

As I highlighted in the previous chapter, journalistic fact checking can sometimes entrench positions and views (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). This study's findings suggest predispositions matter more than new — corrective — information when it comes to political opinion formation. Partisans, in fact, appear to resist fact checking when it contradicts with their established positions. Berinsky (2009: 84) contends citizens discount new information that does not mesh with their partisan identifications. Facts, it appears, do not matter as much as party loyalty. Other predispositions also have an important shaping function as well on political opinions concerning war.

## 6.7. Popular Wisdom

This study's sixth research question (**R6**) examined how audiences may be influenced by popular wisdom concerning Canada's military:

**R6.** How are audiences influenced (or not at all) by the popular wisdom concerning peacekeeping?

My data clearly demonstrates that Canadians' preference for a peacekeeping role for their military plays a significant role in determining how Canadians feel about their military and their roles overseas. A preference for peacekeeping is a significant predictor of opposition to the war

in Afghanistan. Historically, people who live in Quebec are particularly disposed to seeing Canadian Forces used exclusively for peacekeeping. This research confirms this predisposition. As I discussed in the last chapter, it is notable that public opinion was decidedly more enthusiastic for the military's deployment in Afghanistan when Canadian Forces were involved in more traditional peacekeeping roles between 2003-2005 and 2011-2014, compared to the combat role between 2006-2011 in Kandahar (Boucher and Nossal 2015; Saideman 2016).

This study confirms the shaping power of popular wisdom on political opinions. The strongly held public belief that Canadian Forces should be used exclusively for peacekeeping, as I have argued, ran up against the reality of soldiers fighting a brutal — and bloody — insurgency in Afghanistan. The constant combat images from Kandahar, I contend, were incongruous with the popular wisdom most Canadians hold about their military. The discordance between the notions of peacekeeping and combat operations likely played a role in the quick drop in public support for Canada's military mission in Kandahar. The idea of Canadian Forces *keeping the peace* internationally will likely continue to be a potent influence on how Canadians want their military used. Governments who wish to use Canadian Forces for combat roles overseas will, no doubt, have to overcome the popular wisdom Canadians have about their military to gain widespread public support. Fletcher and his colleagues (2009) suggest increased support for combat is possible if elites engage with the public on an emotional level. The coming section addresses the importance of experiential factors such as emotion.

## **6.8. Experiential Knowledge**

My seventh research question put experiential factors under the microscope, asking:

**R7.** How are Canadians' attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts influenced (or not at all) by experiential knowledge?

In line with considerable literature, this study found that gender plays a role in shaping attitudes about Canadian Forces and thinking about the war in Afghanistan (Conover and Sapiro, 1993; Eichenberg 2003). Female Canadians are less supportive of the war in Afghanistan than their

male counterparts. They were also less proud of Canada's combat role in Kandahar and more inclined to prefer that the country's military stick to peacekeeping only. Gender, however, was not a statistically significant predictor of support for the war in Afghanistan when holding all the other socio-political and demographic variables constant in my binary logistic regression analysis.

Partisan politics, as this research's data illustrates, also had an influence on Canadians' attitudes towards the military and the combat mission in Kandahar. Not surprisingly, the ideological spectrum offers a useful predictor of Canadians' attitudes towards the role of their military and the war it fought in southern Afghanistan. This study's population-based survey experiment found that Canadians on the right side of the spectrum are: (1) more supportive of Canada's military; (2) prouder of the military's combat mission in Kandahar; (3) more willing to return to a combat role in South Asia; and (4) more likely to support an interventionist role over a peacekeeping one for Canadian Forces.

Partisan Conservatives, it appears, largely embraced their party leadership's view of the military's role and its combat mission in Afghanistan. Conservative Party supporters were much more supportive than other partisans of the conflict in Kandahar. They also felt the most pride about the military mission. Conservative voters, in fact, want to see Canadian Forces return to a military role in Afghanistan now. As I argued in the discussion section of the previous chapter, the increasing polarization of Canadian politics (Johnston 2014) has entrenched attitudes. Moreover, multiple social and political identities likely tend stack on top of themselves (Rocca and Brewer 2002; Mason 2013b; Mason and Davis 2015) with gender, region, education level and politics compounding people's opinions of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.

This research also highlights the importance of emotion in political opinions. Pride emerged as a significant predictor of how Canadians felt about the war in Afghanistan. This study bolsters evidence suggesting emotion, is a central element in the development of political opinions (Gamson 1992). How proud — the honour, credibility and dignity — that Canadians ascribed to the war in Afghanistan proved to be a considerable predictor of support for Canada's military mission in Kandahar. Canadians, clearly, incorporated their "predispositions" (Zaller 1992: 6;

Western 2005: 5) or “past experience” and the considerations they made about that history with “contemporary circumstances” (Marcus 2000: 221) to arrive at their opinions about the conflict in Kandahar. This finding, as I noted in the previous chapter, conflicts with rational choice models and cost-benefit political decision making theories. Future political communication research needs to take emotion seriously when considering how people form their political opinions. To be sure, a combination of variables likely influenced public opinion about Canada’s combat role in Afghanistan. The coming section considers the mixing of these factors.

### **6.9. A Confluence of Factors Shaping Opinions About War**

This thesis’ eighth research question (**R8**) examines how Canadians’ attitudes are influenced by multiple factors at the same time:

**R8.** How does the confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge potentially shape Canadians’ attitudes towards its military and its intervention in foreign conflicts?

This research’s binary logistic regression clearly shows that Canadians’ attitudes about the country’s military mission in Afghanistan is best understood as a confluence of media messages, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge.

This research’s data suggests that some media messages can influence how people feel about war. As this work’s analysis (binary logistic regression) found, exposure to a news story highlighting the government and military’s improving security frame (absent any journalistic fact checking) is a statistically significant predictor of positive support for the war in Afghanistan. To be sure, public attitudes about war frequently align with elite media framing (Zaller 1992; Zaller 1994; Mermin 1999; Berinsky 2009; Baum and Groeling 2010a; Baum and Groeling 2010b). As I have argued, many Canadians likely folded the media framing of Afghanistan. It is worth noting, that this research’s content analysis determined that much of the news coverage about Afghanistan was episodic and events-oriented. The media treatments in this study’s audience experiment were also episodic. As Iyengar (1991) posited, episodic news coverage

frequently inspires hegemonic interpretations. It is plausible that some Canadians *echoed* the government and military media frames that dominated news coverage of Afghanistan (Rill and Davis 2008). But media discourse is, of course, not the only factor that influences public opinion.

As I have argued, it is prudent not to over-emphasize the new media's role in constructing meaning (Couldry 2004). Media are one part of attitude formation. Canadians' opinions about the war in Afghanistan represent a coming together of factors including: (1) media discourse; (2) popular wisdom surrounding peacekeeping and Canadian Forces; and (3) experiential knowledge, including gender, region, political orientation and emotion. Having highlighted this research's key empirical findings, the coming pages transition to a discussion about the theoretical tensions this work addressed.

## **6.10. Theoretical Interventions**

This study's main research question assesses the influence government and military frames had on both journalists and the Canadian public. At its core, this research attempts to understand the shaping power of elite media frames on the news media and the public. It questions the hegemony of elite media frames. It seeks to understand how these frames sponsored by government and military leaders are “susceptible [to] being challenged by counterhegemonic practices” (Mouffe 2005: 8) employed by journalists. Moreover, this work seeks to illuminate how hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces may (or may not) influence public opinion about war. There is, of course, an analytical and “dialectical relationship between what we understand through theory and what we know through practice” (Mansell 2012: 33).

“[T]he proper locus for the study of social reproduction is in the immediate process of the constituting of interaction, for all social life is an active accomplishment; and every moment of social life bears the imprint of the totality” (Giddens 1993: 8).

There are theoretical implications to this study's main research question. This section evaluates the theoretical tensions this study's empirical findings attempt to address, including: (1) the limits and benefits of Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of influences model; (2) the predictive power of indexing because of fact checking and dramatic events; (3) the implications

of fact checking concerning normative conceptions of the news media in democracy; and (4) the confluence of factors that shape public opinion about war.

### **6.11. The *Hierarchical* Model?**

Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of influences model offered a helpful categorization tool for conceptualizing this study's research questions concerning the shaping power of micro, meso and macro forces that influenced the news media's coverage of the war in Afghanistan. It was a useful means for mapping the shaping power of different social and individual factors. As I outlined at the onset of this thesis, this study wanted to understand how Canadian elites framed the war in Afghanistan and what journalists did with those media messages. Embedded journalists produced most of the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. As a result, I restricted my emphasis to three levels of the hierarchy of influences model: (1) social system; (2) social institutions; and (3) routines and practices. As I noted in my theory chapter, the other two levels (media organizations and individuals) surely shaped the coverage of the war in Afghanistan — but are not aligned with this research's main goals.

Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) model is not perfect, though. It lacks precision and a clear theoretical means to differentiate between the overlap of levels. As Nam-Jin (2004) pointed out, and this research makes clear, it remains difficult to distinguish between levels. The *fuzziness* of how to separate the different levels is exemplified by this research's findings and analysis. Clearly, the phenomena that shape the news media can originate within more than one level. It is theoretically possible, for instance, that the proclivity of Canadian journalists (even those who were embedded) to index their coverage of Afghanistan to government and military leaders is also situated at other levels of the model. Ideology, institutions, organizations and individual journalists can *all* play a role in why journalists gravitate towards official sources. As well, indexing can be imagined as a confluence of all the levels. In the context of the news coverage of Afghanistan, broadcast news organizations may have favoured official sources because it was easier to get Canadian Forces to comment on-camera who were readily available at the Kandahar Airfield over the Afghan people who lived *outside the wire*. News organizations' editorial leaders may have also dictated what types of sources their journalists incorporated into their

coverage. As well, news professionals may have also felt normatively compelled to gravitate towards officials in their coverage of the conflict. Canadian leaders had decided to send soldiers into harm's way — and journalists may have believed it was necessary to hold those political actors accountable for their decision. This is supposition, of course. I offer this speculation to illustrate the blurriness of differentiating between the levels in the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). This research does not precisely pinpoint indexing's level of origin. Nevertheless, with this study's focus on government and military media framing, it was prudent to conceptualize indexing as an institutional level influence.

The lack of clarity about levels can produce research that reaches different determinations about the impact of micro, meso and macro-level influences. The distinctions and overlap between the levels may be *fuzzy*, but the location of a media shaping phenomena in the hierarchy of influences model is, arguably, not essential to identifying the shaping factor, in the first place, and secondly measuring its influence on news media content. The propensity of journalists to index their stories to official sources can originate at the routines and practices level or the ideological level. Different researchers — with different research agendas — will conceptualize different media phenomena at different levels in an effort to answer their research questions. Media and communication scholars need to justify their level of focus, citing empirical and theoretical reasons. My study examined the potential shaping power of officials on the news and analysis about Afghanistan. Specifically, it was interested in gaining insight into the contested media framing dynamic between government and military officials and journalists surrounding the conflict in Kandahar. Journalists covering the conflict as embedded media generated much of the coverage. As a result, this work put the social level, social institution level and routines and practice level under the microscope.

While calling their model a hierarchy, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) urge researchers to incorporate a multi-layered analysis of the overlap between the levels. As this study illustrates, news stories, were influenced by: (1) routines and practices; (2) institutional forces; and (3) social and ideological factors. The Canadian news media's coverage of the war in Afghanistan represents the sum of one level or many levels as articulated in Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of influences model. This research's data and analysis shows that Canadian journalists

were not completely submissive to government and military framing or rigidly bounded by indexing. This study found “linkages between levels... as interactive and multi-directional” (Reese and Shoemaker 2016: 406), begging the question if the model should continue to be called a hierarchy. As this research’s data suggests, the model is clearly not a hierarchy. Perhaps, as Nam-Jin (2004) contends, Shoemaker and Reese’s model is best understood as an *organizing scheme*. I offer some suggestions later in this chapter concerning future research about why the hierarchy of influences model needs to be coupled with theory that accounts for power dynamics. The coming pages, however, transition to the theoretical tensions concerning indexing addressed by this work.

