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"Don't Let Them Die in Vain"

Casualty Frames and Public Tolerance for Escalating Commitment in Iraq

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This article builds on past framing research to probe the impact of casualty frames on the public's willingness to expend additional "blood and treasure" in an ongoing war. The rhetoric of "sunk costs" (often described as "sacrifices") that must be redeemed through further conflict is a well-known, yet irrational, trope. Utilizing an experiment embedded in a nationally representative survey on attitudes about Iraq, we find that "investment frames" *increase* support for the war among individuals who believe the U.S. "did the right thing in Iraq," but *decrease* support for the war among those who feel the U.S. "should have stayed out." We also find, however, that framing effects are inconsistent when the frames are attributed to sources. These latter results demonstrate the importance of including unattributed frames to evaluate source effects in framing research.

Keywords: *Iraq War; casualty sensitivity; framing; sunk-costs; public opinion*

In the spring of 2005, President Bush was accused of being out of touch with events in the Iraq War. Mounting U.S. casualties and declining public support were juxtaposed with rosy presidential statements touting victory on the horizon and the need to "stay the course." In a major speech to Fort Bragg troops on June 28, President Bush attempted to offer a more "sober and realistic" portrait of events in Iraq. The president acknowledged the significant human and material costs of the war and attempted to answer the question on many American minds—"Is the sacrifice worth it?" (Bush 2005a). At the end of his twenty-eight-minute address, President Bush acknowledged the scope and depth of the costs:

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> In this war, we have lost good men and women who left our shores to defend freedom and did not live to make the journey home. I've met with families grieving the loss of loved ones who were taken from us too soon. I've been inspired by their strength in the face of such great loss. We pray for the families. *And the best way to honor the lives that have been given in this struggle is to complete the mission.* (Bush 2005a, emphasis added)[1]

Despite the White House's rhetorical efforts, support for the war continued to decline and newly emboldened Democrats advocated troop withdrawal (over time) or redeployment in advance of the 2006 congressional elections. As the cut-and-run/stay-the-course rhetoric heated up, the president returned to a familiar theme: "Retreating from Iraq would dishonor the men and women who have given their lives in that country, and mean their sacrifice has been in vain" (Bush 2006a). A week later, he again acknowledged the "sacrifice" of American families (responding to "the challenge of our time and the calling of this generation") and pledged, "We will honor their sacrifice by completing the mission, by defeating the terrorists, and by laying the foundation of peace for generations to come" (Bush 2006b). The language of victory and redemption was also evoked by Senator John McCain during the first presidential debate prior to the 2008 election. He mentioned a bracelet he was wearing to honor a soldier's sacrifice and quoted from a mother's plea to "do everything in your power to make sure that my son's death was not in vain" (McCain 2008). A recurring McCain campaign theme focused on the potential harm to the U.S. military should politicians once again force them to accept withdrawal and defeat after great sacrifice (recalling his own Vietnam experience).

These evocatively patriotic and emotional statements actually reflect flawed logic through a well-known and researched psychological bias—the sunk-cost trap (sometimes it *is* better to cut and run rather than to stay and fight).[2] Individuals often pursue irrational and costly courses of action to redeem losses that cannot be recovered (i.e., spent money or dead soldiers).[3] Completing the mission in Iraq will not bring U.S. troops back to life and will not restore limbs lost as a result of combat.[4] There are many rational and logical reasons for continuing the counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq (preventing a civil war/humanitarian tragedy, constraining Iranian influence in the region, maintaining U.S. access to Iraq's energy resources, etc.), but sending more troops to die because others have died is not one of them. Presidents have employed similar statements in the past because redemption-through-victory frames justify continuing involvement and turn a liability into an asset—casualties become a reason to stay, rather than a reason to leave. Widespread public susceptibility to these tropes could yield increased support for ongoing operations. Unfortunately, the psychological research on the sunk-cost trap has generally been limited to purchasing and investment decisions or personal behaviors. We know of no research examining the efficacy of these frames in producing casualty tolerance in the mass public.[5]

To examine the impact of "investment frames" on the U.S. public's willingness to tolerate further casualties in Iraq and willingness to further fund the war, we embedded a framing experiment within a nationally representative survey of American attitudes about the war. Consistent with arguments about the need to examine the differential impact of frames on multiple publics, we find that investment frames *increase* support for the war among individuals that believe the United States "did the right thing in Iraq," but *decrease* support for the war among those that feel the United States "should have stayed out." We also find, however, that framing effects are inconsistent when the frames are attributed to sources. These latter results demonstrate the importance of including unattributed frames to evaluate source effects in framing research.

Casualty Tolerance and the War in Iraq

Research on public opinion regarding military operations has often focused on casualty sensitivity/tolerance. Early work highlighted the relationship between cumulative casualties over time and inexorably declining support for war (Mueller 1973). Research in the 1990s and early 2000s focused on the contextual factors affecting casualty sensitivity/phobia, noting the apparent casualty intolerance of that era and contrasting it with previously high levels of tolerance during World War II (Boettcher 2004a; Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Gartner and Segura 1998; Jentleson 1992; Larson 1996; see Klarevas [2002] for a nice summary of this literature). More recently, scholars have examined the response of U.S. public opinion to casualties incurred in Iraq and Afghanistan (Althaus and Coe 2007; Berinsky 2007; Boettcher and Cobb 2006; Cobb 2007; Cobb and Boettcher 2007; Eichenberg 2005; Eichenberg, Stoll, and Lebo 2006; Gartner 2008a, 2008b; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/06; Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver 2007; Gelpi and Mueller 2006; Jacobson 2007; Kahneman and Renshon 2007; Mueller 2005; Voeten and Brewer 2006).

