

## *Presidential Pseudo-Events and the Media Coverage They Receive*

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American presidents routinely use pseudo-events in their attempts to generate positive news coverage and build a favorable image in the press. Despite their prevalence, we know little about how pseudo-events are covered by the American press. We content analyze front-page coverage of seven White House events during 2006 and early 2007 in 96 U.S. newspapers. We compare the amount and tone of coverage given each event, as well as the framing provided by headlines and lead paragraphs. Moreover, comparisons across newspapers suggest that newspapers slant to their coverage of presidential pseudo-events, which correlates with endorsement behavior and the political leanings of its potential market. Our results suggest that the coverage of presidential pseudo-events is shaped by the national political and policy context as well as the local context of the newspaper, thus limiting the ability of the White House to positively influence media coverage. However, effective staging and symbolism can result in positive coverage, even when the president faces difficult political circumstances.

An important public relations strategy of the modern White House is the use of “pseudo-events” or events manufactured for the purpose of generating media coverage (Bennett 2005; Boorstin 1987; Waterman, Wright and St. Clair 1999). For example, presidents travel extensively across the country delivering addresses to local audiences and give nationally televised addresses in their permanent campaign for public support (Edwards 2007). Scholars note President George W. Bush’s extensive domestic travel schedule in his quest for popular support (Cohen and Powell 2005; Cook 2002), and some have examined the media coverage received by these local presidential pseudo-events. Their results demonstrate that the visits tend to generate extensive and positive coverage by the local press (Barrett and Peake 2007; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2006).

Like his predecessors (see Waterman, Wright and St. Clair 1999), Bush’s public relations strategies have relied extensively on pseudo-events designed to generate widespread and uncritical news coverage across the nation. Examples of national presidential pseudo-events include nationally-televised speeches (including the State of the Union address), press conferences, and trips abroad. Perhaps the most infamous such event put on by the

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Bush administration was the address from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln announcing the end of major combat operations in Iraq on May 1, 2003. The address was preceded by a dramatic carrier landing by the President, dressed in full-flight gear, and generated glowing coverage in the press, despite its obvious manufactured qualities and dubious relationship to reality (see Bennett 2005). Other notable examples include Bush's surprise visit to visit American troops in Baghdad on Thanksgiving 2003 and his surprise trip to Baghdad in June of 2006 to lend support to the Prime Minister of Iraq.

The success of an event-oriented public relations strategy relies precipitously upon the press. How are these events covered by America's newspapers? Are some events more effective at generating positive coverage, and, how does the political context, both national and local, shape the press coverage these events receive? Important questions regarding pseudo-events remain largely unanswered because researchers have yet to address them. Below, we seek to answer these questions in an exploratory analysis of newspaper coverage of seven presidential events during 2006 and early 2007. Specifically, we discuss the variable amount and tone of front-page coverage in 96 American newspapers for each event and the variation in President Bush's success in framing the newspaper coverage. We also compare across newspapers with an eye toward offering explanations for variability in the tone of the coverage.

### **Pseudo-Events**

In 1961, Daniel Boorstin first postulated that the American political experience is largely formed by pseudo-events: events staged for the purpose of generating news coverage (Boorstin 1987). In Boorstin's view, manufactured events provide the landscape of American politics, and are particularly important in developing the modern presidential image (Waterman, St. Clair, and Wright 1999). Pseudo-events generally have the following four characteristics: (1) The event is not spontaneous, but is planned; (2) The event's purpose is to generate news coverage; (3) Its relationship to reality is ambiguous; and, (4) It is intended to be self-fulfilling (Boorstin 1987, 11-12). Pseudo-events, according to Boorstin, are particularly attractive because they lend themselves to newsworthiness. They are typically more dramatic than spontaneous events and because they are planned for media consumption, are easier to cover than other types of events (1987, 39-40).

More importantly for presidents, pseudo-events place the president front and center in framing media interpretations of the event. The success of a presidential pseudo-event hinges on media coverage. Walter Lippman wrote over eighty years ago that "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” (1922, 9). Mental images regarding presidential pseudo-events are largely formed by the media coverage they receive, as most Americans do not experience these events directly.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the ability of the White House to manufacture media events is unparalleled in American politics. However, it is not clear how effective pseudo-events are in generating the positive images within the media that presidents are after.

### **Event Characteristics**

Some research suggests that when the White House is best able to control the media event, coverage is more likely to reflect positively upon the president (see Bennett 2005, 133-136). Fully-controlled events, then, best reflect Boorstin’s definition of pseudo-events, as they exhibit the staging qualities of a full-blown public relations event. Examples of fully-controlled pseudo-events include overseas trips, visiting the troops during war time, and local domestic trips (e.g., Bush’s social security reform tour). Partially-controlled events, on the other hand, are likely to have more limited effects on news coverage. The best example of a partially-controlled presidential event is a press conference (Bennett 2005, 134). Here, presidents attempt to shape the direction of the news conference through opening statements, calling on certain reporters, and avoiding discomfiting questions. However, presidents may lose control of the direction of a news conference, forcing them to refuse to answer questions or try to change the subject. Over time, as press conferences became more difficult venues for presidents to control, presidents have used standard on-the-record solo press conferences less often, instead sharing the stage with foreign dignitaries in joint press conferences. They have also developed other methods of interacting with the press, including interviews, which allow for greater White House control (Kumar 2007). In the less controlled situations (e.g., the solo press conference), news stories are likely to fit the typical standards of newsworthiness: novelty, timeliness, conflict, and audience impact (Graber 2006). The coverage is likely to be less positive and emphasize political conflict instead of the president’s message.

The use of symbols in politics offers the president the opportunity to frame his pseudo-event in order to positively shape coverage. Murray Edelman’s (1967, 6) classic definition of a symbol is an object or image that references or “stands for something other than itself.” Burnier (1994, 240) explains that in politics, “symbols assume meaning in relation to objects, events, beliefs, values or attitudes to which they refer.” President Bush’s carrier landing, for instance, portrayed the president as strong, resolute, and macho—images the White House was going for (Bennett 2005,

47-51). Bush's frequent public references to September 11, 2001, and use of the tragedy for symbolic purposes is helpful politically, for it reminds audience members of the war on terror, a powerful symbol during his presidency. Calling upon the "symbolic presidency" allows presidents, through rhetoric and setting, to borrow positive elements of the political past and Americans' shared experience, projecting a powerful and positive image of the president (Hinckley 1990). Effective pseudo-events make effective use of political symbols. They draw upon political symbols to add legitimacy to the president's message and lend to a positive construction of how the public views the reality surrounding the event (Edelman 1988). Powerful symbols, such as September 11th or the "war on terror," may evoke positive reflections upon the Bush White House, which could then be reflected in the news coverage.