## 6.12. Indexing & Dramatic Events

The debate about indexing’s power to shape news coverage divides into two camps. In the traditional camp, journalism largely echoes and amplifies elite discourse (Hall et al. 1978; Hallin 1986; Herman and Chomsky 2002 [1988]; Hallin 1994; Mermin 1999; Massing 2004). Bennett and colleagues (2007) argue that journalists’ overreliance on official sources leading up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, for instance, produced news coverage that did not adequately interrogate and challenge official justifications for the military intervention. On the other side of the scholarly debate, journalists are afforded more agency as autonomous actors who frequently contest elite media framing (Althaus 2003; Baum and Groeling 2010b; Porpora et al. 2010; Potter and Baum 2010; Speer 2017).

Yet, Bennett et al.’s (2007) updated conception posits that events, technology, investigative journalism and counter-spin provide opportunities for the news media to stray from hegemonic meanings and interpretations. As I have argued, in the context of the events in Kandahar, the precarious security (perpetual suicide attacks, IEDs, etc.) spurred journalists to fact check the preferred framing of government and military officials. This work’s content analysis also found some evidence of investigative journalism (notably surrounding the handling of Afghan detainees) allowing Canadian journalists to push past the bounds of government and military framing of the conflict in Afghanistan (see also Saideman 2016). However, as this study’s CA makes clear, there were very few counter-hegemonic expressions in the coverage about Canada’s

military mission in Afghanistan. Additionally, a lot of the fact checking assessed the government and military's execution of its goals instead of policy decisions or larger structural questions (Mermin 1996). Moreover, nine in ten pieces in the news media about Afghanistan were episodic and not thematic. As a result, much of the events-oriented news coverage of the war in Afghanistan did not move beyond elite interpretations of our social world. (Assessing the impact of technology's impact on indexing was beyond the scope of this research.)

Baum and Groeling (2010a) posit that the news media's ability to avoid the shaping power of indexing increases as journalists covering the conflict gain more knowledge from reporting in the war zone. Embedded journalists, for instance, are able to evaluate for themselves if official claims and rationales for war are, in fact, true. Time essentially enables journalists to evaluate government and military leaders' media frames about war with facts that they observe *on the ground*. More than three-quarters of the news and analysis featured fact checking that challenged the preferred media frames of government and military leaders. This research's data shows that journalistic fact checking of Canada's military mission commenced immediately with the Canadian Forces' deployment to Kandahar. This coverage, as I have argued, is not a new phenomenon – but falls in line with the growing interpretive style (Zelizer 1993; Schudson 2013) and fact checking form (Graves 2016) of journalism. Yet, this phenomenon, especially in the era of heightened fact checking in the Trump era, begs theoretical questions about the predictive power of indexing. The evidence from this research adds to the evidence that fact checking has, indeed, become an entrenched routine and practice. Yet, the means by which journalists challenge elite frames are not, arguably, truly counter-hegemonic expressions.

### **6.13. Fact Checking's Impact on Counter-framing**

Fact checking — and demands for accountability — are becoming central to modern journalism (Jones 2009; Graves et al. 2016). Notably, in 2016, Oxford Dictionary's word of the year was "post truth", noting that facts "have become less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Steinmetz 2016: np). Moreover, U.S. President Donald Trump's seemingly endless claims of "fake news" and "alternative facts" have positioned fact checking at the centre of political communications. Some have even suggested that Trump's

presidential run has “ushered in a whole new era of fact checking in journalism” (Golshan 2016: np). A doyen of U.S. journalism, Carl Bernstein, even recently called on the American news media to stand up and challenge the “malignant presidency” of Trump (Bernstein, as quoted in Rojas 2017: np). Some have called this the *golden age* of journalism (King 2017: np).

Hannan (2016: xviii) defines “post truth journalism” as the proclivity of the news media to “reproduce what politicians say without critical comment, thereby allowing falsehoods to proliferate in public discussion.” Yet, this is happening at the same time as the growth – and institutionalization – of fact checking in journalism. This study’s findings raise questions about the efficacy of fact checking at two levels: (1) the journalistic practice level; and (2) the audience influence level. Additionally, my findings trigger theoretical questions about the indexing norm. Perhaps if journalists are increasingly skeptical of what political actors say and do – and if news coverage increasingly fact checks elite rhetoric – then there exists the potential for the news media to present a less hegemonic interpretation of our social world. Yet, that is, of course, not a certainty, as this research’s analysis also suggests, because of the news media’s propensity to offer fact checking that largely relies on elite criteria to assess political actors’ rhetoric.

The abundance of fact checking by Canadian journalists did not completely challenge hegemonic interpretations about the war in Afghanistan, as I have argued. Fact checking, in these cases, only goes so far. It is not a truly counter-hegemonic expression. This type of corrective news does not offer an “alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society in preparation for political change” (Pratt 2004: 232). Fact checking an elite claim with one or two sentences — as much of the news coverage about Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan did — is, arguably, not sufficient information for audiences to make considered decisions about the war. To be certain, this research clearly illustrates that government and military leaders still had considerable shaping power over the news media representations of Canada’s combat operations in Kandahar. This research’s findings, in turn, question theories of journalism’s normative role in democracy.

## 6.14. Fact Checking and Journalism's Normative Role

Nellie Bly, Veronica Guerin, Seymour Hersh, Woodward and Bernstein: their names evoke images of fearless — and crusading — reporters, doggedly uncovering *the truth* and holding the powerful accountable. Rooted in a normative Burkian conception of a *Fourth Estate*, most Canadian journalists see themselves as watchdogs (Ward 2015). Many Canadian journalists will, undoubtedly, contend that their propensity to fact check government and military framing of the war represents the normative manifestation of their monitorial role in democracy (Jones 2009; Graves 2016). As I have stressed, though, a vast majority of the news stories and commentaries about the war were episodic, lacking thematic (substantive and contextual) elements. The prominence of events and storytelling forced critical assessments of the war and militarization “into the background” (Lewis et al. 2003). As Iyengar (1991: 137) argues, it is likely that coverage focusing on brave and heroic soldiers over trenchant reporting and analysis did not produce a rich public discourse about the war. This research’s data raises theoretical questions about *watchdog* conceptions of journalism in democracy.

As I have argued, the binary practice of contesting official frames with elite values reinforced hegemonic representations of the war in Afghanistan. As Ettema and Glasser (1998a, 1998b) have argued, judging officials’ claims with elite yardsticks or values obscures deeper meanings. In the Kandahar context, challenges to elite frames became technical — and often more about execution critiques, whether elites were living up to their promises to make the region safer, for instance. This practice is divorced, I contend, from the wider knowledge production required to understand our social world.

The news media’s *raison d’être* and authority “depends on its declared ability to provide an indexical and referential presentation of the world at hand” (Zelizer 2017: 154). This positivist means of knowledge construction — with its emphasis on *truth* — often does not prize “subjectivity, relativity, engagement, construction and reflexivity” (Zelizer 2017: 154). Many journalists, no doubt, assume that their fact checking of elite media frames constitutes a contribution to the *facts*, *truth* and *reality* that democratic citizens use to make *informed* decisions. But fact checking — despite its intentions to correct elite spin and misinformation —

still puts a spotlight on the government or military's media frame. Contradicting a frame in the news media still incorporates — and sparks in the receiver's mind — the frame in the coverage (Lakoff 2004).

It is also worth stressing again that the overabundance of events-oriented coverage questions whether journalists are living up to their normative monitorial role. This research suggests an emphasis on event-oriented news coverage is more consistent with a collaborative role and not a monitorial role (Christians et al. 2009). Journalists may *fact check* what elites are saying — but when those challenges are contained within episodic coverage, the media messages, arguably, perpetuate elite definitions and positions. Theoretically, there are detrimental consequences for participatory democracies if the news media are filled with hegemonic values (Lewis 2001). Persuasion starts with political actors framing the debate within which individuals form their political opinions. The news media's abundance of events-oriented coverage is best understood as collaboration (Christians et al. 2009: 197) whereby journalists — unknowingly and without resistance — reproduce meaning that benefits power. Future media and communication scholarship should recognize that fact checking does not always represent a truly counter-hegemonic expression. I now wish to consider the theoretical debates that this work explored concerning how people form opinions about war.

### **6.15. The Confluence of Factors Shaping Public Opinion**

As I argued in the preceding chapter, a confluence of factors likely influenced how Canadians viewed the military mission in Afghanistan. Much of the literature surrounding public opinion concerning war stresses a rational public reacting to the success or failure of the conflict or casualties (Mueller 1973; Eichenberg 2005; Gelpi et al. 2006; Gartner 2008; Gelpi et al. 2009). Other scholarship (Zaller 1992; Brody 1991; Zaller 1994; Berinsky 2007, 2009) emphasizes the impact of elite media framing of conflict. In line with substantial literature (Everts 2002; Berinsky 2009; Fletcher et al. 2009; Fletcher and Hove 2012), this study suggests it is wise to move beyond thinking of publics as rational and deliberative (Page and Shapiro 1992). Instead, it is clear that feelings offer an important independent variable that political communication researchers must account for. It is, indeed, crucial that scholarly analysis makes space for — but

also defends — the salience of emotion and the affective in democratic debate (Mouffe 1999, 2000; 2005). It is time to move beyond thinking of democratic citizens as human calculators adding and subtracting the pros and cons or levelheaded computers weighing the arguments on both sides. The complicated — messy — emotional nature of the human brain needs to be factored into research considering how individuals arrive at their political opinions.

Emotion, as this research shows, needs to be conceptualized as an important predictor of public attitudes towards war. This study's population-based survey experiment found a positive correlation between pride in the military mission and support for it. Clearly, Canadians turned to experiential knowledge (Gamson 1992), such as emotions, in their thinking about the war. Attitudes about the conflict did not represent a neat cost-benefit analysis (Edwards 1977; Edwards and Newman 1986) or even rational choice (Tversky and Kahneman 1973, 1974; Kahneman and Tversky 2000; Tetlock and Mellers 2002). In line with Damasio (1994), this research concludes that emotion is key in understanding how people construct their political thinking. Moreover, my results highlight a need for a nuanced understanding of how individuals fold in emotion, media discourse and other predispositions such as popular wisdom and experiential knowledge into their political opinion formation. Having outlined this research's theoretical contributions, I now transition to this concluding chapter's thoughts about its methods.

## **6.16. Methodological Reflections**

This section reflects critically on the cause and impact of this research's methodological choices. The coming pages focus, in particular, on the strengths of this study's methods and the innovative ways I overcame the weaknesses of my methodological choices. Primarily, however, I wish to highlight this study's contribution to media and communication scholarship. I begin by considering this study's content analysis before providing a critical reflection on my population-based survey experiment. I also offer a number of suggestions about how this study might be improved.

To be sure, I am well aware of my position as a white, privileged male. Moreover, I am conscious of how my professional experience as a journalist who covered the conflict in

Afghanistan likely coloured my view of the journalism produced by the correspondents who covered the war. I know that my subject position had a profound impact on my research questions and subsequently on the methods geared at answering my research questions. To that end, an interpretive philosophy underpinned this work's approach. I was aware of the "cultural assumptions" that influenced and informed this work's emphasis and interpretation (Rubin and Rubin 2005: 29-30).