The extant literature on the public reaction to American casualties tends to split between rationalist- and elite-driven explanations. For Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler casualty sensitivity "is, to put it crudely, one's price sensitivity to the human cost of war" (2005/06, 10). They argue that "the scholarly consensus is nearly unanimous in favor of the 'rational cost-benefit' model" (2005/06, 10; see also Gartner [2008a, 2008b]), but that scholarly consensus does not extend to more general research on American public opinion (see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Jacobson 2007; Zaller 1992). The role of media and political elites in framing the discussion of casualties is a burgeoning area of research, supported by the empirical discovery that only a limited number of respondents (40 percent in this study) can come within 20 percent (on either side) of accurately estimating the actual number of U.S. casualties at any point in time (Berinsky 2007; Boettcher and Cobb 2006; Cobb 2007). To the extent that cost-benefit calculations are undertaken or internalized, they can only involve

subjective rationality based on rather blunt perceptions. We follow Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2005/06; see also Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver [2007]) in exploring the determinants of casualty tolerance, but we embed a framing experiment in our survey to examine the sensitivity of individual casualty tolerance to elite rhetoric.[6]

Researchers tend to focus more on the "blood" than the "treasure" when considering the impact of war costs on public opinion because challenging "excessive" monetary expenditures can appear penurious given the stakes of the military action (portrayed as Iraqi freedom and democracy). Tolerance for additional spending, however, may be more sensitive to investment framing because money is more easily conceived as an instrument that can be redeemed (or perceived to be "well spent") once victory is attained. Thus, we also include spending tolerance as a target of investment framing.

Casualty Framing

The sunk-cost "trap" is a well-known psychological bias, particularly to researchers studying managerial behavior and investment decisions (Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa [1998] 2006; Juliusson, Karlsson, and Gärling 2005; Plous 1993; Schaubroeck and Davis 1994; Schwartz 2005, 2006; Vedantam 2006). In personal behavior, individuals will often try to avoid "wasting money" by consuming food they do not like, watching DVDs they find boring, or wearing clothing that no longer fits. In the business world, software companies will continue projects that are no longer innovative and banks will lend money to failing businesses hoping they can "turn themselves around." Sunk costs are "old investments of time or money that are now irrecoverable" (Hammond, Keeney, and Raifa [1998] 2006, 122). The "trap" closes when individuals or groups escalate their commitment to failing courses of action to "gamble for resurrection" (Downs and Rocke 1994). Whether they do so because of a fear of punishment or a desire to justify past choices, the sunk-cost trap can lead to "throwing good money after bad" (Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa [1998] 2006, 122). This destructive decisional pathology can be explained by the general human desire to avoid losses, another major observation of prospect theorists (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, 1982; Tversky and Kahneman 1981; McDermott 2004; Nincic 1997; Whyte 1993). Ironically, individuals and groups will often risk greater losses to avoid or recoup smaller losses, even when the probability of success is fading.

Sunk-cost and escalation of commitment traps have received a fair amount of attention from political scientists. Researchers interested in foreign-policy decision making have examined the negative impact of sunk costs in laboratory experiments and in case studies of "real-world" decisions (Downs and Rocke 1994; Taliaferro 1998, 2004). They have also examined the extent to which group decision making can exaggerate this effect (Seibert and Goltz 2001; Whyte 1993). Fearon (1997)

moved beyond the decision making milieu to formally demonstrate the relevance of "sunk-cost signaling" in strategic interaction. Fearon's work comes closest to this article's focus on investment framing, since he examines how sunk-cost signals affect other actors. However, we know of no research that has directly examined the power of investment frames in influencing wartime public opinion.

One of the only studies to explore sunk-cost thinking in the context of wartime public opinion was published in 1995 by Nincic and Nincic. These authors offered a relatively simple rationalist model in which the benefits of war remain constant while the costs of war (expressed in casualties) rise over time (1995, 414). Their innovation was to conceive of "the U.S. government" and "the U.S. public" as differentiated actors with alternative views of risk and uncertainty. They posited that the public interprets costs as consumers—expecting almost immediate benefits for payments, intolerant of uncertainty, and heavily discounting the future (1995, 415). Conversely, the government is expected to interpret costs as investors—expecting deferred benefits for payments, tolerant of a reasonable degree of uncertainty, and evaluating future outcomes at only a marginal discount. Given these expectations, public support for a war should wane in relation to steadily increasing casualties as Mueller (1973) observes, but government decision makers should escalate commitment until the costs of war clearly exceed any potential future benefits and then pursue disengagement through negotiated settlement (1995, 416).[7] If U.S. government officials approach wartime costs and benefits as investors, we would expect them to frequently deploy "investment frames"[8] to justify continued involvement and/or escalation. This may explain Bush and McCain's reliance on these tropes. Conversely, if the U.S. public approaches wartime costs and benefits as consumers, we would expect them to be resistant to investment frames (*ceteris paribus*) and drawn to "consumer frames" (which emphasize casualties as unacceptable costs and advocate reduced commitment and/or withdrawal). Our work extends Nincic and Nincic to the individual level and directly tests the impact of this type of elite rhetoric.