### **The National Political and Policy Context**

Pseudo-events are part of a larger political and policy context, and as a result, political circumstance might drive coverage of the event more than the specific staged elements of the event. Modern media are inherently negative, especially in their coverage of the presidency (Groeling and Kernell 1998; Patterson 1996). If the president is suffering in the polls or a particular policy is unpopular, then reporters are perfectly capable of stressing these points in their coverage of the president's event, no matter its staged qualities. National news reporters are trained to place these events into the larger political context in framing their stories. Hence, the coverage of pseudo-events related to unpopular policies or while the president is unpopular is likely to be less positive than when the president or his policy is popular.

Pseudo-events differ in terms of their policy content. Some staged events emphasize valence issues (e.g., anti-crime or anti-terrorism); whereas, others tackle contested policy issues (e.g., the Iraq War during 2006). Presidents are expected to tackle contested policy issues, and many of their pseudo-events are designed to address them. Pseudo-events dealing with contested policies are likely to draw adversarial responses from partisan opponents, which will temper the coverage as media tend to "index" political coverage based on the contested views of political elites (Bennett 1990; Halin 1984).

Given the significance of the political and policy context, the pseudo-events we examine below present a difficult test for the success of this pervasive public relations strategy. Simply put, during 2006 and early 2007 (the period of our study), President Bush was very unpopular. In the Gallup polls, his approval rating ranged from 32 to 44 percent. The events we examine

deal primarily with the war in Iraq and his approval ratings specific to his handling of the Iraq war are even more dismal, ranging from 21 to 36 percent.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Democrats were directly confronting the President on his war policies and won control of both chambers of the Congress in the 2006 midterm elections, for the first time in twelve years.

Our analysis, thus, provides an opportunity to compare coverage of unpopular President Bush to previous studies that have focused on successful pseudo-events staged by President Bush under more favorable circumstances. For example, Barrett and Peake (2007) analyze local news coverage of Bush's 2001 domestic trips and find the President's local pseudo-events generated generally positive local newspaper coverage. Bush's approval ratings were above 50 percent during 2001, and the positivity of the coverage increased following the cataclysmic events of September 11, 2001, which vaulted Bush's approval levels to stratospheric levels. Bennett (2005, 47-51) analyzes the coverage of Bush's carrier landing speech on May 1, 2003 (while at 73% approval), where he prematurely announced victory in Iraq, and concludes that pseudo-events are effective in shaping news coverage. Bennett argues that reporters, even the seasoned ones in the White House press corps, "write stories around blatantly manufactured images, even when they recognize the manipulation that is happening in front of them." After all, he concludes, the journalists hold "that they have nothing else to report other than what newsmakers offer them" (2005, 51). When the president is unpopular, however, reporters are likely to stress the bad news over the good and frame their stories of pseudo-events differently.

### **The Local Political and Media Context**

Evidence exists for variation in the slant of political coverage among local media outlets. For instance, some research on political coverage in local media supports the relationship between editorial endorsements of candidates and campaign coverage (Barrett and Barrington 2005; Kahn and Kenney 2002; Page 1996). When combined with market forces represented by the newspaper's potential readership, a dominant political atmosphere may result, which could impact how a newspaper portrays a presidential event (Barrett and Peake 2007, 8). A newspaper's political atmosphere is typically represented by its campaign endorsement behavior, as endorsements are largely a product of interactions between owners, publishers, and editorial staff. Local newspapers may also filter a pseudo event for their readers in a way that benefits the bottom line. In other words, local newspapers may cater to their readers in their portrayal of the President's pseudo-events, providing more favorable coverage to audiences supportive of the President and less favorable to unsupportive audiences. Newspapers are

businesses, and therefore affected by market forces (Bogart 1989; Hamilton 2004; Kaniss 1991; Underwood 1993). As a result, it is plausible that the local political context, as represented by support for President Bush, may impact how newspapers cover the president's events (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006).

### **Collecting and Coding Newspaper Coverage**

To examine newspaper coverage of presidential pseudo-events, we examine front-page coverage in 96 newspapers on the day after each of seven events, which all occurred during the period of June 2006 through January 2007.<sup>3</sup> The events include one spontaneous event (the death of the terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq), three nationally-televised prime-time addresses (Bush's 2007 State of the Union Address, Bush's speech announcing the "surge" of U.S. forces in Iraq in January 2007, and Bush's speech on the fifth anniversary of September 11, 2001), two solo press conferences (on Iraq and North Korea, both in October, 2006), and Bush's surprise visit to Baghdad in June, 2006. We include a major spontaneous event in order to compare its coverage to the other pseudo-events. The events and the associated dates of coverage are listed in the Appendix. Newspapers are used because they influence the agenda of local television more so than vice versa and because of their availability (Mondak 1995; Shaw and Sparrow 1999).

### **Newspaper Selection**

Rather than focus on the prestige press or national newspapers, we sought to get a more complete picture of coverage generated by presidential pseudo-events using a broad set of major daily newspapers. We analyze the front-page coverage for 96 major daily newspapers. The newspapers included in the study were selected based on several factors. First, since an image of the front-page was necessary for valid analysis of the front-page news, we rely upon *Newseum* ([www.newseum.org](http://www.newseum.org)).<sup>4</sup> Next, we turned to circulation reports. Working from the *Newseum* sample of newspapers, we used a list of the top 100 circulating newspapers in the United States, as reported by the Audit Bureau of Circulations. We cross-referenced the top 100 list with the *Newseum* newspapers, to formulate our set of major daily newspapers. We further supplement this list with the top-200 list published by the Audit Bureau of Circulations, including newspapers from smaller states that do not have newspapers in the top 100 (e.g., the Dakotas).<sup>5</sup> Newspapers that met the above criteria but did not include a single front-page story on the pseudo-events were dropped from the analysis altogether.