As well, as I detailed in the methods chapter, classic content analysis are often thought of as quantitative research, but the coding is subjective, meaning concerns persist about its reliability, specifically when it comes to identifying media frames (Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Miller 1997; Scheufele 1999; Grandy 2001; Hertog and McLeod 2001; Tankard 2001; Matthes and Kohring 2008). It was, admittedly, impossible to divorce my subjectivity – my experience as a journalist – from the coding (Van Gorp 2005). Unlike a lot of CA concerning news framing (Hanson 1995; Haller and Ralph 2001; Coleman and Dysart 2005), I tried to be exacting in my description and methods for identifying how this work identified news frames sponsored by government and military officials. I was acutely aware of Matthes and Kohring's (2008) suggestions that researchers consciously — knowingly or unknowingly — find what they go looking for.

To that end, the coding searched for combined words such as "helping women and children" or "making Afghanistan safer." This was done with a mind to increasing identifying media frames sponsored by government and military officials and enhancing this research's reliability and validity. I also used Entman's (1993) definition of frames in the inductive phase to establish patterns and common words for frames. I looked for four elements: (1) a problem; (2) an interpretation that attributed blame; (3) an evaluation; and (4) a fix or treatment to the problem defined in the media frame (Matthes 2009).

Moreover, I deliberately used Uscinski and Butler's (2013: 163) definition of fact checking — the process of "comparing" the statements of elites "to 'the facts' so as to determine whether a statement about these topics is a lie" (2013: 163) — to identify and quantify how journalists challenged the media frames sponsored by government and military leaders. These definitions

proved useful for identifying and quantifying how government and military officials attempted to frame the conflict in Afghanistan and how journalists covering the war responded to those frames with fact checking aimed at holding political actors culpable for their rhetoric (Jones 2009; Graves 2016). These definitions — and this work’s systematic methods of identifying frames and fact checking — offer a useful system for future content analysis research examining similar news media phenomena.

This study benefited from making a distinction between the frames sponsored by government and military leaders and the frames used by news professionals to structure their news and commentary. Few media and communication studies disaggregate the two (Speer 2017). Most research does not distinguish between the source (elites or journalists) of frames (Bennett et al. 2006) or assesses frames solely considering the source (Baum and Groeling 2010b). Separating frames allowed this study to analyze how journalists deal with the media frames perpetuated by government and military leaders and other political actors. It also made it possible to measure the autonomy of journalists to counter-frame the war in Afghanistan. As well, the distinction made it possible to measure if (and how) news professionals fact checked the frames used by officials.

This study benefited from engaging a second coder early on in the content analysis to double-check my coding. Ensuring a high intercoder reliability early on in the process confirmed that the coding schedule was robust and valid. Ultimately, this research’s CA methods produced statistically significant empirical findings about how government and military leaders attempted to frame the war in Afghanistan and how journalists fact checked that media framing. Moreover, these findings offered a number of interesting theoretical insights into debates about indexing and fact checking. I deliberately set out to produce statistically significant findings concerning the Canadian news media’s coverage of the war in Afghanistan. I chose to do a classic content analysis (with a random sample) because I wanted to be able to make generalizable conclusions about how journalists responded to government and military framing of the war in Afghanistan. Moreover, I wanted to engage theoretically with other scholarship (Bennett 1990; Entman 2003, 2004; Bennett et al. 2006, 2007; Baum and Groeling 2010a, 2010b; Graves 2016; Speer 2017)

about indexing, framing and fact checking. Using a similar method to the research to which I wish to engage critically with offers me a better footing to step into these scholarly debates.

While one part of my rationale for this research is an attempt to respond to the deficit of scholarly analysis of the news coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan, I also wanted to produce research that might grab the attention of journalists, journalism educators and news organizations. My findings concerning the journalistic practices of fact checking and indexing raise normative questions about the news media's watchdog role in democracy. As my coming section on recommendations argues, journalists and their news organizations can do a better job when it comes to challenging the hegemonic positions of government and military leaders surrounding war. I hope this research sparks a more considered debate about how journalists cover conflict. To that end, I consciously chose to do a classic content analysis over a more qualitative method because I know the news media prize surveys and statistics over what is often regarded as more *subjective* research (Lewis 2001).

This research's methods also attempt to build a bridge between media messages and audience reception. It endeavours to understand both media production and its potential impact. This work analyzes both the type of news media Canadians had access to surrounding the war in Afghanistan and examines its potential influence. This research wanted to move beyond having to guess at what the media did or what audiences thought of media texts (Philo and Berry 2004). Fletcher and colleagues (2009: 925) concluded that the Canadian government's "information transmission" about the war in Afghanistan (despite the low public support) succeeded. Media and communication scholarship, however, has largely ignored the actual media messages available to Canadians during the conflict. This research responds to this deficit.

Fletcher et al. (2009) used survey data to evaluate Canadians' opinions about the war. The researchers concluded that government and military leaders largely succeeded in getting Canadians to accept the government and military's media framing surrounding the combat operation. The researchers infer that Canadians accepted government information because survey respondents identified the media talking points (or frames) used by officials. Unlike Fletcher and his colleagues, this research tested actual media frames to examine their potential

impact on Canadians. Moreover, this research — at a theoretical level — conceptualized the news media as a site of contestation. As a result, this work also sought to assess the potential impact of journalistic fact checking mixed with government and military media frames. As a result, this work, arguably, offers a more complex understanding of the influence of media discourse on opinion formation concerning war.

Using the findings from my content analysis as a springboard, this research assessed how actual media messages may have influenced Canadians' attitudes towards the conflict in Afghanistan. The combination of a content analysis with a population-based survey experiment provides a full examination of media production and its potential influence on its consumers. Notably, this research's treatment did not come in an unnatural laboratory setting but in the form of a more *natural* online survey. Additionally, this work attempted to overcome the typical limitation of experiments where meaning making associated with media treatments are only “variations in message comprehension” (Price et al. 2005: 182). Instead, this work's analysis folds in other factors such as popular wisdom and experiential knowledge that can shape people's attitudes about war.

To be sure, though, the influence of the news media remains a contentious concept in the academy (Corner 2000; McQuail 2005; Curran 2006). Without question, as this work's data illustrates, it is difficult to isolate the specific influence of media messages. “Influence,” as Corner (2000: 376) stresses, is at “the contested core of media research.” I draw insight from Corner's (2000) work. While acknowledging that the news media are “primary producers and distributors of popular knowledge”, questions (mostly methodological) persist about the actual influence of mediated messages on public opinion (Corner 2000: 376-377). Citing Miller and Philo's (1996) polemic, Corner (2000: 388) contends too much media and communication research is “nervous” about commenting on the influence of media. Like Corner (2000: 393), this research is not interested in drawing direct connections between media “message x” determining the “thought or action of y.” This study is humbly interested in illuminating the potential consequences of the news media on audiences.

With that in mind, I used Gamson's (1992) model purposefully to conceptualize the complexity of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential wisdom mixing together (or not) to

potentially form people's political opinions. I believe, though, that questions surrounding the influence of media messages should be fundamental to media and communications research (Corner 2000). Laswell (1948: 116), no doubt, posed the essential question about the communication process: "Who, said what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?" This research attempts to unpack that multi-dimensional way media can influence political opinions.

There is potential to improve on the design of this study's population-based survey experiment. Shah and colleagues (2010), for instance, conducted a 2x2 experiment, employing a simulated radio broadcast to measure frames. They exposed a representative sample of individuals to differently framed news stories about a proposed housing development in an environmentally sensitive area. The researchers then conducted cognitive interviews (Geiselman et al. 1985) after respondents were exposed to the different news media treatments. Shah et al.'s (2010) design might be able to better ascertain the impact of fact checking on audiences. Cognitive interviews definitely afford researchers more latitude to probe and follow-up with respondents about the potential influence of media messages. Research along this line would, no doubt, produce more robust and descriptive findings.

In hindsight, it would have been advantageous for this research to reduce its treatment groups from five to three to test the impact of journalistic fact checking. This reduction — with the same sample ( $n = 1,131$ ) divided between three groups — would offer more statistical power for an analysis of variance across three treatment groups (Iamai et al. 2011). Moreover, it would have been prudent to assess whom respondents believed when exposed to a news treatment that contained both an official media frame and a journalistic fact check. Did respondents understand the correction? Did they believe it? I also think it would have been wise to gauge the potential impact of anger on Canadians' attitudes concerning the war in Afghanistan. Similarly, I wished I asked respondents if they thought Canada's military mission in Afghanistan was a success to assess that potential impact on support for the war. Moreover, it might also have made sense to evaluate the impact of counter-hegemonic frames surrounding war. As Lewis (2001) contends, the public is much more progressive than many surveys suggest. It would be interesting to test this idea concerning war.

Focus groups, using this study’s research questions, might also produce more descriptive and insightful results. This method would offer a researcher the opportunity to engage in an “open and creative dialogue with group participants” (Deacon et al. 1999) about the potential impact of the news media’s fact checking. To be sure, focus groups offer a strong opportunity for media scholars to explore “the dynamics of what experiential knowledge, and frames of interpretation audiences bring to bear in their use of media content” in shaping their political beliefs (Hansen and Machin 2013). Philo and Berry (2011: 281) contend focus groups lead participants to “opening up” about how they feel, leading participants “to say what they really believe” (see also Gamson 1992). Having reflected on the benefits and drawbacks of this study’s methodological design, I now wish to offer a potential roadmap for future research.

## 6.17. Future Research

This section outlines a potential research trajectory that flows from this study’s findings and the theoretical tensions explored in this work. Future media and communication scholarship using Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) model as an organizing system to understand the various factors that shape news content needs to recognize the hierarchy of influences model is not a theory. It is a categorization tool. It is conceptually useful for imagining the various levels of influence that produce news. But the model needs to be combined with other theories to better analyze the phenomena that shape news coverage, as I have done in this study. As I have emphasized in this work, media and communication scholarship that uses the model needs to place power — and its linkages to political and professional ideologies — at the heart of any analysis.

Critical media scholarship needs to expose the constituent power relations influencing news production. Caragee and Roefs (2004), of note, contend too much media framing research neglects the manifold expressions of political and social power. Media frames, in particular, need to be linked to the expression of power (Tuchman 1978; Gitlin 2003 [1980]) because frames are both “an imprint of power” and “central to the production of hegemonic meanings” (Caragee and Roefs 2004: 222). This research responds to that criticism. Referencing Wolfsfeld (1997), Carruthers (2000: 17) observes that “no single theory can explain how all media behave in all wars.” Indeed, critical scholarship often needs a *toolbox* full of theoretical devices to

conceptualize complex media and communication practices and influences. As Silverstone (1999) so aptly noted, media scholarship is ultimately about power.

“It is about the media’s power to create and sustain meanings; to persuade, endorse and reinforce. The power to undermine and reassure. It is about reach. And it is about representation: the ability to present, reveal, explain; and also the ability to grant access and participation. It is about the power to listen and the power to speak and be heard. The power to prompt and guide reflection and reflexivity. The power to tell tales and articulate memories” (Silverstone, 1999: 143).

Shoemaker and Reese’s (2014) model is a helpful analytical tool — but it must be coupled with critical theory that can adequately explain power relations and their implications. Attending to power relations is particularly important when it comes to the news media’s role in war.

For 16 years now, NATO members have been fighting a war in Afghanistan. And terrorism remains an ever-present threat. War is a constant, making political communication about it even more salient in democratic countries. Yet, as Brown (2003) points out, there are few disciplinary connections between communication studies and international relations. Communication is clearly fundamental to convincing the public to support the war – but:

“Much of what is written about the media and international conflict is built around a concern with how the conflict is reported. Did the media accurately and objectively report events? Did the military use illegitimate means to restrict or shape the coverage?” (Brown 2003: 97).