Exploring Contingent Framing Effects

The concept of "framing" and the observation of "framing effects" should now be widely familiar to political scientists and policymakers. Starting in the early 1990s, research on framing evolved independently in the fields of American and International politics. In American politics, "issue frames" (for a definition, see Druckman 2004, 672) have been viewed as "meaningful and important determinants of public opinion" (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997, 224). Unlike persuasion—which as traditionally understood produced a change in beliefs based on the provision of new information—framing seeks to change the "perceived relevance or importance of a specific belief for an attitude" (Nelson, Oxley, and

Clawson 1997, 226).[9] A frame alters the salience of information that is already possessed by the target. Since salient information is often perceived to be diagnostic, frames affect attitudes without altering underlying beliefs. The subtlety of issue framing explains the counterintuitive observation that frames (*ceteris paribus*) are more likely to influence knowledgeable individuals (Chong and Druckman 2007, 110). International politics scholars are more familiar with the seminal work of Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1979) and have generally limited their research to "evaluative frames" (Mintz and Redd 2003, 195; also known as "equivalency frames"; see Druckman 2004, 672). This second type of framing is similar to issue framing, in that both "types of framing effects cause individuals to focus on certain characterizations of an issue or problem instead of others; however, issue framing effects do not involve logically equivalent ways of making the same statement" (Druckman 2004, 672).

The seemingly robust results produced by experimental framing research in a number of disciplines have generated numerous critiques concerned with external validity and scope conditions of applicability (Boettcher 2005, 2004a, 2004b; Druckman 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2004; Druckman and Nelson 2003; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001; Kinder 2007).[10] These studies have focused on three key questions: Who can frame? How are framing effects to be estimated? And what are the contextual constraints on framing effects? Druckman (2001b) and Boettcher (2004a) both examined the importance of source credibility. More credible sources (Colin Powell vs. Jerry Springer or the *New York Times* vs. *National Enquirer*) may produce stronger framing effects as might well-known figures targeting established constituencies (President Bush targeting Republicans or the fictional "Concerned Christian Americans" targeting evangelicals). However, even credible or "trusted" sources may have difficulty selling frames that run counter to their public image. Druckman (2001b) has also demonstrated the relevance of belief importance in mediating framing effects and in more recent work (Druckman and Nelson 2003; Druckman 2004) has explored the role of competition and deliberation in limiting the impact of equivalency frames and offered a theory of framing and opinion formation in competitive elite environments (Chong and Druckman 2007). Outside of the laboratory, a number of demographic variables may mitigate the impact of elite issue framing, but framing studies are not commonly embedded in large-n nationally representative survey designs (but see Cobb [2006]; Kinder and Sanders [1990]; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). Finally, framing effects are often measured by the "contrast method" (Chong and Druckman 2007, 105) where the impact of one frame is compared to the impact of another (muddling their individual contribution). The impact of an individual framing condition, however, can only be measured when compared to a control group that was not exposed "to a persuasive communication" (Chong and Druckman 2007, 106). Yet, the use of a control group is seldom found in framing experiments.[11]

Expectations

Our first expectation regarding the impact of casualty frames derives from the work of Nincic and Nincic (1995). Their hypothesis—that the mass public approaches wartime costs as consumers—was supported by aggregate level data, but was not directly tested at the individual level. The frequency with which political leaders deploy investment frames suggests that they believe in their efficacy, a belief that runs directly counter to Nincic and Nincic's (1995) observations. In this study, we directly test the relative strength of investment and consumer frames. *Following Nincic and Nincic (1995), we expect that respondents will be more receptive to consumer frames.* Our survey includes one condition in which respondents were exposed to a consumer frame describing casualties as sunk-costs that cannot be redeemed and three conditions in which respondents were exposed to an investment frame exhorting further escalation to honor the dead.[12]

Our expectations regarding the impact of casualty frames (investment and consumer) are shaped by previous work on the conditionality of framing effects (Boettcher and Cobb 2006; Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman 2001a, 2001b, 2004; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001). Overall, we do not expect to find strong main effects for casualty frames. Unlike previous framing studies using hypothetical scenarios (see Boettcher 2004a, 2004b); the Iraq War was a highly salient and deeply political experience.[13] By the fall of 2006, the Iraq War was "President Bush's war" and partisanship and retrospective judgments regarding the decision to go to war were major determinants of support/opposition. Thus, we anticipate that strong framing effects will only emerge when we examine the differential impact of the investment and consumer frames on particular subgroups (see Bleich 2007; Edy and Meirick 2007; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001).

We believe that individuals that respond that the United States "did the right thing in Iraq" are more personally committed to the war (recall our discussion of accountability and sunk costs) and are more likely to positively respond to investment frames. Conversely, respondents that feel the United States "should have stayed out" have less commitment to the war and are less likely to respond to investment frames in a positive manner (and may indeed respond negatively). The retrospective right/wrong item is superior (for our purposes) to using partisanship since 27 percent of Republican respondents stated the United States "should have stayed out of Iraq," while 21 percent of Democratic respondents felt the United States "did the right thing." *Thus, we expect that the casualty and spending tolerance of individuals supportive of the decision to go to war in Iraq will increase when exposed to investment frames, while the casualty and spending tolerance of individuals opposed to the decision to go to war in Iraq will be unaffected or decrease when exposed to investment frames.*[14]