Finally, we dropped from the sample newspapers that only sporadically appeared on *Newseum*, giving us a final sample of 96 newspapers. A list of newspapers included in the analysis is provided in the Appendix. We analyze only front-page articles because these articles are those most likely read by consumers (Bogart 1989) and for practical reasons involving the data-coding effort.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the newspapers relied upon wire reports from the Associated Press, newspaper chains, or the prestige press newspapers; whereas, only a few of the newspapers in the sample regularly write their own stories about the president. This could potentially cause a problem in the forgoing analysis because so much of the newspaper content is dictated by wire reports. However, the local papers exercise choice in which wire services they use and whether or not to even include an article on the president on the front page on a given day. Moreover, each newspaper is free to rewrite the wire report and the analysis clearly shows that local newspapers commonly rewrite at least the headline and lead paragraph of the wire reports they use. In fact, newspapers using the same wire report would commonly write very different headlines and lead paragraphs, changing the way the news story was framed for readers.<sup>7</sup>

In order to assess whether or not an article had to do with the president, we include only articles where the President, the White House or someone in the White House is the focus of two or more paragraphs on the front-page portion of the story. For example, news stories regarding the death of al-Zarqawi which detailed the military goings on, but not the President's reaction, were not coded in our analysis. The average number of articles on the President in the 96 newspapers examined the day after each of the pseudo-events was 0.86, with significant variation around the mean, from a low of 0.42 for the *Manchester Union-Leader* to a high of 1.86 for the *Washington Post*.<sup>8</sup>

### **Coding Headlines and Leads**

The headlines and lead paragraphs of the front-page articles were coded for tone, to reflect the general slant of the front-page coverage provided in each newspaper for each event. Headlines and lead paragraphs can reflect trends in how stories are covered; however, they may differ from the full text in terms of tone and source emphasis (Althaus, Edy, and Phalen 2001). The headlines (including the subheadings) provide emphasis (or a dominant frame) to the story and are a product of local editorial decisions.<sup>9</sup> If the headline or lead paragraph reflects positively on the President or adopts the White House framing of an event, it was coded positive (and scored a "2"). If the headline or lead paragraph reflects negatively on the President or

frames the story in a way detrimental to the White House view, it was coded negative (and scored a “0”). Finally, if the headline or lead reports a fact or opinion in such a way that is neither negative nor positive toward the White House, it was coded as neutral (and scored a “1”). When headlines and leads included both negative and positive statements, we code slant as the balance between negative and positive. Thus, a headline that includes two positive statements and one negative statement would receive a positive code. Coding headlines and leads correctly weights the measure of tone to the most commonly read part of a story and more accurately accounts for the dominant frame in the story.<sup>10</sup> In order to quantify and aggregate tone measures for the coverage of each event, we summed the headline (including deck-heads) and lead scores for all of the front-page articles, then divided by the number of articles appearing in the set of newspapers, yielding a score ranging from zero (least positive) to two (most positive) for the headlines and leads.

### **Comparing Coverage of Presidential Events**

We expect that presidential pseudo-events are likely to generate positive coverage when they are tightly controlled and make use of powerful symbols. In contrast, we expect partially-controlled events and events associated with contested policies to generate less favorable coverage. We examine seven events. For point of comparison, we include a spontaneous (and therefore, not manufactured) event. The other six events reflect the range of presidential pseudo-events designed to generate extensive, national coverage.<sup>11</sup> Statistics measuring the amount of coverage generated and the tone of headlines and lead paragraphs for each event are presented in Table 1. We indicate with an asterisk those average tone scores where the difference in means test indicates a statistically significant difference from the al-Zarqawi coverage.

The only spontaneous event included in the analysis, terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s death, generated the least amount of Bush-associated front-page coverage, as only 38 percent of the newspapers in the sample placed an article regarding President Bush on the front page the day following the event. This suggests that presidents may have difficulty in controlling the coverage of truly spontaneous events, as front-page stories largely focused on the military implications of the terrorist’s slaying. Much of the Bush-related coverage of the event was positive (as was the military-related coverage), however, reflecting the fact that the event was a positive development in a largely unpopular war. The average tone score (combining headlines and leads) for the Bush-associated coverage of al-Zarqawi’s death is 2.28, the third highest among the seven events.



**Table 1. Comparing Front-Page Coverage Given to Individual Presidential Events**

Event (date of coverage)	Total Articles	Average <sup>b</sup> Articles/ Newspaper	Percent Newspapers Covered	Average Headline Code (Std. Dev.)	Average Lead Code (Std. Dev.)	Average Tonal Code (Std. Dev.)
al-Zarqawi Death <sup>a</sup> (6/9/06, N=90)	37	0.41	38%	1.17 (0.76)	1.10 (0.82)	2.28 (1.45)
Baghdad Visit (6/14/06, N=90)	105	1.17	76%	1.22 (0.47)	1.14 (0.47)	2.36 (0.84)
9/11 Anniversary Speech* (9/12/06, N=93)	61	0.66	63%	1.65* (0.48)	1.68* (0.60)	3.33* (0.97)
N. Korea Press Conf. (10/12/06, N=88)	37	0.42	42%	1.02 (0.67)	0.68* (0.61)	1.70 (1.36)
Iraq Press Conf. (10/26/06, N=89)	53	0.61	60%	0.81* (0.65)	0.63* (0.62)	1.44* (1.21)
Iraq "Surge" Speech (1/11/07, N=93)	136	1.46	100%	0.35* (0.48)	0.35* (0.43)	0.69* (0.75)
State of the Union (1/24/07, N=88)	119	1.35	98%	0.77* (0.71)	0.43* (0.67)	1.19* (1.20)

Note: Each headline and lead was coded as negative (0), neutral (1), or positive (2); therefore, a score higher than 1.0 indicates positive coverage. The total tone score is the sum of the headline and lead scores, so scores higher than 2.0 indicate positive coverage.  
\*Indicates that the difference in means test between the tone of articles (their headlines, leads, and combined tone score) on the event are statistically significant (F-test at p<.05) than the average tone scores for the comparison group, articles on the al-Zarqawi slaying.  
<sup>a</sup>Articles which did not include the White House as part of the story or did not cover the President's speech (e.g., instead focusing on the military strike which killed al-Zarqawi or local events on the 9/11 anniversary) were excluded from the analysis.  
<sup>b</sup>Averages are based on the total number of newspapers included on *Newseum* for the date of coverage.

### **The Fully-Controlled Pseudo-Events**

The two events which reflect the greatest amount of staging, symbolism, and control on the part of the White House, yet resemble political reality the least having the greatest pseudo qualities, are the Baghdad trip in June, 2006, and Bush's speech on the fifth anniversary of September 11, 2001. Our findings indicate that these two events generated the most positive coverage. The two events provided the White House with the greatest opportunity to shape coverage due to their clearly staged and symbolic properties.