This type of research often ignores the fundamental connection the political actors who advocate for war clearly recognize. Officials at the Pentagon take communication about conflict seriously. They want their media messages to influence audiences. Future media and communication research should take questions concerning these issues just as seriously. “We must,” argues Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2010: 192), “bridge the theoretical and methodological interstices and bring our subject matter into full view, thereby illuminating the multiple and contested dimensions of war.”

Beyond these general theoretical suggestions, I also wish to suggest a number of specific research suggestions. Elsewhere I offered some preliminary conclusions about the impact of embedding on Canadian news coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan (DeCillia 2009). Speaking

with journalists revealed their compunction to resist officials' media framing of the war. Future interviews — with more journalists — could reveal greater insight into the growing prevalence of fact checking in modern journalism, especially in war coverage. This study's content analysis, offers a solid launching point for follow-up qualitative interviews with Canadian journalists in the hopes of producing a "deeper interpretation" of this research's findings (Flick 2006: 150).

I am especially keen to explore how journalists understand their role in knowledge production. Plus, I would like to know how journalists react to concerns about fact checking leading audiences to different conclusions than expected by normative conceptualizations of accountability journalism. If audiences do, in fact, disregard the news media's corrections, then what do news professionals think they can do to change or improve on the practice? As well, this line of questioning holds the potential of better understanding journalists' self-perception of their role in democracy. These research questions could also be explored in newsroom ethnography similar to Tuchman's (1976) classic investigation. Clark's (2014) ethnography in a Canadian newsroom recently revealed intriguing findings concerning the factors that increase more diversity in news coverage.

Additionally, my research suggests a need to look at reporting before and after dramatic events. Speer (2017) found that dramatic events can spark a turn in news coverage, spurring journalists to counter-frame events and issues in opposition to elite media framing. Speer (2017) further suggests that examining news coverage pre and post-dramatic events can illuminate what triggers journalists to begin counter-framing issues and events and, thereby, contradicting or confirming the indexing norm. Yet, future research may wish to investigate if dramatic events are still required to trigger journalistic counter-framing, especially if fact checking continues as a normative and ubiquitous journalistic practice.

In the United States, online *truth police* such as FactCheck.org and PolitiFact have institutionalized a form of journalism that promotes accountability. Moreover, the practice has been widely adopted by an increasing number of individual journalists outside of official digital fact checking organizations. This work adds to the evidence that fact checking does not have an immediate impact on audiences. But there are questions about long-term effects and other – less traditional ways – of correcting audiences' misconceptions.

As I detailed in chapter five, some research (Lewandowsky et al. 2013; van der Linden et al. 2017) found that emphasizing consensus about climate science can *inoculate* the public against misinformation. Young et al.’s (2017) recent experiment found that humorous videos can have a meaningful corrective impact. But these fact checking methods challenge traditional journalistic practices. Conflict is often a key ingredient in news. Moreover, journalism, especially political news, is a serious business. So, would journalists be willing to accept these decidedly different forms of storytelling if they knew their corrections would have a better chance of correcting audiences’ misconceptions?

Donald Trump’s rise to the Presidency of the United States sparked a rise in fact checking by journalists (Hepworth 2017). News stories now regularly scream that the president’s claims are “patently false” or represent “a false claim” (Lederman 2017: np). Days after taking office, *The New York Times* headline, in fact, declared that the president had repeated a “Lie About [the] Popular Vote in [a] Meeting with Lawmakers” (Shear and Huetteman 2017: np). Post-truth has become a marker of our time. While the term is imbued with a Golden Age-like sensibility, harkening to a more certain time, the notion of facts being less influential does, somehow, ring true in the wake of Trump and Brexit. No doubt, there is a pressing need for critical scholarship that examines the importance of truth to media and communication. Journalism, with its focus on truth, surely needs to be at the centre of such scholarly pursuits. Having sketched a path for future research, I now transition to some observations about what journalists can do differently to fact check in a more effective way.

### **6.18. Recommendations for Fact checking**

The post-factual world represents a daunting challenge for journalists and democracy. Historian Timothy Snyder warns about the consequences of a post-truth reality:

“...if you want to rip the heart out of a democracy directly, if you want to go right at it and kill it, what you do is you go after facts. And that is what modern authoritarians do. Step one: You lie yourself, all the time. Step two: You say it’s your opponents and the journalists who lie. Step three: Everyone looks around and says, “What is truth? There is no truth.” And then, resistance is impossible, and the game is over” (Snyder, as quoted in Strachan 2017: np).

There are no easy answers to the problem posed by elite manipulation and their misleading

statements concerning war. This is increasingly apparent with the Trump administration attempting to delegitimize the mainstream news media. Yet, in democracy, “[t]hose in government and other positions of trust should be held to the highest standards. Their lies are not ennobled by their position; quite the contrary” (Bok 1978: 181).

There is also no easy solution to increasing the efficacy of fact checking in journalism. The literature (Kuklinksi et al. 2000; Haidt 2003; Lakoff 2004; De Waal 2005; Skurnik et al. 2005; Westen 2007; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Pingree 2011; Nyhan and Reifler 2012, 2015; Nyhan et al. 2017) is decidedly pessimistic about people’s unwillingness to adopt information that is not in line with their own beliefs. Journalism – with its compunction for telling both sides of the story – often does not help to clarify the veracity of the claims on both sides (Pingree 2011). Fact checking often backfires, in fact, entrenching positions and views (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). Notably, the news media’s propensity to spotlight false claims frequently confuses audiences, leading them to “misremember” lies as truth (Skurnik et al. 2005). So, what are journalists to do?

Facts are important – but the way they are presented may be more important. Cognitive science and linguistics expert George Lakoff contends it is not enough to simply counter political U.S President Donald Trump’s untrue claims, for example, by calling them false. A better strategy, according to Lakoff, is to highlight how the American head of state diverts attention from real issues. Reporters, Lakoff told CNN in February of 2017, need to “talk first about the truth, that he’s diverting attention from the real issues” (King 2017: np). Exposing the political agenda of the elite has a better shot at getting audiences to accept corrected information, according to Lakoff.

As noted in chapter four, news professionals may want to borrow a page from satirists and not take elite rhetoric so seriously. If news professionals know that Donald Trump’s claims about his predecessor, Barack Obama, wiretapping the phones in Trump Tower before the 2016 election is ludicrous and a diversionary tactic, why take it seriously? Humour might, indeed, be one of the keys to dispelling audience misperceptions (Young et al. 2017). Nyhan and Reifler (2012) offer a number of recommendations for increasing public trust in journalism, such as cutting down on

the errors journalist make and issuing corrections quickly when news organizations do get it wrong. Their research also provides some guidance about fact checking, including:

1. Avoid negations – corrections can reinforce misconceptions. “Joe is cleared” is better than “Joe is not guilty”;
2. Cut down on the reputation of misleading statements or false allegations. Repeating false claims can make them stick in people’s minds. As stressed before, invalidating a frame still provokes the frame (Lakoff 2004);
3. Cut back on the partisan cues in corrections. Partisan cues can lead media consumers to disregard information that comes from a party they do not support. As a result, keep mentions to party politics to a minimum in corrections;
4. Use credible sources. Credible sources, such as experts, have more sway with audiences; and
5. Use graphics that correct misconceptions. They are more effective (Nyhan and Reifler 2012).

Nyhan and Reifler (2010) provocatively concluded that shaming dishonest elites may also offer an effective way to prevent misleading media messages from being articulated in the first place. To be sure, broadcast journalists could do a better job fact checking slippery politicians in real time while conducting interviews live on TV (Mantzarlis 2017). In a similar vein, it may make sense to ban known liars from the airwaves. If journalism’s main commitment is to the truth, it makes sense to not invite individuals who make have made false claims before on live television. Some media commentators have suggested that some of Trump’s spokespeople, for example, should be banned from doing television interviews (Saletan 2017). MSNBC’s morning show has “blacklisted” presidential counsellor Kellyanne Conway from its show after her repeated misstatements on live television (Borchers 2017: np). In a similar vein, Boehlert (2017) has argued that broadcasters should boycott White House press briefings and stop carrying the misinformation-laden forums live on TV. This thinking comports, in some ways, with the public journalism movement of the mid-1990s that aimed to invigorate democracy with journalism committed to putting civic engagement and community at the forefront (Rosen 1999).

Additionally, journalists, I believe, need to be more reflexive about their role in knowledge production (Zelizer 2017). Journalism plays a critical part in the construction of public knowledge (Lippmann 2002 [1922]; Nimmo and Combs 19383; Schudson 1995; Johnson-Cartee 2005). Yet, all too often, that role in knowledge production is obscured (Hackett 2006) and questions of how power relations shape news content are not top of mind in the craft of journalism (Folwer 1991). An increased reflexivity about this subjective knowledge production can lead to less hegemonic presentations of war and conflict.

Hackett and Zhao (1998: 86) describe how journalism's "regime of objectivity" imposes a very narrow — and hegemonic — interpretation of war in news coverage about conflict. Objectivity, stress Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, 2006), amplifies conflict (Us versus Them) in war reporting. This is compounded by journalists' propensity to index so much of their coverage to official sources. There is, of course, the potential for counter-hegemonic expressions, but the regime of objectivity:

"...provides a legitimation for established ideological optics and power relations. It systematically produces partial representations of the world, skewed towards dominant institutions and values, while at the same time it disguises that ideological role from its audiences. It thereby wins consent for 'preferred readings' ...embedded in the news" (Hackett and Zhao 1994: 161).

As I detailed in my theory chapter, advocates of peace journalism (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Lynch and McGoldrick 2005, 2006) want news organizations and professionals to adopt a more conscious and reflective journalism practice aimed at:

1. Highlighting the history and context of conflicts from every side (and not just both sides);
2. Providing voice to all sides in the dispute;
3. Reporting possible solutions;
4. Exposing spin and lies; and
5. Focusing on successful ends to conflicts and post-war developments.

To be sure, peace journalism challenges traditional Western monitorial or watchdog ideals of objective, and detached journalism (Tumber 2009). Loyn (2007: 1) forcibly argues that "creating peacemaking politicians is not the business of a reporter."

“There is an inherent contradiction between the logic of a peace process and the professional demands of journalists. A peace process is complicated; journalists demand simplicity. A peace process takes time to unfold and develop; journalists demand immediate results. Most of a peace process is marked by dull, tedious negotiations; journalists require drama. A successful peace process leads to a reduction in tensions; journalists focus on conflict. Many of the significant developments within a peace process must take place in secret behind closed doors; journalists demand information and action” (Wolfsfeld 1997: 67).

Hanitzsch (2004, 2007: 4) argues that peace journalism is also “prone to epistemological realism.” Advocates of the practice, he argues, fail to appreciate that journalists do, in fact, recognize that their work is a “selective representation” (Schudson 2011: 33) and not an objective “mirror” of reality. Moreover, proponents of peace journalism suggest that their interpretation of the world reflects a “true” reality. Hanitzsch contends this position is naïve and patronizing. As well, Hanitzsch (2007: 1) questions if peace journalism is really an alternative to traditional reporting, concluding that the reform movement “comes as old wine in new bottles.” Loyn, a long-time war correspondent, concedes that journalistic notions of truth and objectivity are problematic — but insists on retaining the traditional practices (2007).