Following Druckman (2001b) and Boettcher (2004a) we also examine source credibility as a mediator of framing effects. When varying the source of casualty

frames, we expect that trusted/credible sources are more likely to evoke stronger framing effects (contingent on the relationship between the source and the recipient) because their statements will be seen as more authoritative. In this study, the unattributed "some people" source is expected to be less effective at producing framing effects than a specific, widely known military officer (General Casey) or religious leader (Pat Robertson, Pope Benedict).[15] We chose General Casey to represent source credibility because of issue expertise and Pat Robertson and Pope Benedict to represent source credibility because of belief congruence. We do not anticipate that all subjects will be familiar with General Casey's role in the war, so we identify him as the "Commanding General in Iraq" and expect that perceptions of his issue-specific credibility will be widespread among respondents exposed to this condition. We identify Pat Robertson as the "founder of the Christian Coalition" and Pope Benedict simply as "Pope Benedict" and expect that perceptions of their credibility will be more limited to Evangelicals and Catholics.[16]

The 2006 Iraq Survey

Our data come from an opinion survey that was fielded by Knowledge Networks from September 19 through 26, 2006.[17] The survey included 1,342[18] members of the Knowledge Networks panel, which provides a representative sample of U.S. households. Individuals from households selected to join the panel complete surveys online either with their own personal computer or with a WebTV device provided by Knowledge Networks. We obtained a 70 percent completion rate and a 29 percent response rate, using AAPOR standard definition #3. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.7 percent.

Respondents answered a battery of questions about Iraq and were then randomly assigned to one of nine experimental conditions or a control group. Four of the treatment conditions encouraged (or discouraged) respondents to honor sunk costs while the remaining five frames varied the stated goals in Iraq. In the analyses presented here, we limit our examination to the four frames about honoring (or not honoring) sunk costs.[19]

Similar to the majority of past research on framing effects, we investigate the effects of exposure to one-sided frames (Druckman 2004; Chong and Druckman 2007; Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997). Our research design is more complex than many past studies, however, because we include a control group and attribute three of the frames to a different source. The inclusion of a control group allows us to estimate the unique impact of exposure to each frame, while varying the source of the frames enables us to evaluate the impact of attributed versus unattributed frames. Without a control group, for example, researchers can only estimate framing effects across experimental conditions in which the contribution of any individual frame on

opinion change is unknown. The absence of a control group therefore contributes to the appearance of exaggerated framing effects because the difference between framed opinions and baseline opinions is ignored (see Druckman [2001a] and Chong and Druckman [2007] on this point). Likewise, without an unattributed frame, researchers can only compare across sources without knowing the impact of the frame alone.

All respondents, regardless of the precise framing condition, were provided information about cumulative American troop fatalities in Iraq since the start of the war.[20] In the control group, this information was the only thing respondents read before moving to the final set of questions.[21] In our unattributed, investment framing condition, respondents also read that "Some people say we need to stay and complete the mission in Iraq to honor the dead and make sure they did not die in vain." In the second and third investment framing conditions, we replaced the phrase "some people" with "General Casey, the Commanding General in Iraq," or "Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition." Conversely, the fourth frame (a consumer frame) was attributed to Pope Benedict, and it discouraged respondents from honoring sunk costs by saying, "staying will not bring them back and will only result in more loss of life."

The effects of exposure to the various frames about Iraq were estimated by asking two questions: (1) "How many more American military deaths should be tolerated in order for the United States to complete the mission in Iraq?" and (2) "How much more money should the United States spend in order to complete the mission in Iraq?"[22] Following Berinsky (2007), we allowed respondents to answer these questions using an open-ended format, although the maximum casualty tolerance permitted was approximately a million lives and the maximum billions was approximately ten thousand billion dollars.

General Results

Before presenting the results of our framing study, it is useful to consider the descriptive results for questions administered prior to the framing experiment. These results can be compared to the results of other national surveys conducted in the same time period to gauge the representativeness of our sample.[23] The results of our survey reflect the general discontent found in the mass public just before the midterm congressional elections in 2006. Fifty-seven percent of our respondents indicated that the United States "should have stayed out" of Iraq, while 43 percent felt that the United States "did the right thing in Iraq." Unsurprisingly, this retrospective judgment about the choice to initiate the war is correlated with partisanship, perceptions regarding prospects for success in Iraq, perceptions of the U.S. goal in Iraq, and attitudes regarding U.S. troop strength in Iraq (see Berinsky and Druckman [2007,

Table 1
Casualty Tolerance and Willingness to Spend Billions of Dollars more on Iraq

	Casualties	Billions of Dollars
Minimum	0	0
Maximum	999,999	9,999
Mean	20,627	171
Standard deviation	132,646	996
Mode	0	0
Median	0	0
Percent Saying Zero	64	55
Skewness	7.0	9.3
Kurtosis	47.8	87.6
N	1,283	1,285

136] on the degree to which a number of these items tap a "single underlying construct" of latent war support). Respondents that feel the United States "did the right thing" in invading Iraq are more likely to be Republicans (73 percent vs. 21 percent), perceive the possibility of success (80 percent vs. 27.2 percent), believe the United States is in Iraq to "promote democracy" or "fight terrorism" (34 percent and 43 percent vs. 17 percent and 14 percent, respectively), and believe that U.S. troop strength should be increased (27 percent vs. 14 percent). Finally, 27 percent of our respondents felt that American troops should be "withdrawn completely," while 32 percent felt that troops should be reduced "a lot" or "some."