In addressing the nation on the fifth anniversary of 9/11, Bush worked to remind Americans of the devastating terrorist attacks and asked for continued support in his prosecution of the "global war on terror," to include the war in Iraq.<sup>12</sup> The speech was delivered in the evening, following a national day of remembrance and local commemorating events throughout the nation. The President clearly benefited from the connection of his speech to such a traumatic and symbolic American event. The coverage of the speech was overwhelmingly positive, averaging 3.33 on the four-point tone scale, nearly a full point higher than any other event covered in the analysis.<sup>13</sup> It is the only pseudo-event in the analysis that generated more positive coverage than the very positive (and real) event, that of the slaying of al-Zarqawi. Despite the positive coverage of the 9/11 address, the President's speech was largely overshadowed in the newspapers by other events commemorating the fifth anniversary of 9/11. For instance, all of the newspapers in our sample included a front-page story on the event's anniversary, but only 63 percent of the newspapers also included a front-page story on Bush's speech. Even so, where the President did receive coverage, the coverage was largely uncritical.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the most dramatic event we examine is the President's surprise visit to Baghdad on June 13th where Bush visited with the Iraqi Prime Minister and American troops. The event fits the definition of a fully-controlled pseudo-event whereby the President has substantial influence over how the event is covered. The trip was shrouded in secrecy, was reminiscent of Bush's successful Thanksgiving trip to Baghdad in 2003, and was highly dramatic. The use of symbols was also evident during the President's trip, as coverage made frequent reference to Air Force One, the danger on the ground, the surprise at which the trip was pulled off, and presented the president in photos with the Iraqi Prime Minister and with American troops appearing resolute and presidential. The President met with the newly elected Prime Minister of Iraq to personally reassure Iraqi leadership of Bush's resolve in the fight against the Iraqi insurgency. That was the White House perspective, at least, and it was transmitted successfully through the press, generating positive coverage related to Bush on the heels of other

positive events, including al-Zarqawi's death. The coverage averaged 2.36 on the four-point tone scale. The press was not completely overwhelmed by Bush's staged event, however. Several newspapers printed front-page stories focusing on the contrived nature of the President's trip; whereas, others stressed the negatives surrounding the war. Even so, the coverage was fairly uncritical, while the photographs of the president were indeed positive. Given the state of affairs in Iraq at the time and the President's dismal popularity,<sup>15</sup> the President's visit must be considered a public relations success, albeit limited when compared to other such staged events at earlier stages of the war. However, the coverage was no more positive, statistically speaking, than the coverage of the al-Zarqawi death, suggesting that low approval ratings for the president and the war may have tempered the coverage of the President's pseudo-event.

### **Partially-Controlled Events**

The two solo press conferences, pseudo-events created by the White House which fit the classification of partially-controlled events, generated less coverage than the others. The coverage, on balance, was negative. Only 42 percent of the newspapers in the sample placed a front-page article on the day following Bush's October 11th press conference which was in response to North Korea detonating a nuclear test. Bush's press conference was somewhat effective in blunting the negative slant of the North Korean event, as headlines related to the press conference were largely neutral (averaging 1.02 out of two). Still, it is difficult for a president, let alone an unpopular one at the time of the press conference, to completely blunt the negativity surrounding an event that is clearly a setback for U.S. foreign policy. That Bush's success in doing so was limited is suggested by the lower score in the coding of the lead paragraphs, which averaged only 0.68 out of 2.0. Bush was unable to control the direction of the press conference, perhaps an indication of why the coverage was fairly negative. For example, in the first two paragraphs of his opening statement, the President stressed very positive numbers on the budget and the economy, yet not a single reporter asked the president a question on the economy, instead focusing their questions on North Korea, Iraq, and the upcoming midterm congressional elections.<sup>16</sup> No newspaper mentioned the economic numbers cited by Bush in their front-page articles.

Two weeks later, Bush gave another press conference on the Iraq war. His opening statements focused on the progress of the war and all but a few of the questions asked at the press conference were related to the war.<sup>17</sup> It generated significantly more coverage than did the previous press conference, with 60 percent of the newspapers placing a story on the front page.

However, the coverage was generally negative, averaging 1.44 (out of 4.0) on the tone scale. Again, the negative coverage is unsurprising given the downturn in events on the ground in Iraq (October 2006 was the deadliest month for American forces in 2006) and the president's 30 percent approval rating in his handling of the war (CBS Poll).<sup>18</sup>

### **The Nationally-Televised Address**

The press conferences we analyze address significant, contested policies, which partly explain the relative negativity of the news coverage. While press conferences are fairly common events, presidents sometimes use nationally televised addresses in order to generate public support for their policies. In “going public” on national television, presidents are offered an opportunity to address the American people directly and ask the public for their support as they seek to change public policy (Kernell 1997). Some research suggests national addresses are significant in generating public support for the president (Ragsdale 1984). They make for difficult pseudo-events, however, because presidents typically address contested policy issues. This is especially problematic when the president's approval ratings are lagging, as was the case for Bush in January, 2006.

While the 9/11 address is a televised address, two other addresses in the data set are more indicative of the president making direct appeals to the public for policy support. They include Bush's prime-time nationally-televised speech on January 10th announcing his “surge” strategy for the Iraq war and his State of the Union address on the 24th, in which he spent roughly half of the speech addressing the Iraq war. Both addresses were widely covered by the newspapers. The addresses were especially newsworthy for two reasons—they included the drama of a struggling President Bush faced off against a Congress controlled by the opposite party for the first time, and, both included significant policy announcements. Moreover, circumstances for the President could not have been worse. His approval ratings were stuck in the middle 30s, and approval for his handling of the war was mired in the low to mid 20s.

Both addresses were widely covered, as all of the newspapers in our sample covered the Iraq “surge” speech and all but two papers covered the State of the Union on the front page. However, the coverage was overwhelmingly negative, especially the coverage on the Iraq “surge” speech. It generated an average tone score of 0.69 (out of 4). The State of the Union averaged 1.19. Put into context, both addresses and the resulting coverage represent a major setback for President Bush in his efforts to persuade the American public on his Iraq war policies.<sup>19</sup>

In sum, our comparison of the seven events suggests that the pseudo-event strategy can be effective in generating positive coverage, even for an unpopular president. However, the two pseudo-events that generated positive coverage (the Baghdad trip and the 9/11 anniversary speech) were effectively staged events. The trip to Baghdad, being a surprise, placed the media in a reactive mode, and it appears they more commonly accepted the White House framing of the event. The 9/11 anniversary speech served to remind Americans of Bush's leadership post-9/11 and, more generally, about what the administration refers to as the global war on terror. Both pseudo-events relied upon symbols that reflected positively on the president.

