International Relations Scholars, U.S. Foreign Policy, and the Iraq War

On October 12, 2004, a group calling itself Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy issued an open letter to the U.S. public signed by 851 experts on international relations (IR) and national security policy. The letter described President George W. Bush’s policy in Iraq as “misguided” with “overwhelmingly negative” results for U.S. national security. The vast majority of leading scholars of foreign affairs in the United States signed the letter, including twenty past presidents of the American Political Science Association. IR scholars may agree on little else, but they agreed in the first decade of the 21st century that U.S. policy in Iraq had strayed dangerously off course.

The overwhelming consensus among IR scholars against an Iraq invasion was not reflected in the Bush administration’s Iraq policy. This exclusion stands in stark contrast to the role in the policy process often played by experts from other disciplines. When economists agreed in 2008 that a tax holiday on the nation’s federal gasoline tax would not accrue benefits to most citizens, the experts’ views were accorded serious public attention.¹ Similarly, the consensus among scientists who study the upper atmosphere has framed the debate about the need for an international agreement to reduce ozone depletion. Politicians often craft policy that diverges from scholarly opinion (as the Bush administration did on global climate change, for instance), but it is unusual and striking for political leaders, the press, and the public to ignore experts to the degree that they disregarded the academy—that is, IR scholars teaching at universities—on the Iraq war.

IR scholars largely agreed with one another in their opposition to the Iraq invasion and on the consequences of the invasion for U.S. national security, but their views diverged significantly
from those of the U.S. public. It may not be surprising that expert opinion differed from mass opinion, but two factors make this divergence worthy of investigation: the nearly universal consensus among scholars in American colleges and universities against a U.S. invasion of Iraq and the size of the gap between public and scholarly opinion on the issue. Americans rallied to the administration’s cause for invasion in 2003; academic experts did not.

To determine how IR scholars’ views on the invasion of Iraq differed from those of the public, we compare the answers of IR scholars at U.S. colleges and universities to those of the U.S. public on similar opinion survey questions. To this end, we analyze data from a series of surveys of IR scholars conducted by the Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) project. These data come from surveys of IR faculty in the United States conducted in 2004, 2006, and 2008. These surveys measure IR scholars’ opinions across a number of questions regarding U.S. foreign policy and international relations. We compare these data with information on public opinion compiled by the Roper Center. We also explore the public debate on the Iraq War by examining op-ed pieces in national newspapers from the time of the invasion.

Scholarly opinion differed markedly from that of the general public in the run-up to and throughout the war in Iraq. First, IR scholars opposed the war in Iraq from the beginning. Unlike public opinion, scholarly opinion showed no “rally ‘round the flag” effect, in which an international crisis or war generates significant, short run increases in public approval of the president (Mueller 1973). Second, scholarly opinion on the war remained remarkably stable over time. Important events such as the beginning of the Iraqi civil war in 2006 or the reduction of violence in Iraq following the “surge” in 2007 did not change scholarly opinion, even though these events had significant effects on public opinion. Third, differences in opinion between IR scholars and the general public can be explained in part by ideology, as conservative IR scholars
were more likely than liberal scholars to support the invasion, and liberal scholars far outnumber their conservative counterparts. Even when we control for ideology, however, we find that IR scholars overwhelmingly rejected central components of the Bush administration’s Iraq policy in far greater percentages than did the general public.

Together, these finding suggest the existence of an “epistemic community”—“a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area” (Haas 1992, 3). These epistemic communities comprise experts who share causal beliefs, problem-solving tools or skills, and preferred solutions (Adler and Haas 1992). Previous work has shown that such communities often form in scientific and technological areas, where members share common understandings of policy problems and solutions. Epistemic communities may influence policy by helping to identify a policy problem and providing policy makers with relevant knowledge, technical information, and policy options. The extraordinary level of consensus on the war in Iraq, and the fact that this consensus crosses ideological lines, suggests that IR scholars—faculty in the nation’s colleges and universities—form a community of knowledge-based experts, similar to those who have been influential in other policy areas.