We present descriptive data about our dependent variables in Table 1. Several crucial departures from a normal distribution of respondents' answers are apparent. First, nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated they are intolerant of losing a single additional life in Iraq by answering "zero," and over half also said they did not support spending any additional money on Iraq. Second, the distribution of respondents' answers to both questions is severely positively skewed; the majority of nonzero answers cluster closer to zero than farther away from zero.

Consequently, we decided to transform our dependent variables into dichotomous measures and conduct a conservative test of whether investment/consumer frames can move people from casualty/spending intolerance to casualty/spending tolerance (or vice versa). While this solution admittedly reduces the wide variation in some respondents' willingness to expend additional resources, the key distinction in our data appears to be between respondents who say they will not tolerate a single additional lost life/billion dollars spent and those who say they can tolerate at least one more lost life/billion dollars spent, no matter how many lives/billions of dollars. We determined this was the case by conducting several sensitivity tests to make sure we were not losing important information by collapsing the data.[24] Thus, we have

Table 2
Logistic Regression for Casualty and Spending Tolerance

	Lives		Billions of Dollars	
	Beta	*Wald*	*Beta*	*Wald*
Right/wrong	1.87	60.0**	1.75	59.6**
Investment frames	0.51	4.1*	0.00	0.00
Consumer frame	0.30	0.92	–0.18	0.39
Constant	–1.67	5.3**	–0.95	2.0+
Nagelkerke R^2	0.30		0.30	
N	622		624	

Note: Entries are logit coefficients. Models include controls for region, religion, age, education, gender, income, party identification, political ideology, military status, and attention to news about Iraq.
**$p < .01$; *$p < .05$; +$p < .10$, one-tailed tests.

little to say about the role of investment frames in increasing an individual's degree of casualty tolerance, say from one hundred casualties to one thousand casualties (Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/06).

Framing Results

Table 2 reports the results of our logistic regression models for our casualty frames with tolerance for additional casualties and tolerance for additional spending as our dependent variables. Each of the regression models includes our "investment frame" variable, our "consumer frame" variable, the retrospective "right/wrong" variable, and a series of demographic control variables[25] that might also affect casualty tolerance.[26] In each model, the impact of the casualty frames is evaluated relative to the control group rather than to one another. This table reflects the traditional approach to the analysis of framing effects and does not take account of the differential impacts of our moderator variable or of source credibility. Here, we observe only one significant framing effect—for investment frames when the dependent variable was tolerance for additional casualties. The positive coefficient for the investment frames reveals that these pro-war frames had a positive impact on tolerance for additional casualties. The consumer frame variable fails to achieve significance for either dependent variable and the investment frame variable fails to achieve significance when the dependent variable was tolerance for additional spending. Our retrospective right/wrong variable was highly significant ($p < .001$) in both models. Were we to stop here, we might misjudge the efficacy of our investment and consumer frames.

Table 3 follows the same structure as Table 2, but unpacks our casualty frames by source. Thus, our generic investment frame variable is divided into our "unattributed,"

Table 3
Logistic Regression for Casualty and Spending Tolerance, by Framing Source

	Lives		Billions of Dollars	
	Beta	*Wald*	*Beta*	*Wald*
Right/wrong	1.86	58.3**	1.72	56.9**
Investment, unattributed	0.53	3.2*	0.14	0.23
Investment, General Casey	0.23	0.51	–0.43	2.0+
Investment, Pat Robertson	0.74	5.5**	0.29	0.90
Consumer, Pope Benedict	0.30	0.90	–0.18	0.37
Constant	–1.6	4.8**	–0.88	1.7+
Nagelkerke R^2	0.30		0.31	
N	622		624	

Note: Entries are logit coefficients. Models include controls for region, religion, age, education, gender, income, party identification, political ideology, military status, and attention to news about Iraq.
**$p < .01$; *$p < .05$; +$p < .10$, one-tailed tests.

"General Casey," and "Pat Robertson" variables, while our consumer frame variable now includes the "Pope Benedict" label. This table begins to parse out source effects as we compare the attributed and unattributed frames to the control group. Here, we observe that some sources are more effective than others at producing framing effects. With tolerance for additional casualties as the dependent variable, both the unattributed and Pat Robertson investment frames produced a significant framing effect (again in the appropriate direction). With tolerance for additional spending as the dependent variable, only the General Casey investment frame produced a weakly significant framing effect, *but it was in the wrong direction.* Once again, our retrospective right/wrong variable was again highly significant ($p < .001$) in both models. However, were we to halt our analysis at this point, we would fail to understand the manner in which responses to these frames are moderated by our retrospective right/wrong variable.