The four pseudo-events that had clear policy implications (the two press conferences, the Iraq "surge" speech, and the State of the Union) reflect the more typical presidential event and our results speak to the problematic nature of using these events to generate positive coverage. The media present these more typical pseudo-events using frames that are likely to generate audience interest: conflict and negativity.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, these events exhibit less staged qualities and allow for the give and take of partisan politics to play out—either through responses by partisan opponents or through adversarial questions from the press. Next, we explore in greater detail the coverage of each of these addresses by analyzing specifically the frames that were generated by the coverage.

### **Framing Pseudo-Events**

According to Robert Entman, "Framing entails selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman 2003, 417). When the White House stages a pseudo-event they aim to control the dominant frame in the media. Work by Iyengar and Kinder (1987) demonstrates the political significance of framing—how an issue is framed in the news influences public beliefs regarding the causes of a problem and opinions related to likely policy solutions. The balance of alternative frames is likely to drive the slant of coverage. We identified five major frames for the three most heavily covered pseudo-events (Table 2): Bush's surprise trip to Baghdad, his speech on the Iraq troop surge, and the 2007 State of the Union address.<sup>21</sup>

For each event there was a White House frame, basically the message the pseudo-event was planned to disseminate. For both speeches, the President was more successful at getting his preferred frame into headlines than into leads (25% and 33% v. 15% and 5%). For the State of the Union address, the White House frame was the frame least adopted in leads, seen in only 5 percent of papers. Bush was only slightly more successful in the Iraqi

**Table 2. Comparing the Framing of Front-Page Coverage Given to Individual Presidential Events**

Event (date of coverage)	Number of Headlines (%)	Number of Lead Frames (%)
Baghdad Visit (6/14/06, N=82)*		
White House Frame (support PM)	38 (46%)	24 (29%)
Surprise Frame	25 (30%)	17 (21%)
Negative Frame	7 (9%)	17 (21%)
Military / Strategic Frame	11 (13%)	14 (17%)
Positive Developments Frame	11 (13%)	14 (17%)
Iraq "Surge" Speech (1/11/07, N=136)		
White House / Victory Frame	34 (25%)	21 (15%)
Partisan Conflict Frame	37 (27%)	24 (18%)
Negative / Little Support Frame	71 (52%)	71 (52%)
Military / Strategic Frame	36 (26%)	36 (26%)
Local Frame	21 (15%)	20 (15%)
State of the Union (1/24/07, N=113)*		
White House / Victory Frame	37 (33%)	6 (5%)
Partisan Conflict Frame	47 (42%)	64 (57%)
Negative / Little Support Frame	28 (25%)	48 (42%)
Military / Policy Frame	33 (29%)	26 (23%)
Local Frame	9 (8%)	11 (10%)

Note: Column percentages sum to over 100% because several headlines/leads included multiple frames.

\*The framing analysis excludes articles unrelated to the event, including 23 articles on 6/14/06 (21 dealt with Karl Rove not being indicted as a result of the Scooter Libby investigation), and six articles on 1/24/07, which dealt with the Scooter Libby investigation.

surge speech where the White House frame and the local frame tied for last (15%). A second frame is the conflict or opposition frame. It was the most popular frame used in coverage of the State of the Union address headlines and leads (42% and 57%). This frame occurred when the article or headline led with the Democrat's opposing view. This frame could be negative or neutral in nature, as the Democratic view could be followed up by the President's or his fellow Republicans, thus making the frame one of conflict, but balanced. For the troop surge speech, the frame is quite similar; usually with Democrats criticizing President Bush for escalating a war they say was a mistake.

Each event could be framed in a purely negative manner, without a focus on partisan conflict, which is our third frame. This frame is identified most notably with loaded, emotional phrases or emphasis on the lack of popular support for either Bush or his policies. For instance, a phrase such as

“President Bush, politically weakened and increasingly isolated” (Terence Hunt, AP January 24, 2006) frames the lead negatively. Our data indicate that the negative frame clearly dominated front-page coverage on the day after Bush’s Iraq “surge” speech. The negative frame appeared in 52 percent of both headlines and leads for the Iraqi surge speech, almost twice as often as the next most common frame.

A fourth frame emphasizes the pure policy element of the event, which focuses on military policy or new domestic policy initiatives, in the case of the State of the Union. Between 23 percent and 29 percent of the headlines and leads for each speech emphasized policy content. Given the significant policy content of each of Bush’s speeches, it is interesting that so little of the coverage emphasized it; instead, focusing on conflict and negativity. This is consistent with conventional understanding regarding the lack of policy content in news coverage of politics (Bennett 2005; Patterson 1996). Hence, a casual reader of the newspaper is likely to come away with an understanding that the speech was highly conflictual or that the President did not have public or congressional support, but with little understanding of the speech’s policy content.

The final and least prevalent frame in each speech is the local frame. A local journalist takes the national event and localizes it for the readers, emphasizing how it may affect the specific community. For the Iraqi surge speech, the local frame appeared in 15 percent of the lead paragraphs, the exact same percentage of leads that fit the White House frame. For the State of the Union, more papers actually led with paragraphs using the local frame than the White House frame (10% v. 5%). The White House frame was not well adopted by the media in their news leads. However, headlines show a different trend. For the State of the Union, The White House frame actually appeared in 33 percent of the headlines, second only to the partisan/conflict frame (42%).

The nature of Bush’s surprise trip to Baghdad was quite different than the other pseudo-events, as we discuss above. It was still staged to attract attention to a military and policy issue. However, the surprise event gave the news media little time to form alternate frames, hence a reason why this is the event in which the administration’s message was most salient and the positive frames were quite ubiquitous in print media. Once again, this event had a White House frame and a military frame. The difference being, the White House frame emphasized President Bush showing support for Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the troops, while the military frame emphasized the large-scale security sweep that American and Iraqi forces launched following the surprise visit. The negative frame for this story included leads with terms like “failing democracy” to describe Iraq or portrayed President Bush as “passing the buck” to the prime minister. Despite

the positive coverage given the Baghdad visit, the negative frame still appeared in 21 percent of leads.