Hanitzsch (20007) argues convincingly that the principles and goals of peace journalism are, in fact, merely tenants of good journalism. That is:

“...to make conflicts appear transparent through background information, to give voice to the views of all rivaling parties, to expose lies, cover-up attempts and culprits on all sides and to report on the atrocities of war and the suffering of civilians” (Hanitzsch 2007: 7).

Notably, in his call for an ethical code of peace journalism, Irvan (2006) highlights many hallmarks of good journalism such as uncovering truth and exposing lies. He also outlines newsgathering principles such as seeking non-elite sources, verifying claims, skepticism and verifying claims. All of these values, of course, line up with traditional elements of journalistic standards and practice. Irvan (2006:37) also suggests journalists should: “provide background information” and “exercise the ethics of accuracy, veracity, fairness, and respect for human rights.” While conceding some of the critiques peace journalism proponents advance, Loyn (2007: 1) stresses that better coverage of conflict is best achieved by a “better application of known methods, not an attempt to reinvent the wheel.” This, of course, begs the question: what can journalists do to better apply their craft?

Hackett (2006) identifies both individual (journalists, editorial leaders, journalism educators) and structural barriers (educational institutions, journalistic objectivity, source selection, corporate media ownership) that prevent peace journalism's objectives from becoming more mainstream. He doubts, however, that much of the Western commercial news media will feel compelled to change their practices. Hanitzsch (2007) also contends that structural factors are the biggest impediment to journalists covering conflict in a more considered way. "To have any impact on the way the news is being made," write Hanitzsch (2007: 7) "...the advocates of peace journalism must address the structural constraints of news production" such as shrinking staff and resources, time pressures, news values, availability of sources, danger, etc.. Hanitzsch (2007) is not, however, pessimistic about the possibility of change. In fact, he thinks journalism practice can change, especially if emphasized in journalism training. He encourages robust discussions about peace journalism in the field of journalism studies "where it resonates with ongoing efforts to promote excellence in journalism" (Hanitzsch 2007: 1). Irvan (2006) similarly urges universities and journalism schools to provide more space for peace journalism.

Hanitzsch (2007) remains skeptical about individual journalists overcoming structural factors such as economic restraints. Hackett (2006: 10), however, sees more latitude for individual journalists to make choices because power dynamics:

"may be manifested or even constituted, within the everyday routines and ethos of workaday journalism — a conception which implies the productivity and power of journalism, and the potential agency of journalists as social actors, without seeing it as entirely free-floating or self-determining."

Journalists — and their news organizations — can, arguably, change their routines and practices. As this study and others (Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978; Bennett 1991; Entman 1993) highlights, when journalists use officials as their main sources, they, not surprisingly, reproduce elite views of the world. As this research found, government and military leaders comprised the most common primary and secondary source for journalists covering the war in Afghanistan. This indexing to officials, as I have argued, perpetuated a hegemonic view of the conflict. Reese and Buckalew's (1995: 41) examination of the Gulf War foregrounds how "the interlocking and reinforcing triangle of government, news media and corporate needs works together to further a

culture supportive of military adventures.” Without a doubt, news coverage of war needs to include more diversity and ordinary people. All too often, the people living through war and conflict are marginalized in news. In the case of Afghanistan, Canadian journalists failed to include the voices of Afghan people in much of their coverage. Talking to Afghans would have surely helped contextualize news coverage of the conflict — and produced decidedly less hegemonic representations of the war.

News organizations and their professionals also need to pay attention to the overabundance of stories that are episodic over thematic. As this research makes clear, events-oriented coverage frequently reproduces hegemonic interpretations in the news (Iyengar 1991). Akin to how public broadcasters such as the BBC keep exacting figures of how much time each party gets during elections (BBC 2017), it makes sense for news professionals to keep track of the diversity of their sources and count how much of their coverage is episodic compared to thematic. As well, news organizations would be wise to include more counter-hegemonic voices in their coverage of war. There is also a pattern of silencing protests about war in the mainstream news media (Gitlin 2003 [1980]; McLeod and Hertog 1992). More space needs to be made for dissent about war and conflict. These metrics would, arguably, encourage more reflexivity about sources and coverage focus. With respect to post-truth discourse, news professionals would also be wise to emphasize their role as interpreters. Journalists can wisely shape the coverage they produce about post-truth discourse by translating coded language and double speak and contextualizing and interpreting statements by populist leaders (Romano 2017).

Loyn (2007) contends that journalists are cognizant of these concerns. Conceding that Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, 2006) were justified for criticizing journalists for uncritically accepting Western governments’ demonizing of the Taliban in Afghanistan after the 9/11, Loyn encourages journalists to do a better job contextualizing and explaining the roots of conflict.

“But surely the antidote to this is a fuller context in the reporting of events, not discarding objectivity. Both the reporter and the audience need to know that there is no other agenda than explaining what is going on – that what you read, see on the screen or hear on the radio is an honest attempt at objectivity; that reporters treat any and every event with an informed skepticism, rejecting any attempt to co-opt them into involvement. Better reporting of the Taliban meant finding out what they were about, not promoting ‘non-violent responses to conflict’” (Loyn 2007: 5).

To be sure, there is room for improvement.

In the words of Carey (1987: 7), the news media needs to do a better job of “presid[ing] over and within the conversation of our culture: to simulate it and organize it, to keep it moving...” Undoubtedly, the news media have an important role in deliberative democracy. As a result, journalists cannot merely report on what is going on — but must “seek to enrich and improve” understanding of our social world (Christians et al. 2009: 158). Ward (2015: 232), for his part, urges journalists to adopt what he calls a “pragmatic objectivity” that allows news professionals to scrutinize the events, issues and people they construct knowledge about. Journalists need to constantly test and challenge information before publishing it. According to Ward, the future of journalism is “investigative” and “interpretative” (Ward, as quoted in Rupp 2006: np). At its core, this type of journalism, he contends, requires “well-designed inquiry, questioning, imagination, and interaction with other ways of thinking” (Ward 2015: 285). This informative news can, according to Ward (2015: 309), make public debate “rational, inclusive, and objective as possible.”

There are signs of hope, though. Journalism is changing. While newspapers and traditional broadcasters face declining audiences, online journalism is growing. This new form of online journalism provides the potential for better reporting about war. Online news has the potential to be more transparent. It has more space for context and explanation. Plus, hyperlinks allow web journalism to offer evidence other perspectives. Online journalism also offers more opportunity for a conversation between journalists and their audiences. As well, online technology offers activists and civil society a potentially equal platform for advancing peace and challenging hegemonic views (Cammaerts et al. 20016).

Young journalists, some have argued, are increasingly more reflexive about their role in knowledge production, “prefer[ing] a more intimate, personal, even self-referential style to their journalism – something obviously connected to social media and Internet culture (Adams 2017: np).

“It is easy for greybeards to mock this, to rear back in horror, to accuse the Snake People of being self-absorbed. But many younger people see a huge dollop of vanity — and

perhaps even fakery — in the pose my generation of journalists adopted of being above it all, pretending to deliver the news without the merest inflection of political bias or social position” (Adams 2017: np).

Transparency, argues Adams, is the new objectivity for younger journalists. Ultimately, changing the way journalists cover war requires a different way of thinking about the news media’s role in knowledge production. Framing theory, as this thesis has detailed, is frequently viewed as an almost unconscious act, shaping and constraining events and issues. Galtung (1986, 2002a, 2002b) envisions peace journalism as a decidedly deliberate orientation. While I do not share the overt political agenda that peace journalism prescribes, I do believe, as I outlined above, that journalists should reframe how they report on war and conflict. As Loyn (2006: 1) puts well, journalists do not need “a new toolbox” but instead need to apply their “old tools” better. I now wish to transition to some lessons that can be drawn from this research for Canadian democracy.

### **6.19. Some Lessons for Canadian Democracy**

Canada paid a heavy price for its involvement in Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces lost 158 soldiers in the conflict (Government of Canada 2017a)<sup>53</sup>. Without doubt, sending soldiers into harm’s way represents the most “difficult decision any government in Ottawa makes” (Gross Stein and Lang 2007). Yet, the Conservative government and military officials failed to articulate a coherent discourse that captured public support for the military mission (Boucher 2009: 141).

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<sup>53</sup> Journalists covering the conflict also sacrificed much. My colleague, Canadian journalist Michelle Lang, lost her life covering the war in 2009. Another colleague and friend, CBC journalist Melissa Fung, spent almost a month in 2008 in captivity, held by organized criminals demanding a ransom. The fixer I worked with in Afghanistan, Shokoor Feroz, spent weeks in one of Kabul’s notorious prisons, suspected – wrongly – of playing a role in Fung’s kidnapping. While I was in Kandahar in 2007, another CBC/Radio-Canada colleague, Charles Dubois, lost his leg in a roadside bomb explosion while on patrol with Canadian Forces.

This study also exposes government and military leaders' reliance on spin to sell the war in Afghanistan. As I have argued in the previous two chapters, this torqued framing left both journalists and the public cynical and less trusting of officials. Clearly, given the long history of public opinion manipulation surrounding war, it is not surprising that political actors "fudge facts, withhold salient details, bluster, fib, and lie with particular persistence and determination when making the case for war" (Carruthers 2011: 34). But, it is a troubling manifestation for civic life. This type of leadership fuels cynicism about democratic institutions (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995). But political actors are not the only party that deserves blame (Capella and Hall Jamieson 1997).

Canadian journalists, as this research shows, failed to articulate a sufficiently critical account of the war. As noted in the previous chapter, there was no shortage of criticism — and sobering counter-hegemonic assessments — of Canada's role in the conflict (Byers 2006; Greaves 2008). Aid agencies and security think tanks questioned whether Canadian Forces were prepared to handle Afghanistan's counter-insurgency. The emphasis on combat over reconstruction and development was also critically questioned. Information challenging the government and military's preferred media frames were easily available to journalists. Canadian journalists did fact check the frames sponsored by government and military officials — but big questions about militarism, foreign policy and the structure and industries that enabled it all, did not get asked. "[M]ilitary assumptions and values" were embedded "into the very definition of what is 'normal' in everyday life" (Turenne Sjolander and Cornut 2016). The implications for Canadian democracy are troubling. Influence, of course, often starts when political actors define the discourse individuals draw on to form their political opinions.

## 6.20. Conclusion

The intellectual journey of this thesis began with a number of worrying questions. While I was embedded with Canadian Forces, I wondered if instead of journalism, I was doing *public relations* for the Canadian military. Was I seduced by the spin of my military handlers? I questioned if my news stories were influencing how Canadians viewed the war. Would my reporting increase or decrease public support for the conflict? This study reflects my best efforts

to answer these questions. By combining two methods, this study assessed both the influence of government and military leaders' framing of the war on journalists and the public. This study's major findings include:

1. The news media largely indexed their coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan to official sources;
2. Canada's minority Parliament — and the lack of uniformity amongst elites — was reflected in the media's news and analysis of Afghanistan;
3. The news media's coverage of Afghanistan focused mostly on death, injuries, corruption and the deteriorating security in Afghanistan;
4. Journalists fact checked government and military media frames of the conflict, using elite criteria to judge the claims made by government and military leaders;
5. Fact checking in news coverage of the conflict likely had no immediate impact on Canadians' attitudes about the conflict;
6. Canadians' predispositions about peacekeeping had a profound influence on attitudes about the military and the war in Afghanistan;
7. Quebecers are less supportive of seeing Canadian Forces involved in combat operations overseas;
8. News coverage highlighting the improving security media frame (with no journalistic fact checking) influenced support for war; and
9. Canadians' opinions about their military and the war in Afghanistan is best understood as a confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge.