Students of threat assessment may disagree about whether the U.S. war in Iraq represents a failure of the marketplace of ideas (Kaufmann 2004; Thrall 2007), but they likely would not quarrel over whether IR scholars were represented in that marketplace of ideas. On the issue of Iraq the public debate leading up to the war largely ignored the expert consensus among scholars. The op-ed pages of the nation’s largest newspapers tended to include a balance of views for and against intervention, or they leaned towards supporting an invasion, rather than reflecting the
consensus among IR experts that the war in Iraq would undermine U.S. national security. Published op-eds systematically over-represented pro-war arguments.

In what follows we seek to answer four related questions: What were IR scholars’ views on the U.S. war in Iraq? How did those views compare with those of the general public? What explains scholars’ views? And how well were those views reflected in the mainstream media? It is important to briefly highlight what we do not address in the paper. We do not explain why the epistemic community of IR scholars failed to sway U.S. policy. We show that academic views did not receive much media attention, but a complete explanation of the decision to go to war in Iraq is well outside the scope of the paper. Nor do we seek to explain why IR scholars were ignored in the policy process, although that too is an important research question that follows from findings in this study. The conclusions reported in this paper suggest that IR specialists are not accorded the same expert status as their counterparts in economics or environmental science. As IR scholars become increasingly interested in making their research more relevant to policy makers (Avey and Desch 2012; Jentlesen 2002; Walt 2005), they also will need to learn to make their voices heard in the policy process.

This paper proceeds in four parts. In the following section, we present public opinion data on the Iraq invasion. Next, we contrast these data with results from the TRIP survey of IR scholars. We argue that being a member of the academy had an epistemic effect on experts’ views of U.S. policy in Iraq. We reject two major alternative explanations for elite consensus and the divergence between elite and public opinion. In the third section, we examine opinion pieces published in leading U.S. newspapers to show that the consensus among IR scholars was not represented in the press and public debate. These publications reflected a balance of expert opinion on the war, rather than the expert consensus against it that actually existed, giving
disproportionate space to pro-war arguments. Newspaper editors provided very little space for IR scholars to make their arguments and when scholars were selected to write op-eds, their views were not representative of the consensus among their colleagues. In the conclusion we consider the implications of our findings for the IR discipline and for U.S. foreign and security policy.

Public Opinion on Iraq

Existing scholarship explores the impact of various factors—including the avoidance of casualties (Mueller 1973), beliefs about the rightness of the war and the likelihood of victory (Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2005), ethnocentrism (Kam and Kinder 2007), and partisanship (Jacobson 2007)—on public support for military action. While we examine basic trends in support for the Iraq War, we do not comment here on the reasons for that support. These public opinion trends show that, following an initial surge of significant support for the invasion, support for the U.S. war in Iraq declined over time. It tended, moreover, to be sensitive to events on the ground in Iraq, including the formation of a transitional government, the 2005 elections, increased sectarian violence in 2006, and the promise of elections in 2010.

To study public support for the Iraq War, we gathered polling data from the Roper Center, which compiles publicly available data on U.S. public opinion from a number of sources. All the surveys discussed here employ similar methodologies, including nationally representative samples. Sample sizes typically range from 600 to 2,000 respondents. We compare survey questions with similar wording to ensure that differences in marginal responses across surveys reflect shifts in opinion rather than differences in phrasing.
In the early stages of the U.S. war in Iraq, which began in March 2003, Americans overwhelmingly supported the invasion. A Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll conducted in March found that over 70 percent of Americans favored military intervention. Jacobson (2007) notes that after September 11, 2001 President Bush benefitted from a rally ‘round the flag effect to gain the largest approval rating of any U.S. president since the advent of polling. As Figure 1 shows, this effect also characterized early views on the war in Iraq.