A common frame in the coverage of the Baghdad visit, not seen in the other two pseudo-events, is the surprise frame. These headlines and leads captured one of the journalistic criteria for newsworthiness, and novelty (Graber 2006). The media was swept away by the actual pseudo-event and the secrecy and intrigue surrounding the Baghdad trip, so much so that they often ignored the obvious contrived nature of the trip, putting a positive spin on the surprise factor. This frame was the second most common frame in headlines and leads (30% and 21%), suggesting that the media may have believed that the pseudo-event was more interesting than the President's message or the media had little time to evaluate and research the story, so they simply printed the known facts. The positive frame is the fifth frame for this event. Several articles mentioned the formation of the Iraqi government, the slaying of al-Zarqawi and that presidential advisor Karl Rove would not be charged in a CIA leak case. They tied these events together with the Baghdad visit to speculate on an upswing for the administration. Coupling the positive frame with the White House frame, 59 percent of headline frames and 46 percent of lead frames slanted towards the administration (not including the surprise frame). Indeed, the President's trip to Baghdad contributed to positive coverage on the next day despite (or perhaps due to) its contrived nature.

### **Comparing the Newspapers' Coverage**

While our research of President Bush's pseudo-events suggest their limited effect on generating positive media coverage, it is quite possible that the coverage varies from one newspaper to the next. We hypothesize above that the local political and media contexts, both in terms of the newspaper's endorsement behavior and its audience's political leanings, slant coverage of national politics. In Table 3, we aggregate the coverage of the seven events and compare the average tone measures across the 96 newspapers.

Our comparisons lend support to the local context hypothesis. As shown in Table 3, newspapers that endorsed President Bush's reelection in 2004 averaged higher on our tone measures than newspapers that did not endorse Bush (these papers either endorsed his opponent, Senator Kerry, or endorsed no one) and these differences are statistically significant for headline tone.<sup>22</sup> When Bush endorsing papers are compared to only those papers that endorsed Senator Kerry, similar differences emerge. When we compare newspapers serving states that voted for Bush (the so-called Red States) to newspapers serving states that voted for Kerry (the so-called Blue States), we find a similar pattern of slant in the headlines and leads. Both headlines



**Table 3. Aggregate Comparisons for Tone, Comparisons by Newspaper**

Comparison Variable	Average Headline Code (F-test)	Average Lead Code (F-test)	Average Total Tone (F-test)
Endorsed Bush in 2004 (N=35)	0.92	0.73	1.66
Did not Endorse Bush <sup>a</sup> (N=61)	0.76 (5.96)**	0.62 (2.62)	1.38 (5.13)**
Endorsed Bush in 2004 (N=35)	0.92	0.73	1.66
Endorsed Kerry <sup>a</sup> (N=51)	0.78 (4.23)**	0.66 (1.13)	1.43 (3.08)*
Red State Paper <sup>b</sup> (N=52)	0.90	0.73	1.63
Blue State Paper (N=42)	0.72 (7.36)**	0.59 (4.42)**	1.30 (7.25)**
Prestige/National Paper <sup>c</sup> (N=6)	0.86	0.57	1.43
Local/Regional Paper (N=90)	0.81 (0.10)	0.67 (0.55)	1.48 (0.05)

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05

<sup>a</sup>Two categories of comparison are used to compare to Bush endorsing newspapers, those newspapers that did not endorse Bush (including Kerry endorsing papers and papers that endorsed no candidate) and those papers that endorsed Senator Kerry's election in 2004.

<sup>b</sup>Red states are states that went for Bush, the Republican, in 2004. Blue states went for Senator Kerry. The *USA Today* and *Wall Street Journal* were dropped because they are national papers.

<sup>c</sup>The six prestige/national newspapers include the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *LA Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*.

and leads in Red State newspapers were significantly more positive, on average, than for Blue State newspapers.<sup>23</sup> The national/prestige press is often cited as covering presidents more negatively than the local press (e.g., Barrett and Peake 2007; Cohen and Powell 2005; Graber 2006; Kumar 2007). However, the coverage of the seven events we examine does not indicate any significant differences, in terms of tone, between the local/regional newspapers in the sample and several newspapers we identify as prestige/national newspapers.

### Conclusion

The use of pseudo-events by modern presidents has become part and parcel of the public presidency. Designed to generate broad coverage of the White House, it has generally been presumed that these events and the media coverage they produce tend to present the president in a favorable light. Our analysis of President Bush, admittedly during a down period of his administration, suggests that pseudo-events are limited by the political context in

creating positive newspaper coverage. Of the six pseudo-events we examined, two had pronounced effects in generating positive news stories: the surprise trip to Baghdad and the 9/11 anniversary speech. Both of these events represent classic pseudo-events as described by Boorstin (1987) and borrow upon potent symbols in order to convey a positive image of the president (Hinckley 1990). Our results suggest, however, that pseudo-events may, at times, fall flat as the media do not always adopt the White House frame and competing frames often structure how the events are portrayed in newspapers. This seems especially the case for pseudo-events that deal directly with contested policies and place the president in a confrontation with the other party or with reporters directly.

A serious limitation of our research is that we focus entirely on one president during a period when he is unpopular. Therefore, our analysis is primarily exploratory rather than explanatory. It is somewhat surprising that two of the pseudo-events we examine generated such positive coverage, given Bush's poor situation. The findings lend support to the notion that the more pseudo (or manufactured) the event is, the more likely coverage will reflect positively upon the president. Moreover, we cannot say whether these pseudo-events contributed to more (or less) positive coverage, generally, as we do not examine trends in coverage of President Bush before and after each of the events. Future analysis of presidential pseudo-events should examine a broader set of events. Our research design, which employs *Newseum* and front-page coverage, significantly hampers the external validity of our findings, as we are unable to broaden our comparisons in a systematic fashion. Our comparisons across newspapers, however, lends support to arguments that newspapers slant their coverage of national politics, both to reflect the paper's political leanings and in terms of the prevalent political leanings within the newspaper's market.