Table 4 follows the same structure as Table 3, but further subdivides the regression models by our retrospective right/wrong variable. As other researchers might run separate regression models for gender or race, we believe that our moderator variable fundamentally alters our respondents' receptivity to the casualty frames. Indeed, among respondents that indicated the United States "should have stayed out" of Iraq, only our unattributed investment frame produced a change in tolerance for additional casualties and that change was in the wrong (but expected) direction. Respondents exposed to our unattributed pro-war investment frame were actually *less* casualty tolerant than respondents in the control group. The result is similar when the dependent variable is tolerance for additional spending. In this model, both the unattributed and the General Casey investment frames produced a statistically significant decrease in spending tolerance. Conversely, and again consistent with our

Table 4
Logistic Regression for Mediated Casualty and Spending Tolerance, by Framing Source

Retrospective Viewpoint	Lives				Billions of Dollars			
	War = Wrong		*War = Right*		*War = Wrong*		*War = Right*	
	Beta	*Wald*	*Beta*	*Wald*	*Beta*	*Wald*	*Beta*	*Wald*
Investment, unattributed	–1.4	4.9*	1.3	11.9**	–0.77	2.9*	0.99	5.0*
Investment, General Casey	–0.60	1.4	0.73	2.6*	–1.0	5.7**	0.22	0.20
Investment, Pat Robertson	0.11	0.05	0.77	3.0**	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.11
Consumer, Pope Benedict	–0.03	0.00	0.16	0.16	–.27	0.40	–0.32	0.54
Constant	–1.4	1.6+	0.17	0.03	–0.89	1.1*	1.3	1.4
Nagelkerke R^2	0.18		0.18		0.30		0.31	
N	333		289		331		293	

Note: Entries are Logit coefficients. Models include controls for region, religion, age, education, gender, income, party identification, political ideology, military status, and attention to news about Iraq.
**$p < .01$; *$p < .05$; +$p < .10$, one-tailed tests.

expectations, the unattributed, Pat Robertson, and General Casey investment frames all produced statistically significant increases in tolerance for additional casualties among respondents that indicated the United States "did the right thing in Iraq," while only the unattributed investment frame produced a statistically significant increase in tolerance for additional spending. Without running separate models for our moderator variable (or including multiple interaction terms), we would have completely missed the "backlash" effect among respondents that indicated the United States "should have stayed out" of Iraq.

The logit coefficients reported in Tables 2 through 4 are not easily interpreted, so we calculated changes in the predicted probability of tolerance for casualties and additional spending for respondents that indicated the United States "should have stayed out" of Iraq versus respondents that indicated the United States "did the right thing in Iraq." Table 5 reveals the magnitude of the shifts produced by our unattributed and attributed casualty frames when other variables are held at their means. For example, the unattributed investment frame produced a 12 percent marginal *decrease* in the predicted probability that respondents would be casualty *tolerant* among those that feel the United States "should have stayed out" of Iraq. The largest framing effects were observed in the predicted probability of casualty tolerance for respondents that feel the United States "did the right thing in Iraq" and were exposed to the unattributed and Pat Robertson frames (+28 percent and +24 percent, respectively). Interestingly, the Pope Benedict consumer frame did little to *decrease* the predicted probability that respondents would be casualty/spending *tolerant* among those that feel the United States "should have stayed out" of Iraq.[27]

Table 5
Change in Predicted Probability of Tolerance for Additional Casualties and Tolerance for Additional Spending, by Respondents' Retrospective Beliefs about the War

Explanatory Variable	Change in Predicted Probability
Respondent Said We Should Have Stayed Out of Iraq	
Investment frame	–12% more casualties**
	–17% more $billions**
General Casey, investment	–6% more casualties
	–18% more $billions**
Pat Robertson, investment	+10% more casualties
	+1% more $billions
Pope Benedict, consumer	+4% more casualties
	–5% more $billions
Respondent Said We Did the Right Thing by Attacking Iraq	
Investment frame	+28% more casualties**
	+13% more $billions**
General Casey, investment	+16% more casualties**
	–1% more $billions
Pat Robertson, investment	+24% more casualties**
	+8% more $billions
Pope Benedict, consumer	+7% more casualties
	–9% more $billions

Note: Changes in probabilities were generated using binary logistic regression models in Stata V.9. Regression models held all other independent variables at their means. The change in predicted probability is always based on movement from the control group to the specified frame.
*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$.

Additional Tests

Despite our expectations, the source of the investment and consumer frames had no discernable effect on the casualty and spending tolerance among the anticipated demographic subgroups. In results not presented in these tables, we find that evangelicals were no more likely to be moved by Pat Robertson and Catholics were no more likely to be moved by Pope Benedict. The null results held up across multiple model specifications. This was a surprising finding given recent research on religiosity and U.S. public opinion regarding the Middle East (see Baumgartner, Francia, and Morris 2008), but one that would not have come to light had we not employed a more sophisticated multisource experimental design. We should caution, however, that only twenty-nine Catholics were exposed to the Pope Benedict consumer frame and only

ten Evangelicals were exposed to the Pat Robertson investment frame. As an anonymous reviewer observed, ceiling effects may also limit Robertson's impact on already pro-war Evangelicals and Benedict's impact on already antiwar Catholics.[28]

Discussion

Despite the substantial literature on the sunk-cost trap and the frequent deployment of investment frames by political leaders, we know of no other research on the effectiveness of this rhetorical device. Our results demonstrate that sunk-cost tropes generate more consistent framing effects when they are unattributed *and* when addressed to a congenial audience.[29] The investment frames attributed to sources produced statistically significant effects in only three out of eight opportunities, and only twice in the direction intended by the source (see Table 5). Indeed, despite our expectations regarding source credibility, the General Casey investment frame decreases the predicted probability of spending *tolerance* by 18 percent among respondents indicating the United States "should have stayed out" of Iraq. The unattributed investment frame was the only one to produce statistically significant changes in the predicted probability of *both* casualty and spending tolerance among respondents that indicated the United States "did the right thing in Iraq." The inconsistent effects observed for source credibility are consistent with previous findings by Boettcher (2004a), but run counter to work by Druckman (2001c). We believe that the speaker occasionally trumps the frame—our respondents may treat unattributed frames as "information," while they view frames associated with a particular source as self-interested "argument." The selective attention to a particular value dimension evoked by an unattributed piece of information (issue framing) would be subtly effective since it avoids the provocation of resistance generated by sourced arguments. This implies that the White House should attempt to insert investment frames into the public discourse through a medium other than presidential speeches. Bush (and now Obama) might swamp the message, either in a positive or negative manner, and the framing attempt may be transparent to the target.[30]

