

Section #6

Public opinion and the media

Does public opinion matter in foreign policy?

Affirmative

- *Normative*: public should constrain presidents with bad policies
- *Positive*: Presidents may:
 - Anticipate future electoral costs
 - Anticipate policy costs imposed by domestic opposition
 - Worry about “muddying the waters” during a crisis

Negative

- *Normative*: presidents should ignore the public if doesn't further national interest
- *Positive*:
 - Ignorance: people know little about foreign policy
 - Instability: foreign policy issues sporadically salient

Addressing critiques



- Elite cues
- Core dispositions
- Miracle of aggregation



- Rational adjustment
- Measurement error



- Strategic rhetoric

**Where do foreign policy
views come from?**

(1) General attitudes reflecting values, ideology, and lived experiences

- Broad political attitudes: liberal-conservatism spectrum (Milner and Tingley)
- Foreign policy attitudes: cooperative internationalism and militant internationalism (Wittkopf)
- Ethnic/racial backgrounds (Mutz et al.)
- Cohort effects: unique historical context and major events (Thrall and Goepner)
- Values: conservation and universalism (Rathbun et al.)

2 applications

The Price of Peace: Motivated Reasoning and Costly Signaling in International Relations

Joshua D. Kertzer, Brian C. Rathbun, and
Nina Srinivasan Rathbun

- What is costly signaling?
- How do foreign policy attitudes (MI/CI) shape perception of costly signals?
- What psychological mechanisms are believed to be at work?

The Racialization of International Trade

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- What factors do material theories of trade emphasize as most influential in support for free trade?
- Through what mechanisms might race and ethnicity influence attitudes toward international trade?

(2) Views influenced by elites (via media)

Point: public doesn't know much so relies upon elite cues.

- *Mainstream effect*: elite consensus —> support for policy
 - Greater political awareness leads to convergence
- *Polarization effect*: disagreement among elites —> polarization along party lines
 - Greater political awareness leads to polarization

Elasticity of reality (Baum and Groeling)

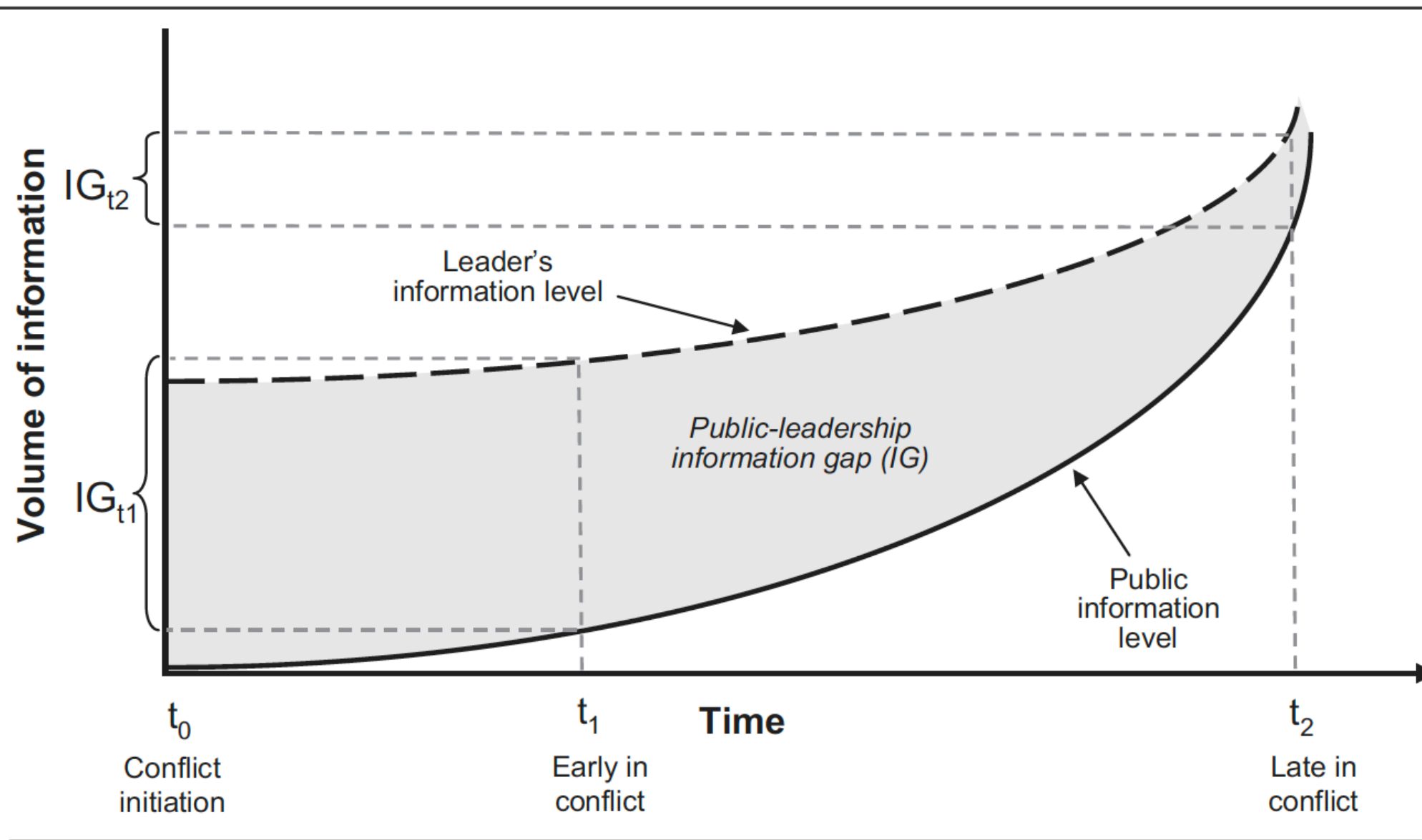


Figure 2

Information gap between leaders and the public, over time during a military conflict.

(3) Media effects

1. *Agenda-setting*: media selects what stories to cover and thus what may populate public consciousness
 - Incentives for new or unexpected information
2. *Priming*: what information is presented and thus rendered salient
 - Persen et al.: coverage of human rights abuses precipitated use of economic sanctions
3. *Framing*: how information is presented
 - Situational (systemic) and dispositional (individual) frames

Caution: selective exposure

Media effects exercise

- In groups of 2-4, choose a media outlet (NYT, WSJ, BuzzFeed News, Vox, etc.), navigate to its “front page,” and explore some of the articles.
- Discuss the following in your groups:
 1. *Agenda-setting*: What issues are covered?
 2. *Priming*: What considerations will readers use to evaluate political officials based upon the coverage?
 3. *Framing*: Can you classify situational or dispositional frames?