Public support declined over time, as Figure 1 also demonstrates. This decline began almost immediately after the invasion and accelerated after key real or perceived setbacks in the U.S. prosecution of the war. It was not until late 2005 and early 2006, however, that fewer than half of respondents supported the war. Through the 2007 surge and 2008 presidential election, support dropped even further to below 40 percent. In short, U.S. opinion on the use of force in Iraq was overwhelmingly positive at first and declined significantly over time. This support also appeared sensitive to events, and over time rally effects diminished before disappearing altogether.

Figure 1 here

Public support for the Bush Administration’s arguments for invasion and, later, for continued occupation of Iraq reflects similar trends: decline over time punctuated by responses to specific events. Initially, members of the Bush Administration argued that a pre-emptive strike against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq would benefit U.S. security in the long run, both by preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by a rogue regime and by slowing state-
sponsored support for international terrorist networks. A March 2003 Gallup/CNN/USA Today poll measured the extent to which the public’s attitudes matched the Administration’s rationales for an invasion. Specifically, it asked whether each of the following “reasons for taking military action against Iraq . . . is—or is not—a goal worth going to war over:

A. Freeing the Iraqi people from the rule of Saddam Hussein.
B. Destroying Iraq’s capabilities of producing and using weapons of mass destruction.
C. Making the United States safer from terrorism.
D. Paving the way for a peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians.”

The results of the poll show that Americans believed that the need to destroy Saddam’s WMD capability and to make the United States safer from terrorism were the most important reasons for an invasion. Eighty-seven percent of respondents believed that each of these goals was worth fighting for. At the same time, 81 percent thought that freeing the Iraqi people from Saddam’s rule justified the war. In contrast, only 54 percent believed that facilitating an Israeli/Palestinian peace warranted war in Iraq.

The need to disarm Saddam was discredited after inspectors failed to find any WMD stockpiles, and the Bush Administration turned its focus instead to issues of U.S. security and terrorism. An interesting pattern emerged among responses to polling questions about whether the invasion of Iraq and/or removal of Saddam Hussein from power would enhance U.S. security by reducing the threat of terrorism: public support for the war increased rather than decreased over time. As Figure 2 illustrates, at the time of the invasion in 2003, the rally ‘round the flag effect in support for the war did not inhibit skepticism for one of its key justifications. At that time, only 9 percent of Americans believed that the removal of Saddam would reduce the
likelihood of a terrorist attack against the United States. The public became less skeptical, however, as the Iraq war progressed through the end of the Bush Administration without further terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. Similar to public opinion about the invasion, public perceptions of the security rationale were not stable over time.

Figure 2 here

After the invasion and overthrow of Saddam, the U.S. administration shifted its rhetoric to the importance of establishing and maintaining a stable and democratic Iraq. Again, as figure 3 illustrates, public views on this rationale changed over time, often in response to events and perceived progress on the ground in Iraq. The formation of a new Iraqi government after the fall of Saddam became the centerpiece of the Bush Administration’s policy (Bremer 2005). But the formation of the Transitional Government, the subsequent introduction of democratic elections in 2005, and increased sectarian fighting in 2006 did not provide the stability or political reconciliation that the U.S. Administration had forecast. Unlike support for the Administration’s argument about the link between Iraq and American security, which remained relatively flat until the 2005 Iraqi elections, public beliefs about the progress of efforts to achieve a democratic government in Iraq rose dramatically in 2005 before falling in 2006. Later, belief in Iraq’s transition to democracy rose when elections where scheduled for early 2010. Even with this uptick, however, by 2008 fewer than half of U.S. respondents believed that the United States was making progress toward establishing democracy in Iraq.