This work, as I outlined, raises more questions than answers, both methodologically and theoretically. Further research may be able to better define the factors shaping both news content and public opinion. Ideally, focus groups or another audience experiment followed with cognitive interviews may provide a more complex picture of the impact of fact checking on audiences. This study offers a solid starting point for that follow up research. Additionally, indexing and framing, to be certain, represents important powerful phenomena in the media/political nexus. New research should explore the influence of fact checking and dramatic events on the indexing norm. It is also crucial to fully understand the potential influence of fact

checking on news consumers. Future research should focus on illuminating fact checking methods that have a real impact on correcting misinformation amongst audiences.

There are implications for journalism and democracy flowing from this research. The news media's coverage of war, as Carruthers (2000, 2011) contends, offers an important close-up look at the routines and practices of journalism that often go unnoticed during times of peace. War is an important opportunity for scholars to critically examine not only what journalists do during these times, but also reflect on the normative implications of the coverage they produce at all times. More and more — and especially during times of war — democracies need critical and autonomous journalists. Episodic, event-oriented coverage does not give citizens enough information and context to evaluate alternative positions to those promoted by government and military leaders (Entman 2004). There is far too much bias towards the status quo in coverage of war and foreign affairs. This research details a number of suggestions for journalists and news organizations to overcome these deficiencies.

Considerable research has attempted to explain Canadians' opinions about the war in Afghanistan (Fletcher et al. 2009; Loewen and Rubenson 2010; Fletcher and Hove 2012; Boucher and Nossal 2015; Saideman 2016). Much of this research relies on the interpretation of survey data produced by national polling firms. None of this research really problematized the news media messages citizens have access to — and their potential influence on public opinion about war. Moreover, no research, to date, has attempted to actually quantify how government and military media framing was actually represented in the news media. This study responds to this deficit, concluding that Canadians did not receive uncontested media framing of the war in Afghanistan. This work attempted to gauge the complexity of both media messages and people's predispositions in their political attitude formation about war. This work exposes the multitude of factors that potentially influence political thinking.

What began with heat — the sweltering temperatures of Kandahar, my smoldering trepidation about both the media and the public being manipulated by the government and military — ends much cooler, in the mild spring climate of London and the even colder calculations of empirical research. I began this journey questioning if journalists *did their job*, holding decision-makers to

account for sending Canadian Forces into harm's way. I now wonder if the *watchdog* needs to stop barking so much and start thinking more. Democracy needs journalists to hold the powerful to account, of course — but the news media needs to be decidedly more reflexive about how it goes about making decision-makers answerable for their words and actions.

The news media's fact checking is not working. The U.S. media devoted considerable time to challenging candidate Donald Trump's mendacity. Despite all his lying, he still got elected president. Journalists have kept up their challenges — and Trump's core supporters show no signs of abandoning *their guy*. Journalists can do better. Democracy deserves better. I hope this research offers a starting point for a discussion about how journalism needs to evolve. Perhaps, this work can be the beginning of articulating a new *common sense* about changing the practice of journalism to foster a better — more robustly informed — democracy. It is a dream, of course. But as Hackett (1991: 281) puts so well, the news media are “not a level playing field, but sometimes it is possible, even playing uphill, to score points, to win a match, and perhaps occasionally even to refine the rules of the game.”

## Appendix One

### Content Analysis — Coding Schedule April 2, 2015

The units of analysis in this codebook are media samples from four Canadian news organizations — CBC National Radio News, CTV National TV, The Globe and Mail and The National Post.

This codebook contains 18 variables and aims to quantify the framing of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan between February, 2006 - December, 2009.

**V1 — ID Number** — Unique identification number consecutively numbered from 01 (for the first sample), 02 (for the second sample). Each sample gets a unique ID number.

**V2 — TITLE** — Cut and paste title or headline directly from *Infomart.ca*.

**V3 — MEDIA** — Record the sample's media type: CBC, CTV, *The Globe & Mail* or *The National Post*.

1. CBC National Radio
2. CTV National TV
3. The Globe and Mail
4. The National Post

**V4 — Date — DD/MM/YY** — Record month, day and year. March 3, 2009 = 03.03.2009

**V5 — PERIOD** — Record the year of publication or broadcast.

1. 2006
2. 2007
3. 2008
4. 2009

**V6 — TYPE** — Record the type of sample — news, editorial/commentary, letters to the editor or feature. All of the samples from CBC and CTV will be news or current affairs. *Infomart* indicates under the headline if the media sample is news, editorial/commentary, letters to the editor or feature.

1. News / Current Affairs
2. Editorial/Commentary
3. Letter to the editor
4. Feature

**V7 — DATELINE/EMBEDDED JOURNALIST:** Where was the media sample produced? Where does it originate from? Is the reporter embedded with Canadian Forces? Embedded journalists are attached with Canadian Forces. For newspaper samples, *Infomart* identifies the dateline underneath the headline. For broadcast stories, check the anchor/host introduction or the sign-off (Tom Parry, CBC News, Kandahar).

0. Not known / Not Applicable
1. Afghanistan (Embedded reporter with Canadian Forces in Afghanistan)
2. Afghanistan (non-embedded reporter)
3. Canada (anywhere in Canada)
4. Other (outside Canada or Afghanistan)

**V8 — Episodic vs. Thematic:** Is the media sample episodic or thematic? “The episodic news frame takes the form of a[n]…events-oriented report” (Iyengar 1991: 14). For example: a military battle, a soldiers, death, a political debate about Afghanistan. “The thematic frame, by contrast, places public issues in some more general or abstract context or abstract context and takes the form of a “takeout,” or “backgrounder, report directed at general outcomes or conditions” (Iyengar 1991: 14). For example: stories and commentaries that offer explanation, context and analysis of Canada’s military role in Afghanistan.

0 = Not applicable or undetermined

1 = Episodic

2 = Thematic

**V9 — Counter-hegemonic:** Does the media sample a critique or challenge of hegemonic forces? Does the sample confront or oppose the existing status quo or political views concerning Canadian foreign policy and its military intervention in Afghanistan. Counter-hegemony is the “creation of an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society in preparation for a war of position” (Pratt 2004: 332). Does the sample, for example, question Canada’s role in the war? Does the news or analysis question war? Does the sample critique militarism? Does the sample critique the political economy of war? Does the sample suggest there is an alternative to conflict or war?

0 = Not applicable or undetermined

1 = Yes - Counter-hegemonic

2 = No - Hegemonic

**V10 — Focus:** Read the sample (unit of analysis) to determine its main focus. Ask yourself: what is the **MAJOR** or **PRIMARY** focus of the story? Ask yourself what is this media sample mainly about? Sample may contain multiple focuses — but this variable seeks to determine what is the main focus of the sample or unit of analysis.

0. UNDETERMINED

1. MILITARY (operation, troop numbers, deployment, battle, insurgents, offensive, stability, surge, expectations, strategy, goals, insurgents, renewed attacks, surge, resurgence, escalation of attacks, peace keeping, awarding military honours, negotiating with insurgents)
2. POLITICS (debate about mission or troop numbers, including NATO troop numbers. Justification or value of mission. Fragility or questions about the value or efficacy of the Canadian or NATO-led mission. DEADLINE for Canadian Troops to pull out or withdraw)
3. DEATH (Military Deaths or injuries (Ramp Ceremony or body repatriation). Afghan Military, Police, Civilian, Interpreter Death. Death Toll (Civilian or Military)).
4. POLLS/PUBLIC OPINION (Surveys about Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan, discussion of public attitudes towards Canada’s military mission in Afghanistan)
5. DEVELOPMENT / RECONSTRUCTION (rebuilding roads, schools, helping Afghan people rebuild after decades of war)
6. SECURITY, SAFETY SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN (escalating violence — suicide attacks, IEDs or improvised explosive devices, road-side bombs).
7. HUMAN RIGHTS, prisoners of war, torture, ethic
8. MULTIPLE

**V11 — SECURITY / VIOLENCE**

Does the sample mention or discuss security or safety in Afghanistan?

0 = No

1 = Yes

3 = Undetermined / NA

**V12 — PRIMARY SOURCE** — Primary sources are “credible individuals and institutions granted media access to enable their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within the area of competence: for instance, experts, officials, sources, courts, leading politicians, and senior religious figures” (Oxford Encyclopedia Media and Communication Studies 2016). Sometimes, journalists will paraphrase or quote sources who articulate the frame. The primary sources will often be the main character in the story. This source is often the focus of the story. Often, the primary source is the person who is quoted or paraphrased the most. Primary sources often sponsor the story’s frame. This source frequently defines the conflict and problem in the story (diagnostic frame). This source can also prescribe a solution (prognostic frame). **Ask yourself who is the main person or person speaking in this sample? Who does the story hinge around? Who is the primary definer of the preferred frames?**

0. Not Applicable
1. Author/Journalist
2. Government
3. Military Official/Including NATO/UN
4. Expert/Academic
5. Insurgent/Taliban
6. Other Politician (outside of government)
7. Critic other than politician (activist)
8. Afghan Official
9. NGO
10. Civilian - Afghan
11. Civilian - Canadian
12. Other

**V13 — SECONDARY SOURCE** — Secondary sources are “credible individuals and institutions granted media access to enable their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within the area of competence: for instance, experts, officials, sources, courts, leading politicians, and senior religious figures” (Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies). Sometimes, journalists will paraphrase or quote source who articulate the frame. The secondary source places a subordinate or supporting role to the story’s main character. This source is often reacting to the primary source. Often, the secondary source will not quoted or paraphrased as much as the primary source. **Who is quoted second most? Who is the second most conspicuous person in the story?**

0. Not Applicable
1. Author/Journalist
2. Government
3. Military Official/Including NATO/UN
4. Expert/Academic
5. Insurgent/Taliban
6. Other Politician (outside of government)
7. Critic other than politician (activist)
8. Afghan Official
9. NGO
10. Civilian - Afghan
11. Civilian - Canadian
12. Other

#### V14 — FRAME – Preferred government of military frame

Is one or more preferred military or government frame contained in the media sample? See the list below.

0 = No

1 = Yes

3 = Undetermined / NA

1. **Safety / Security** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a safety frame sponsored by a source. Does the sample highlight the importance of safety or improving security? This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to connect Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan to making the volatile region safer and more secure.
2. **Taliban Regroup** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a Taliban regroup frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to connect Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan with making sure that the Taliban does not regain power in Afghanistan. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of "the Taliban will regroup and come back into power in Afghanistan";
3. **United Nations** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a United Nations frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by endowing it with the legitimacy of the United Nations. The frame suggests that Canada's mission is lawful and appropriate because it is sanctioned by the UN. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of "The authority and legitimacy of the United Nations would be severely damaged";
4. **Canada's Reputation** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a Canada's reputation frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting Canada's international reputation would suffer if it did not participate in the United Nations-sanctioned and NATO-led military mission. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of "Canada's reputation within the international community would suffer if...";
5. **Women & Children** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a women and children frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting Canada's military mission is helping Afghan women and children. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of "Canadian Forces are helping to make Afghanistan safer so more women and children can attend school or get access to health care." Alternatively, the frame sponsor may suggest that without Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan "the rights of women and children will be negatively affected";
6. **Terrorist Attack** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a terrorist attack frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting Canada's military mission preventing terrorist attacks in Canada or North America. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of "More terrorist attacks will happen in Western nations such as Canada if the Taliban is not stopped in Afghanistan" The sample may, for example, refer to "more terrorist attacks" occurring anywhere in the world if NATO-led forces do not remain in Afghanistan. The frame sponsor may refer to western forces in Afghanistan serving as a deterrent to future terrorist attacks in western countries. The sample may posses a suggestion that Canadian Forces are required in Afghanistan so as to ensure there is no "fertile ground for terrorist organizations to operate" in the country.
7. **Afghan Economy** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains an Afghan economy and poppies frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or

government officials. The frame attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting Canada's military mission is preventing a resurgence of illegal poppy agriculture. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of "Afghanistan's economy would become more reliant on the cultivation of poppies for the production of opium and heroin";