The importance of dividing the public via our moderator variable is demonstrated by the differential impact of our unattributed and attributed investment frames among respondents that indicated the United States "should have stayed out" of Iraq versus those that indicated the United States "did the right thing in Iraq." Respondents with a sense of personal commitment to the war experienced *increased* casualty/spending tolerance in reaction to investment frames, while respondents that questioned the U.S. intervention in Iraq experienced *decreased* casualty/spending tolerance in reaction to investment frames.[31] This suggests that investment frames should be deployed before targeted audiences to bolster previous positions. Without the inclusion of our moderator variable and a control group for comparison, the differential impact of these casualty frames would be obscured from view.

Conclusion

Sunk-costs traps are widespread decision-making pathologies, but are investment frames effective rhetorical tools in bolstering support for ongoing military operations? In this article, we reported the results of a framing experiment embedded in a nationally representative survey of American attitudes on the Iraq War. The central importance of our moderator variable and the inconsistent results for our sourced frames (including among particular demographic subgroups) reveals the extent to which issue framing is conditioned by both individual and situational factors. In laboratory studies of issue and evaluative framing, hypothetical scenarios involving clear and unambiguous frames can produce significant framing effects. In the real world, preexisting and hardened perceptions about the issue under study and the source of the frame can significantly attenuate the impact of these frames. Investment frames can either bolster escalation of commitment or generate a backlash depending on the audience. In the case of wartime public opinion, the potential range for framing effects undoubtedly narrows as public opinion solidifies in response to feedback from the battlefield and elite discourse regarding the war (see Baum and Groeling 2008). Given the ceiling and/or floor effects that inevitably result from this process of ongoing evaluation, we can only expect to observe relatively weak and conditional framing effects. Issue and evaluative framing remains an important area of research given the number of important outcomes that are decided by narrow margins (particularly in a democracy), but subtle and sophisticated experiments are needed to disentangle framing effects in the real world.

Notes

1. This message was repeated (almost verbatim) in an address to U.S. troops at Osan Air Base on November 19, 2005 (Bush 2005b).

2. For timely challenges to Bush's statements, see Schwartz (2005, 2006).

3. For accessible descriptions of the sunk-cost trap and its relevance today, see Plous (1993, 243-44) and Vedantam (2006).

4. Recall the furor over Senator John McCain's comment that American lives had been "wasted" in Iraq (McCain interview with David Letterman, February 28, 2007). This statement marked a significant departure from the language of "sacrifice," so much so that it overshadowed the announcement of McCain's candidacy for president. McCain repudiated his comments immediately and returned to the "sacrifice" frame.

5. Nincic and Nincic (1995, 413) posit that the U.S. public "responds to costs in the manner of consumers," while the U.S. government "responds to costs in the fashion of an investor." Their research suggests the public should be less sensitive to arguments regarding the redemption of sunk costs, while elites should be more prone to making (and accepting) these arguments regarding escalation. Unfortunately, these general hypotheses are tested at the level of mass opinion and the authors do not explore the impact of these frames at the mass or individual level.

6. Berinsky and Druckman (2007, 130-31) offer a sound critique of using casualty tolerance as a singular measure of war support. They note issues of reliability and validity and comment on the irony of Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler's (2005/06) reliance on this measure when they "in fact argue that casualties

are not the primary determinant of support for war" (Berinsky and Druckman 2007, 131; see Gelpi and Reifler [2008] for their rejoinder).

7. Much of the escalation of commitment literature suggests that this reevaluation of the balance between costs and benefits will come much later than standard expected utility models predict (see the Nincic and Nincic [1995, 416] discussion of cognitive dissonance and accountability on this point).

8. An earlier version of this article used the phrase "sunk-cost frames." A reviewer suggested that the frames offered in our experiment were just the opposite (at least for those making the arguments in support of the war). We would maintain that military casualties are indeed sunk costs (since they are not redeemable through victory), but acknowledge that "investment frames" better captures the intent of the source. The use of "sunk-cost frames" would also presuppose that the Iraq War was a losing venture, a position that is less tenable at this point in time.

9. Chong and Druckman (2007, 107) argue that framing also occurs when "an evaluative component changes;" for instance, the target responds to new information and gives that information priority status in developing a new attitude. This conception of framing blurs the line separating framing from persuasion (though they do draw a clear distinction between framing and agenda setting and priming; see 112-13; see also Edy and Meirick [2007, 120-23]).

10. Kinder (2007), in particular, questions the external validity of framing experiments, even when embedded in representative sample surveys. He notes that most framing experiments "obliterate the distinction between the supply of information, on the one hand, and its consumption, on the other" (2007, 157). We acknowledge the "artificiality" of our study, in that we do not fully approximate "real world" framing in a competitive communication environment. However, we maintain that our experiment is more realistic than similar studies including unrepresentative student samples. In the end, we agree with Kinder's (2007, 157) desire to promote "methodological diversification," but would note that this epistemological position explicitly condones additional framing experiments.