We expect, given their recent prevalence and apparent utility, that modern presidents will continue their use of pseudo-events in their pursuit of public support, similar to President Bush's recent use of local "town meetings" in his efforts to reform social security (Edwards 2007; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2007). The importance of local and national political circumstances in shaping newspaper coverage, however, suggests that pseudo-events are likely to have their most limited effects on media coverage when the president's need for positive coverage is at its greatest. In comparing the results presented here with the results of previous research, which tends to focus on successful pseudo-events (Bennett 2005) or local presidential events when Bush was more popular (Barrett and Peake 2007), our exploratory analysis suggests two important considerations. First, the national political context matters. Coverage of a popular president's pseudo-events is likely to be more positive and competing frames will be less common. When

the president’s popularity sours, however, it appears that the coverage of their pseudo-events may also turn more negative. Second, variations in coverage exist across local media outlets which tend to correlate with local political contexts. The degree to which effective staging and the use of symbols can overcome these apparent realities remains uncertain. However, the 9/11 and Baghdad trip cases examined above suggest that presidential theatrics can impact the tone of the coverage, even for an unpopular president.

**APPENDIX**

**Table 1**  
**Events and Associated Dates of Coverage Included in the Content Analysis**

Date of Coverage	The Event	No. of Bush Articles	Bush Approval Prior (Gallup)	Bush Approval Post (Gallup)
June 9, 2006*	Zarqawi, Al Qaeda leader, Slain by US Forces, Bush responds	37	36%	38%
June 14, 2006	Bush makes surprise visit to Baghdad	105	38%	37%
Sept 12, 2006	Bush addresses nation on 9/11 fifth anniversary	61	39%	44%
Oct 12, 2006	Bush press conference on North Korea and economy	37	37%	37%
Oct 26, 2006	Bush press conference on progress in Iraq War	53	37%	38%
Jan 11, 2007	Bush addresses nation on “surge” of U.S. forces in Iraq	136	37%	34%
Jan 24, 2007	Bush addresses nation on the State of the Union	119	36%	32%

\*Most articles covering the death of Zarqawi focused on the actual slaying and military strike and not the President’s reaction. Therefore, these articles did not mention the President often enough in their front-page content and were excluded from the analysis. Those articles coded here were focused primarily on the President’s response to the event.

*Appendix continues . . .*

## Appendix (continued)

**Table 2**  
**Newspapers Included in the Content-Analysis**

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<i>Akron Beacon Journal</i>	<i>Memphis Commercial Appeal</i>
<i>Albany Times Union</i>	<i>Miami Herald</i>
<i>Albuquerque Journal</i>	<i>Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel</i>
<i>Allentown Morning Call</i>	<i>Minneapolis Star Tribune</i>
<i>Anchorage Daily News</i>	<i>Nashville Tennessean</i>
<i>Arizona Daily Star</i>	<i>New Orleans Times-Picayune</i>
<i>Arizona Republic</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
<i>Arkansas Democrat-Gazette</i>	<i>Newark Star-Ledger</i>
<i>Atlanta Journal-Constitution</i>	<i>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot</i>
<i>Austin American-Statesman</i>	<i>Oklahoma City Oklahoman</i>
<i>Baltimore Sun</i>	<i>Omaha World-Herald</i>
<i>Bergen County (NJ) Record</i>	<i>Orange County Register</i>
<i>Billings Gazette</i>	<i>Orlando Sentinel</i>
<i>Birmingham News</i>	<i>Palm Beach Post</i>
<i>Boston Globe</i>	<i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>
<i>Buffalo News</i>	<i>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</i>
<i>Burlington Free Press</i>	<i>Pittsburgh Tribune-Review</i>
<i>Casper Star-Tribune</i>	<i>Portland Oregonian</i>
<i>Charleston (WV) Gazette</i>	<i>Portland Press-Herald</i>
<i>Charlotte Observer</i>	<i>Providence Journal</i>
<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	<i>Raleigh News &amp; Observer</i>
<i>Cincinnati Enquirer</i>	<i>Riverside Press-Enterprise</i>
<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>	<i>Rochester Democrat &amp; Chronicle</i>
<i>Columbia (SC) State</i>	<i>Rocky Mountain News</i>
<i>Columbus Dispatch</i>	<i>S. Florida Sun-Sentinel</i>
<i>Dallas Morning News</i>	<i>Sacramento Bee</i>
<i>Dayton Daily News</i>	<i>Salt Lake City Tribune</i>
<i>Daytona News-Journal</i>	<i>San Antonio Express-News</i>
<i>Denver Post</i>	<i>San Diego Union-Tribune</i>
<i>Des Moines Register</i>	<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>
<i>Detroit Free Press</i>	<i>San Jose Mercury News</i>
<i>Detroit News</i>	<i>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</i>
<i>Fargo Forum</i>	<i>Seattle Times</i>
<i>Fort Worth Star-Telegram</i>	<i>Sioux Falls Argus Leader</i>
<i>Fresno Bee</i>	<i>Spokane Spokesman-Review</i>
<i>Harrisburg Patriot-News</i>	<i>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</i>
<i>Hartford Courant</i>	<i>St. Paul Pioneer Press</i>
<i>Honolulu Advertiser</i>	<i>St. Petersburg Times</i>
<i>Houston Chronicle</i>	<i>Syracuse Post-Standard</i>
<i>Indianapolis Star</i>	<i>Tacoma News Tribune</i>
<i>Jackson (MS) Clarion-Ledger</i>	<i>Tampa Tribune &amp; Times</i>
<i>Kansas City Star</i>	<i>Toledo Blade</i>
<i>Knoxville News-Sentinel</i>	<i>USA Today</i>
<i>LA Daily News</i>	<i>Wall St. Journal</i>
<i>LA Times</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>
<i>Las Vegas Review-Journal</i>	<i>Wichita Eagle</i>
<i>Louisville Courier-Journal</i>	<i>Wilmington News Journal</i>
<i>Manchester Union Leader</i>	

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Some pseudo-events, for example nationally-televised speeches, are experienced directly by large segments of the public. However, research has demonstrated that most of the public tunes out even these easily accessible presidential events (Baum and Kernell 1998; Welch 2000; Young and Perkins 2006), and thus many in the public rely upon subsequent media coverage.

<sup>2</sup>The survey question, from the CBS Poll, was: “Do you approve or disapprove of the Way George W. Bush is handling the situation in Iraq?”

<sup>3</sup>The time period was selected due to the timing of the study and the availability of electronic versions of each newspaper’s front-page. Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2006), it should be noted, examine only those stories appearing on the front pages of local newspapers related to visits by the President during his “Social Security Reform Tour,” which covered five months during 2005.