8. **Afghans want Help** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains an Afghans want help frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting the Afghans want help. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of "The Afghan people want the assistance of Canada and other countries to remove the Taliban threat";
9. **Reconstruction** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a reconstruction frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting Canada's efforts in Afghanistan are helping to reconstruct or restore the war-torn country. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of "Canada's contribution to reconstruction and development in Afghanistan is making a difference to improving the lives of Afghan people."
10. **Democracy** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a democracy frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting Canada's efforts in Afghanistan are helping to sponsor democratic practices. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of "Canada's presence in Afghanistan is helping to restore democracy";
11. **Progress** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a progress frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of Canadian Forces making progress, making a difference, making Afghanistan a safer and better place. Ask yourself: does the sample talk about making progress in Afghanistan in relation to Canada's goals in the country? These goals are: (1) routing the Taliban; (2) stopping terrorism; (3) reconstructing Afghanistan; (3) eradicating the poppy trade; (4) enhancing the rights of Afghan women and children; (5) improving security; and (6) reconstructing Afghanistan's war-torn economy and infrastructure.
12. **Soldiers/Military/Mission** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a soldier or military frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. These frames attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting Canadian soldiers are described as brave, noble, efficient, strong, warrior-like, dedicated characteristics. The frame describes or implies that Canada's efforts in Afghanistan are part of an important task or duty that is assigned, allotted, or self-imposed. The military's work is characterized as an important goal or purpose that is accompanied by strong conviction; a calling or vocation. Does the sample convey that Canadian Forces have been set for some duty or purpose? The frame sponsor may suggest Canada's military mission is "important", "noble", "crucial" or "vital". The frame sponsor may suggest Canada's military efforts is beyond normal because the mission involves an important goal or purpose that is accompanied by strong conviction; a calling or vocation.
13. **"Hearts and Minds"** — This code seeks to assess whether the sample or unit contains a "hearts and minds" frame sponsored by a source. This frame tends to be sponsored by Canadian military or government officials. The frame attempts to justify Canada's military efforts in Afghanistan by suggesting Canada's efforts in Afghanistan are winning the "hearts and minds" of Afghan people by fighting the Taliban and reconstructing and developing the war-torn country. The frame sponsor may suggest something along the lines of Does the sample refer to winning the "hearts and minds of Afghan civilians? That is, convincing Afghan civilians of the merits of NATO-led forces intervening in Afghanistan?

**V15 — FRAME TYPE** - Which frame is primarily present? This variable seeks to code what is the primary or main frame represented in the sample or unit of analysis. See above for definitions.

1. Not Applicable
2. Safety / Security
3. Taliban Regroup
4. United Nations
5. Canada's Reputation
6. Women & Children
7. Terrorist Attack
8. Afghans want Help
9. Reconstruction
10. Democracy
11. Soldiers/Military/Mission
12. "Hearts and Minds"

**V16 — FRAME SPONSOR** — If applicable, referring to V12, who is the source of the frame? Primary definers are “credible individuals and institutions granted media access to enable their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within the area of competence: for instance, experts, officials, sources, courts, leading politicians, and senior religious figures” (Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies). Sometimes, journalists will paraphrase or quote source who articulates the frame.

0. Not Applicable
1. Author/Journalist
2. Government
3. Military Official/Including NATO/UN
4. Expert/Academic
5. Insurgent/Taliban
6. Other Politician (outside of government)
7. Critic other than politician (activist)
8. Afghan Official
9. NGO
10. Civilian - Afghan
11. Civilian - Canadian
12. Other
13. Multiple

**V17 — Multiple Frames** — Which other frames (if applicable) are present? This variable seeks to identify what other frame represented in the sample or unit of analysis. Code as: 1, 3, 5, 12, for example.

**V18 — Fact-Check** — Does the sample offer a fact check to a government or military sponsored frame contained in the media sample? Does the sample compare the statements of frame sponsors “to ‘the facts’ so as to determine whether a statement about these topics is” credible or true? Uscinski and Butler (2013: 163). Challenges to frames can involve information that counters or casts doubt on the preferred government or military frame. If a military or

government official, for instance, suggests that his forces are making Afghanistan safer, does the story contain information, observations, statistics or opinion that critiques or doubts that claim. Does the sample, by means of example, contain data or a quote suggesting violence is escalating. Ask yourself if the journalists uses information or quotes to *fact check* the preferred government or military frame. Sometimes, frames are challenged with information from an opposition politician or government or military critic.

0 = No

1 = Yes

3 = Undetermined / NA

**V19** — If applicable, referring to V15, who is the source? Primary definers are “credible individuals and institutions granted media access to enable their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within the area of competence: for instance, experts, officials, sources, courts, leading politicians, and senior religious figures” (Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies). Sometimes, journalists will paraphrase or quote source who articulates the frame.

- 0. Not Applicable
- 1. Author/Journalist
- 2. Government
- 3. Military Official/Including NATO/UN
- 4. Expert/Academic
- 5. Insurgent/Taliban
- 6. Other Politician (outside of government)
- 7. Critic other than politician (activist)
- 8. Afghan Official
- 9. NGO
- 10. Civilian - Afghan
- 11. Civilian - Canadian
- 12. Other

**V20** — Does the media sample convey a moral tone or judgment about the conflict or military mission? (Noble, just, important sacrifice, part of a larger so-called “war on terror”, etc.)

0 = No

1 = Yes

3 = Undetermined / NA

**V21** — If applicable, referring to V20, who is the source?

- 0. Not Applicable
- 2. Author/Journalist
- 3. Government
- 4. Military Official/Including NATO/UN
- 5. Expert/Academic
- 6. Insurgent/Taliban
- 7. Other Politician (outside of government)
- 8. Critic other than politician (activist)
- 9. Afghan Official
- 10. NGO
- 11. Civilian - Afghan
- 12. Civilian - Canadian
- 13. Other

Primary definers are credible individuals and institutions granted media access to enable their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within the area of competence: for instance, experts, officials, sources, courts, leading politicians, and senior religious figures (Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies).

**V22** — Does the article frame Canadian soldiers or their military mission in Afghanistan as noble, heroic, just, patriotic, brave, honourable, brave, macho, good solider, dying honourably? Does it mention or convey pride in Canadian soldiers?

0 = No  
1 = Yes  
3 = Undetermined / NA

**V23** — If applicable, referring to V22, who is the source?

0. Not Applicable
1. Author/Journalist
2. Government
3. Military Official/Including NATO/UN
4. Expert/Academic
5. Insurgent/Taliban
6. Other Politician (outside of government)
7. Critic other than politician (activist)
8. Afghan Official
9. NGO
10. Civilian - Afghan
11. Civilian - Canadian
12. Other

Primary definers are credible individuals and institutions granted media access to enable their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within the area of competence: for instance, experts, officials, sources, courts, leading politicians, and senior religious figures (Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies). Sometimes, journalists will paraphrase or quote source who articulates the frame.

**V24** – Does the media sample offer a personal story about a soldier? Does the sample highlight or pay particular attention to an individual or a few individuals? Is the media samples focal point of cynosure of the story? Does the sample, for instance, make a soldier's actions (bravery heroism) the spotlight? Does the media sample use narrative and storytelling devices to put an individual soldier or a few soldiers in the spotlight?

**V25** — Does the sample mention Canada's *historical* role as UN peacekeepers or suggest Canada's mission in Afghanistan is peacekeeping?

0 = No  
1 = Yes  
3 = Undetermined / NA

**V26** — If applicable, referring to V24, who is the source?

0. Not Applicable
1. Author/Journalist
2. Government
3. Military Official/Including NATO/UN
4. Expert/Academic
5. Insurgent/Taliban
6. Other Politician (outside of government)
7. Critic other than politician (activist)
8. Afghan Official
9. NGO
10. Civilian - Afghan
11. Civilian - Canadian
12. Other

Primary definers are credible individuals and institutions granted media access to enable their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within the area of competence: for instance, experts, officials, sources, courts, leading politicians, and senior religious figures (Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies). Sometimes, journalists will paraphrase or quote source who articulates the frame.

**V27 — Tone** — What is the tone of the sample towards Canada's military mission in Afghanistan?

0. Not Applicable
1. Positive = A confident opinion or assertion (fully assured) about the military mission. This sample is **enthusiastic** in its praise for the mission and its goals. Samples will be optimistic about the war.
2. Neutral = No opinion expressed in relation to Canada's military mission in Afghanistan. Often news stories will not be aligned with or support any side or position in the controversial mission
3. Negative = A critical assessment of the military mission in Afghanistan. These samples will often question the mission's rationale, its goal. Often, these samples will doubt the justification frames for the war sponsored by elites

## Appendix Two

	% Agree	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha	n Agree	n Disagree	n Cases	n Decisions
<b>V1 ID</b>	100.0	1	1	1	92	0	92	184
<b>V3 Media</b>	100.0	1	1	1	92	0	92	184
<b>V5 Period</b>	100.0	1	1	1	92	0	92	184
<b>V6 Type</b>	100.0	1	1	1	92	0	92	184
<b>V7 Dateline / Embed</b>	100.0	1	1	1	92	0	92	184
<b>V8 Episodic / Thematic</b>	100.0	1	1	1	92	0	92	184
<b>V9 Counter-hegemonic</b>	92.4 738	0.844725 8	0.84519230 8	0.84556962	85	7	92	184
<b>V10 Focus</b>	88.0 453	0.852176 1	0.85252113 1	0.852979842	81	11	92	184
<b>V11 Security / Violence</b>	90.2 305	0.751463 8	0.75172413 8	0.752814048	83	9	92	184
<b>V 12 Primary Source</b>	94.6 538	0.929252 7	0.92926341 7	0.929637035	87	5	92	184
<b>V 13 Secondary Source</b>	92.4 089	0.902239 3	0.90229100 3	0.902770398	85	7	92	184
<b>V 14 Preferred Frame Present</b>	93.5	0.7125	0.71279916 8	0.7140625	86	6	92	184
<b>V 15 Frame Type</b>	88.0 055	0.798947 1	0.79924618 1	0.800039734	81	11	92	184
<b>V 16 Frame Sponsor</b>	82.6 184	0.776885	0.77727341 5	0.778097764	76	16	92	184
<b>V 18 Fact Check</b>	92.4 738	0.844725 8	0.84519230 8	0.84556962	85	7	92	184
<b>V 19 Frame Challenge Sponsor</b>	89.1 236	0.823687 7	0.82395713 7	0.824645458	82	10	92	184
<b>V20 Moral Tone</b>	87.0 913	0.652173 4	0.65988909 4	0.654064272	80	12	92	184
<b>V21 Frame Sponsor</b>	85.9 384	0.652729 5	0.65740475 5	0.654616725	79	13	92	184
<b>V22 Brave Soldiers</b>	94.6 147	0.860922 8	0.86094316 8	0.861678005	87	5	92	184
<b>V23 Frame Sponsor</b>	90.2 069	0.775883 7	0.77609518 7	0.777101096	83	9	92	184
<b>V24 Personal Story</b>	100.0	1	1	1	92	0	92	184
<b>V25 Peacekeeping</b>	95.7 657	0.479858 9	0.48022598 9	0.482685512	88	4	92	184
<b>V26 Source</b>	95.7 656	0.484232 8	0.48459383 8	0.487035739	88	4	92	184
<b>V27 Tone of Sample</b>	91.3 706	0.831886 706	0.83196347	0.832800365	84	8	92	184

## Appendix Three

### **Population-Based Survey Experiment** *English Questionnaire*

Q1.1 What is your gender?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Q1.2 In which year were you born?