Figure 3 here
Public perceptions of the timeframe for establishing democracy in Iraq reflect a similar pattern: initial optimism (at least in relative terms) followed, first, by a waning belief that democracy would ever be possible and, later, by increased confidence. Table 1 presents responses over time to the CBS News Poll question, “Which of these do you think is most likely? 1. Iraq will become a stable democracy in the next year or two, OR 2. Iraq will become a stable democracy, but it will take longer than a year or two, OR 3. Iraq will probably never become a stable democracy.” Any early optimism was relative since, regardless of the year of the survey, very few Americans ever thought that Iraq would become a democracy in the immediate future. As time progressed, however, fewer and fewer respondents thought democracy would be achieved, even in the long-term. Concomitantly, the proportion of Americans who thought that Iraq would never become a democracy rose. At the same time that U.S. hope for progress toward democracy in Iraq declined, another pattern emerged: U.S. public opinion responded to particular events on the ground in Iraq. In December 2003, only six percent of respondents believed that Iraq would become a democracy in the next year or two, and 59 percent believed that it would become a democracy eventually. By December 2006 these percentages slipped dramatically to three and 32 percent, respectively, before climbing again in 2007.

Table 1 here

Scholarly Opinion

Scholarly opinion on the Iraq war differs significantly from public views. The Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) surveys of IR faculty in the United States provide
various measures of expert opinion on U.S. foreign policy toward Iraq. Comparing these views with those of the general public, we find two main points of difference: the IR experts opposed the war from the outset, and their views did not change substantially over time. After reviewing the TRIP survey’s methodology and findings, we outline scholarly opinion on the war in Iraq and consider alternative explanations for the gap between public and scholarly opinion. We conclude that there is a significant epistemic effect associated with studying and teaching international relations within the U.S. academy.

**Survey Methods**

The TRIP project surveyed scholarly opinion in three separate rounds in 2004, 2006, and 2008. Each survey attempts to identify all faculty at four-year colleges and universities in the United States who do research in the IR sub-field or who teach IR courses. The overwhelming majority of respondents have jobs in departments of political science, politics, government, social science, international relations, or international studies, or in professional schools associated with universities.

Each survey used a list of four-year colleges and universities compiled by *U.S. News and World Report (USNWR)*. To that list TRIP researchers added the Monterey Institute and nine military schools that were not rated by *USNWR* but that have a large number of political science faculty who teach courses on IR. The sampling frame includes all faculty who teach or research trans-border issues as they relate to some aspect of politics. Hence, the population includes political scientists specializing in American politics who study trade and immigration. This broad definition includes those scholars who create knowledge, teach students, and provide
expert advice to policy makers about trans-border issues, whether they adopt the “IR” moniker themselves or not.9

We sampled IR faculty members at these schools through a systematic series of web searches, emails, and communications with department chairs, staff, and individual scholars. The 2008 survey identified 4,126 individuals who appeared to research and/or teach IR, compared to 2,705 in 2006 and 2,320 in 2004.10 In all, 1,719 scholars responded to the 2008 survey, either online or through the mail, while 1,112 responded in 2006 and 1,084 in 2004. Additional individuals in the sample were probably misidentified by this selection process, but they were not removed because they never informed the TRIP research team that they did not belong in the sample. Had these individuals been removed from the denominator, the response rate would have been higher. For this reason, the response rates reported here—42 percent in 2008, 41 percent in 2006, and 47 percent in 2004—are conservative estimates.

IR Scholars and Support for the Iraq War

Using the results of the 2004, 2006, and 2008 surveys, we can compare IR scholarly opinion with public support for the U.S. war in Iraq. The pattern that emerges in scholarly opinion is different than the trends in the public opinion described above. First, while the U.S. public overwhelmingly supported the invasion from the outset, scholars opposed the war. The rally effect observed in the general population did not occur among experts. Second, whereas public opinion proved volatile, declining over time and changing in response to events in Iraq, expert opinion was stable.

From the beginning scholars overwhelmingly opposed the war. Even in the 2004 survey, conducted when the United States had just overthrown Saddam and public support for the war
was still high, only 15 percent of IR faculty reported that they had supported or strongly supported the U.S. decision to go to war in 2003. Seventy-eight percent reported opposing or strongly opposing the invasion. In fact, the most frequent response, given by 52 percent of all IR scholars, was that they strongly opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Their responses had not changed significantly by 2006, when they were asked the same question, even though political violence between Shiites and Sunnis had escalated and there may have been a temptation for respondents to retroactively believe that they had been opposed to the war at the outset. IR experts had made up their minds on Iraq much earlier, and they remained nearly unified in this opinion. Figure 4 summarizes public and expert opinion on the Iraq invasion.