<sup>4</sup>*Newseum* makes available for one day a PDF file of each day’s front-pages for about 600 daily newspapers across the world, most located in the United States. *Lexis/Nexis* and *News Bank* are other sources for newspaper coverage; however, the databases vary on whether or not they include wire stories appearing in local newspapers. For example, many newspapers exclude wire stories from their archives on *Lexis/Nexis*. Since most of the papers in the sample use wire reports to report on the president, we cannot use *Lexis/Nexis* or *News Bank*. Therefore, our sample is limited to what is available on *Newseum* on the day following the event.

<sup>5</sup>We consulted the 2004 edition of *Editor & Publisher International Year Book* to determine top-circulating newspapers for states that did not have any on the top-200 list.

<sup>6</sup>Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2006) examine only a single front-page article for each newspaper in their analysis, totaling 44 articles, with dates and locations defined by Bush’s travel schedule. Barrett and Peake (2007) also limit their content-coding to front-page articles, but they address 61 separate editions of local newspapers and a sum total of 141 front-page articles. Both studies code the entire article (but not the headlines), whereas we only code the headline and lead paragraph of the 546 articles. Coding the entire article proved impractical for our purposes. First, since many newspapers publish the same wire reports, but alter headlines and lead paragraphs for their readership, coding the entire article would provide limited variation. Second, the headlines and lead paragraphs are always available on the image of the front-page, whereas paragraphs deeper into the article may appear on other pages and therefore would not be available on *Newseum*.

<sup>7</sup>For example, the October 12th headlines and lead paragraphs covering the President’s news conference on North Korea in the *Providence Journal* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* are both from the same AP wire report. The *Journal*’s headline was “Bush defends US Policy on North Korea; The President says a number of countries, including China, are beginning to unite against North Korea’s nuclear activities.” The *Star-Telegram*’s headline was simply “Bush: US Won’t Attack North Korea.” The first headline suggests international cooperation is building to pressure North Korea, a positive development and the primary frame of the President’s news conference. The second simply states a point Bush made during the press conference. The lead paragraphs also differ significantly. The *Journal*: “President Bush unapologetically defended his approach to North Korea’s weapon’s program yesterday, pledging he would not change course.” The *Star-Telegram* adds this to the end of that same sentence: “. . . despite contentions that the Stalinist regime’s apparent atomic test proved the failure of his nearly six years of effort to prevent one.” The *Providence Journal* discards the last phrase in the wire

report's lead focusing instead on the president's steadfastness. The *Star-Telegram*, however, by leaving the phrase in reminds readers of the failed Bush policy, framing the story negatively.

<sup>8</sup>These averages are based on the seven event-days in the sample, and not representative of typical daily coverage of the President. Of the 96 newspapers, 62 posted front-pages on *Newseum* on all seven days covering the events. 28 newspapers missed only one day of coverage, five missed two days of coverage, and one newspaper missed three days of coverage.

<sup>9</sup>The coders included the authors and a trained graduate assistant. The coverage for June 14 was used to check for inter-coder agreement (105 articles). Previous research has shown high reliability when coding for headline tone (Kahn and Kenney 2002). The headline tone scores were summed for each newspaper containing stories on the 14th, yielding an intra-class correlation coefficient of 0.86 and a *Cronbach's Alpha* of 0.92.

<sup>10</sup>Using the examples provided in note 7, the *Providence Journal's* headline and lead were both coded positive. The *Star-Telegram's* headline was coded as neutral and the lead was coded as negative. Kahn and Kenney (2002, 393) used a similar approach to coding headlines in their study.

<sup>11</sup>Local presidential events generate very limited national coverage, as they are designed to generate coverage in newspapers local to the event. Therefore, we do not include local pseudo-events as part of our analysis, yet remind readers that local events are an important element of the pseudo-event public relations strategy (Esbhaugh-Soha and Peake 2006), which generally lead to positive local coverage. However, the coverage tends to vary depending on local support for the President (Barrett and Peake 2007).

<sup>12</sup>The text of the President's address is provided on the White House web site at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060911-3.html>.

<sup>13</sup>Newspapers could very easily have emphasized the degree of conflict and Democratic furor over the President's televised address, and use of 9/11 to bolster support for the unpopular Iraq war, but most chose not to, as evidenced by the favorable coverage. Perhaps they were hesitant to emphasize conflict in their coverage commemorating such a traumatic national event.

<sup>14</sup>It should also be noted that Bush's approval ratings surged to 44%, from 39%, in the wake of the anniversary.

<sup>15</sup>Only 33 percent of respondents approved of Bush's handling of the Iraq war prior to the visit, according to the CBS Poll.

<sup>16</sup>The text of the press conference is provided on the White House web site at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/10/20061011-5.html>.

<sup>17</sup>The text of the press conference is provided on the White House web site at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/10/20061025.html>.

<sup>18</sup>Overall, when compared to all of the other pseudo-events in the data set, the mean tone scores for the two press conferences are not statistically different from the mean tone scores of articles covering the other events.

<sup>19</sup>The differences in mean for each of these events are statistically significant from the mean for the other six pseudo events in the data set ( $F=90.1$  for the Iraq surge speech;  $F=33.1$  for the State of the Union address, both at  $p<.01$ ).

<sup>20</sup>If all articles on pseudo-events are compared and coded 1 for addressing a policy-oriented event (one of the events listed here) and 0 if the event was primarily symbolic, and means are compared, the results are statistically significant. The average article for these four events received a total tone score of 1.04, whereas the two primarily symbolic pseudo-events (9/11 & Baghdad) averaged 2.73, a significant difference ( $F=286.1$ ).

<sup>21</sup>In order to code the dominant frames of each article, one author read through the articles on each of the events and inductively developed five separate frames for each of the three events. The headlines and leads were then coded for the different frame categories. Headlines and leads commonly emphasized multiple frames, and were included in multiple categories when this occurred. Similarities in the framing analysis are that each has a White House frame category, a category that clearly fits a negative frame and/or a policy-oriented frame. Given the differences across events, our comparisons across events are exploratory and meant to put flesh on our aggregate analysis of tone.

<sup>22</sup>Data on endorsements are available from George Washington University's *Democracy in Action* web site, and are located: <http://www.gwu.edu/~action/2004/cands/natendorse5.html>.

<sup>23</sup>A finer-tuned measure of an audience's political leanings is employed by Barrett and Peake (2007), using county-level measures of Bush's support (in the 2000 election) in the county or contiguous counties for the newspaper's location. We generated a similar variable for the 2004 election. The measure is positively correlated with headline tone (Pearson's  $r=0.25$ ,  $p=.013$ ) and the total tone measure (Pearson's  $r=.19$ ,  $p=.071$ ).

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