Q1.3 In what province or territory do you live?

Newfoundland and Labrador (1)

Nova Scotia (2)

Prince Edward Island (3)

New Brunswick (4)

Quebec (5)

Ontario (6)

Manitoba (7)

Saskatchewan (8)

Alberta (9)

British Columbia (10)

Yukon (11)

North West Territories (12)

Nunavut (13)

Q1.4 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

No schooling (1)

Some elementary or high school (2)

High school (3)

Apprenticeship or trade certificate or diploma (4)

College, CEGEP or college classique (5)

Bachelor's degree (6)

Master's degree (7)

Degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, or optometry (8)

Doctorate (9)

Q1.5 What best describes your current employment status?

I am in education (1)

I am unemployed (2)

I am self-employed (3)

I am in full-time employment (4)

I am in part-time employment (5)

I am retired (6)

Q1.6 In its most recent budget, the federal Liberal government announced plans to run a \$29-billion deficit. How supportive are you of this decision (with one being not supportive and 10 being very supportive)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Tap and drag (1)

Q1.7 Since becoming government, the federal Liberals have resettled thousands of Syrian refugees in Canada. How supportive are you of this decision (with one being not supportive and 10 being very supportive)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Tap and drag (1)

Q1.8 Some people believe Canadian armed forces should focus on combat. Others, however, believe Canadian armed forces should be focused on peacekeeping. What do you think should be the main focus of Canadian armed forces?

Armed combat (1)

Peacekeeping (2)

Both (3)

Q1.9 If you have to choose between only armed combat and peacekeeping, what do you think should be the main focus of Canadian armed forces?

Armed combat (1)

Peacekeeping (2)

Q1.10 Between 2006-2011, thousands of Canadian troops were in combat in the southern region of Afghanistan. Thinking back on that time, how do you feel about Canada's military efforts in that South Asian country (with one being not proud and 10 being very proud)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Tap and drag (1)

Q1.11 Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?

\_\_\_\_\_ Tap and drag (1)

Q1.12 In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the scale below, where 1 is left and 10 is right?

\_\_\_\_\_ Tap and drag (1)

Q1.13 If the Canadian federal election were to take place today, which party would you vote for?

Liberal Party (1)

Conservative (2)

New Democratic Party (NDP) (3)

Green Party (4)

Bloc Québécois (5)

Other party or candidate (6)

I don't know right now (7)

I will not vote (8)

I will spoil my ballot (9)

I am not eligible to vote (10)

Q1.14 How did you vote in the last federal election in October of 2015?

Conservative Party (1)

New Democratic Party (NDP) (2)

Liberal Party (3)

Green Party (4)

Bloc Québécois (5)

- Other party or candidate (6)
- I did not vote (7)
- I spoiled my ballot (9)
- I do not remember (10)

Q1.15 Which Canadian institution do you think has the final responsibility to decide if a law is constitutional in Canada?

- House of Commons (1)
- Governor General (2)
- Supreme Court of Canada (3)
- Senate (4)

Q1.16 Which party currently holds the second most seats in the House of Commons?

- Liberal Party (1)
- Conservative Party (2)
- New Democratic Party (NDP) (3)
- Green Party (4)
- Bloc Québécois (5)

Q1.17 What fundamental freedom do you think is NOT guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

- Freedom of thought, belief (1)
- Freedom of peaceful assembly (2)
- The right to keep and bear arms (3)
- Freedom of religion (4)

Q1.18 Who in Canada regulates pipelines that cross provincial and international boundaries?

- Local governments (municipalities) (1)
- Provinces (2)
- The National Energy Board (3)
- The Governor General (4)

Q1.19 Which federal department issues passports?

- Citizenship and Immigration (1)
- Revenue Canada (2)
- Intergovernmental Affairs (3)
- Global Affairs Canada / Foreign Affairs (4)

Q2.1 The following questions ask whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements. Thinking about Canada's combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission between 2006-2011, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I supported Canada's military role in Afghanistan.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q2.2 Canada's military helped to make Afghanistan safer.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q2.3 I am proud of Canada's military role in reconstructing Afghanistan between 2006-2011.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q2.4 Canada's forces should return to a combat role in Afghanistan.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q3.1 Between 2006-2011, Canada assumed a combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission. In an effort to refresh your memory, please read the following short representative news story from that period. After you read the short news story, you'll be asked whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements.

Q3.2 KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The defence minister says Canadian soldiers are making the war-torn country of Afghanistan a “much safer” place. Peter MacKay toured a road construction project and a newly opened causeway over the Arghandab River during a whirlwind three-day tour. “Kandahar is much safer now than it was before we arrived – and Canadian Forces are needed to restore this country’s security after decades of war,” said Peter MacKay. The defence minister says the reconstruction projects he visited would have been impossible had security in the volatile region of Kandahar not improved over the last year. MacKay adds Canadian Forces remain focused on training Afghan soldiers and police so they can handle security once coalition forces leave.

Q3.3 The following questions ask whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements. Thinking about Canada’s combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission between 2006-2011, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I supported Canada’s military role in Afghanistan.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q3.4 Canada's military helped to make Afghanistan safer.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q3.5 I am proud of Canada's military role in reconstructing Afghanistan between 2006-2011.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q3.6 Canada's forces should return to a combat role in Afghanistan.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q4.1 Between 2006-2011, Canada assumed a combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission. In an effort to refresh your memory, please read the following short representative news story from that period. After you read the short news story, you'll be asked whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements.

Q4.2 KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The defence minister says Canadian soldiers are making the war-torn country of Afghanistan a “much safer” place. Peter MacKay toured a road construction project and a newly opened causeway over the Arghandab River during a whirlwind three-day tour. “Kandahar is much safer now than it was before we arrived – and Canadian Forces are needed to restore this country’s security after decades of war,” said Peter MacKay. The defence minister says the reconstruction projects he visited would have been impossible had security in the volatile region of Kandahar not improved over the last year. MacKay adds Canadian Forces remain focused on training Afghan soldiers and police so they can handle security once coalition forces leave.

Q4.3 The following questions ask whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements. Thinking about Canada’s combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission between 2006-2011, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I supported Canada’s military role in Afghanistan.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q4.4 Canada's military helped to make Afghanistan safer.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q4.5 I am proud of Canada's military role in reconstructing Afghanistan between 2006-2011.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q4.6 Canada's forces should return to a combat role in Afghanistan.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q5.1 As noted above, between 2006-2011, Canada assumed a combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission. In an effort to refresh your memory, please read the following short representative news story from that period. After you read the short news story, you'll be asked whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements.

Q5.2 KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Canada's defence minister says soldiers are helping to rebuild war-torn Afghanistan. Peter MacKay toured a road construction project and a newly opened causeway over the Arghandab River during a whirlwind three-day tour of the volatile region of Kandahar. "Canada is making a real difference reconstructing Kandahar," said Peter MacKay. "Our forces are needed to help rebuild this country after decades of war," he added. MacKay stressed that Canada's development assistance and aid will help improve the volatile region's stability and economy.

Q5.3 The following questions ask whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements. Thinking about Canada's combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission between 2006-2011, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I supported Canada's military role in Afghanistan.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q5.4 Canada's military helped to make Afghanistan safer.

Strongly disagree (1)  
Somewhat disagree (2)  
Slightly disagree (3)  
Slightly agree (4)  
Somewhat agree (5)  
Strongly agree (6)

Q5.5 I am proud of Canada's military role in reconstructing Afghanistan between 2006-2011.

Strongly disagree (1)  
Somewhat disagree (2)  
Slightly disagree (3)  
Slightly agree (4)  
Somewhat agree (5)  
Strongly agree (6)

Q5.6 Canada's forces should return to a combat role in Afghanistan.

Strongly disagree (1)  
Somewhat disagree (2)  
Slightly disagree (3)  
Slightly agree (4)  
Somewhat agree (5)  
Strongly agree (6)

Q6.1 As noted above, between 2006-2011, Canada assumed a combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission. In an effort to refresh your memory, please read the following short representative news story from that period. After you read the short news story, you'll be asked whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements.

Q6.2 KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Canada's defence minister says soldiers are helping to rebuild war-torn Afghanistan. Peter MacKay toured a road construction project and a newly opened causeway over the Arghandab River during a whirlwind three-day tour of the volatile region of Kandahar.“Canada is making a real difference reconstructing Kandahar,” said Peter MacKay.“Our forces are needed to help rebuild this country after decades of war,” he added. MacKay stressed that Canada’s development assistance and aid will help improve the volatile region’s stability and economy. Yet, newly released federal government documents contradict the defence minister’s claims. The internal records suggest Canada has spent most of its aid and reconstruction money on salaries and bureaucracy – and accomplished little that is sustainable.

Q6.3 The following questions ask whether you agree or disagree with a number of statements. Thinking about Canada’s combat role in southern Afghanistan as part of a NATO-led military mission between 2006-2011, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I supported Canada’s military role in Afghanistan.

Strongly disagree (1)  
Somewhat disagree (2)  
Slightly disagree (3)  
Slightly agree (4)  
Somewhat agree (5)  
Strongly agree (6)

Q6.4 Canada's military helped to make Afghanistan safer.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q6.5 I am proud of Canada's military role in reconstructing Afghanistan between 2006-2011.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q6.6 Canada's forces should return to a combat role in Afghanistan.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Slightly agree (4)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

Q7.1 Typically, how much do you access news or current affairs?

- Several times a day (1)
- Once a day (2)
- Once a week (3)
- Two to three times a month (4)
- Once a month (5)
- Less often than once a month (6)
- Never (7)
- Don't know (8)

Q7.2 Typically, from where do you get your news? (Rank the following items in order of importance)

- Newspapers (including online) (1)
- Radio (including online streaming) (2)
- Television (including online streaming) (3)
- Blogs and alternative media websites (4)
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (5)

Q7.3 In the past year, have you done any of the following?

- Did unpaid volunteer work for an organization (1)
- Belonged to a political party (2)
- Participated in a demonstration or march (3)
- Signed a petition online (4)
- Belonged to a union (5)
- Boycotted or chosen a product for ethical reasons (6)
- Signed a petition on paper (7)

Donated to a political party (8)

None of the above (9)

Q7.4 The following questions ask whether you agree or disagree. Many international experts believe Afghanistan remains unstable – and continues to need international help with security. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Canadian Forces should return to a combat role in Afghanistan.

Strongly disagree (1)

Somewhat disagree (2)

Slightly disagree (3)

Slightly agree (4)

Somewhat agree (5)

Strongly agree (6)

Q7.5 What is your current household income?

\$0-35,00 (1)

\$35-50,000 (2)

\$50-75,000 (3)

\$75-100,000 (4)

\$100-150,000 (5)

Plus de \$150,000 (6)

Would rather not say (7)

Q7.6 Thank you for taking part in this survey. The results of the survey are anonymous. Please refrain from talking with friends and family about the survey for the next two weeks. This survey's primary aim is to understand how people feel about Canada's military mission in Afghanistan between 2006-2011. Specifically, it is interested in knowing how different news articles, emotions, attitudes and beliefs influence how people feel about Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan. The study was designed to test how people respond differently to different news articles. The results of this study will contribute to academic research. If the results are significant, the results may be published. Thank for taking time to answer this survey's questions. If you have any questions, feel free to contact: [hello@votecompass.com](mailto:hello@votecompass.com).

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