11. In the international relations literature, this may be because of the difficulty of producing neutral or unframed evaluative prospects. In many international relations scenarios the frame is often implicit in the description of an outcome.

12. We acknowledge that there are limitations to our survey design as we attempt to test this first expectation. We did not include an unattributed consumer frame, so there is a potential confound between the frame and the source. We also have an imbalanced experimental design with three investment frames and only one consumer frame. Given limited resources and our desire to focus on investment frames and source effects, our survey was necessarily circumscribed. In the future, we plan to more rigorously evaluate investment versus consumer frames in a fully articulated experiment.

13. Indeed, the survey administrator noted the unusually lengthy and emotional responses to several open-ended questions in the survey.

14. We expect to observe a similar pattern in response to consumer frames.

15. See Baumgartner, Francia, and Morris (2008) on the influence of religion on public opinion of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

16. We selected General Casey as a source of issue-specific expertise because he was the most authoritative military figure offering pro-war arguments at the time of the study. We selected Pat Robertson and Pope Benedict because of an interest in the impact of religiosity in the South, which was a particular focus of an additional research project. Unfortunately, we did not include a direct measure of trust/credibility for this part of the study and agree with an anonymous reviewer that direct measures are preferable to "assumptions regarding which characters a given individual is 'likely' to trust."

17. Knowledge Networks surveys are not only efficient, but also highly reliable (Krosnick and Chang 2001; Brooks and Geer 2007).

18. As part of a larger study unrelated to this research, we included an over-sample of thirteen southern states. We use poststratification weights in all of our analyses to produce appropriate national-level statistics.

19. The data regarding goal framing are reported separately in Cobb and Boettcher (2007).

20. Earlier in the survey, we asked respondents to estimate the number of U.S. troop deaths in Iraq. Thus, each framing condition corrected any previously inaccurate estimates. Berinsky (2007, 13-14) explored the impact of correcting casualty estimates on measures of war support in an experiment and found only null effects.

21. We did not employ alternative questions that directly framed economic sunk-costs (i.e., "don't let this money be spent in vain"). If framing effects are limited to directly framed value dimensions, we should expect to observe less movement in response to our question regarding additional economic expenditures.

22. The complete wording for this question is, "As you may know, the US has spent more than 300 billion dollars on the war in Iraq. How much more money should the US spend in order to complete the mission in Iraq?"

23. PollingReport.com has accumulated polling data on Iraq from 2002 (pre-war polls) to the present. Comparable questions to those reported below were asked by a number of other pollsters in and around September 2006.

24. For example, we ran two OLS regression models only for respondents who indicated any non-zero tolerance (by answering at least one life or one billion dollars more for Iraq), once using the original coding of responses and then using a natural log transformation of them. Both OLS models suggested no differences existed between respondents who indicated minimal casualty tolerance (or spending tolerance) and those who indicated a great deal of it. In addition, we wanted to make sure that our results using binary dependent variables were consistent with findings we would obtain using other regression models that utilized the original or alternatively transformed values. Using the original continuous measures that included "zero" tolerance responses, OLS results are consistent with those obtained using logistic regression. We also tried using ordered logit models after constructing a categorical measure of casualty tolerance (Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005/06), but we once again failed to find appreciable differences in the results.

25. For the sake of brevity we chose to focus on just our key variables in these tables. The full results for the models, including the coefficients for the demographic control variables, are available upon request.

26. We also ran these models with measures of multilateralism and expectations of future success in Iraq and found that our framing effects remained robust. We opted to exclude these otherwise theoretically relevant variables because of our concerns regarding intercorrelation with our moderator and dependent variables (see Berinsky and Druckman 2007).

27. Tables 2 through 5 analyze framing effects for treatment conditions versus the control group. As an anonymous reviewer observed, these analyses do not allow us to fully explore source effects because we cannot state that the effect produced by one source was significantly different from another. Since most of the investment frames produce similar shifts compared to the control group, the attributed and unattributed frames are not significantly different from one another (in most circumstances, results available on request). Thus, we carefully restrict our language to describing differences in producing framing effects.

28. We considered including anti-"stay-the-course" messages attributed to Casey and Robertson and pro-"stay-the-course" messages attributed to Pope Benedict, but feel that respondents would be more sensitive to such obviously unrealistic frames. This is a shortcoming of research using real scenarios and actual sources.

29. The "and" is very important here. Investment frames, attributed and unattributed, perform poorly when addressed to a skeptical audience. Under these conditions, attributed investment frames may (at best) produce less of a backlash, but this result is indeterminate given the general lack of statistical significance for the attributed investment frames.

30. Chong and Druckman (2007, 110) emphasize "the strength and prevalence of the frame, the knowledge and motivation of recipients of the frame, and the combination of frames presented" as determinants of framing effectiveness. They describe a dynamic, competitive environment where frames may wax and wane as the contextual parameters shift. Over time, effective frames may be rebutted and eventually fall to ridicule as motivated actors engage in political debate and the source of the frame loses

public trust. Excessive message discipline may reduce once powerful sources and frames to caricatures of themselves (e.g., the rise and fall of Bush's "cut and run" and "stay-the-course" rhetoric).

31. This result might suggest that respondents that indicated the United States "should have stayed out" of Iraq were engaging in "consumer" thinking as they responded negatively to the investment frames. Unfortunately, the lack of statistically significant effects for the consumer frame does not support this conclusion.

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