Levels of expert support for each of the Bush Administration’s rationales for going to war in Iraq also reflect the stability of scholarly opinion. The TRIP survey asked IR scholars whether they believed that the U.S. decision to go to war with Iraq would end up enhancing U.S. security, decreasing U.S. security, or having no impact. The experts were much less likely than the general public to believe that the war in Iraq would improve U.S. national security, and their views tended not to change significantly over time. Only nine percent of scholars in 2004 believed that the invasion definitely or probably would benefit the United States, while seven percent in 2006 and eight percent in 2008 felt the same. A scant one percent of IR experts in 2004 and 2006 and two percent in 2008 believed that the U.S. war definitely (as opposed to probably) would make the United States more secure. In contrast, 59 percent of the scholars
surveyed in 2004, 62 percent in 2006, and 45 percent in 2008 thought the war definitely would decrease U.S. security.

Compared to public opinion on the U.S. invasion of Iraq, scholarly opinion was overwhelmingly negative and static. At the same time, as Figure 5 shows, the early years after the invasion saw only a modest divide between scholarly and public assessments of the security effects of the war. The experts were more skeptical than the general public, but the distance between the two groups’ views was relatively small. Over time, however, as public perceptions shifted to include more optimistic appraisals of the effect of the war on U.S. national security, the gulf widened because expert opinion remained constant and more pessimistic.

Figure 5 here

One area where the views of IR scholars and Bush Administration officials overlapped is the assessment of the likelihood that Iraq would become more democratic without a U.S. invasion. In 2006 the TRIP survey asked about the likelihood of a democratic Iraq today and in 10-15 years had the United States not invaded. As Figure 6 shows, IR scholars overwhelmingly believed that Iraq would not have transitioned or become stable or democratic on its own. In 2006 IR scholars remained skeptical, however, that even with the U.S. invasion, Iraq would be a stable democracy within 10-15 years.

Figure 6 here
Given differences in question wording, it is difficult to directly compare public and expert attitudes about the likelihood of democracy emerging in Iraq. The TRIP survey only asked about a democratic Iraq in 2006, moreover, so it is impossible to track changes over time in on this question. Within these constraints, we see that, while 32 percent of the public believed in 2006 that Iraq could become a democracy eventually, as Figure 6 shows, only 15 percent of the more skeptical experts agreed.

*What explains IR experts’ attitudes?*

The TRIP survey allows us to explore IR experts’ skepticism about the Iraq war by examining the determinants of both support for the invasion and beliefs about its effects on U.S. security. There are at least two possible explanations that are consistent with the findings regarding the gulf between scholarly and public opinion described above: IR scholars could be uniformly dovish on the use of force and/or they could be overwhelmingly liberal and their liberalism could have driven them to oppose a conservative administration’s use of force in Iraq. Neither explanation accounts for IR scholars’ attitudes and the gulf between expert and public opinion.

First, scholars of international relations could be largely “doves” who fundamentally oppose the use of force under nearly all conditions. According to this explanation, it was not the peculiarities of the Iraq case that drove expert opposition to the invasion, but the nature of the offensive military action in general. This hypothesis does not stand up to empirical analysis, however. In fact, IR scholars and the public generally agreed on another contemporary use of force issue, the need for increased U.S. troops in Afghanistan. When asked in the fall of 2008 whether a redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq to Afghanistan was likely to increase, decrease,
or make no difference to U.S. national security, 57 percent of IR scholars responded that an Afghan “surge” would benefit the United States. Only 14 percent of IR experts believed that the surge would decrease U.S. security. This finding is virtually identical to the 59 percent of the public who in December 2008 responded to a CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll that they would favor a decrease in U.S. combat troops in Iraq and an increase in U.S. combat troops in Afghanistan.

Despite their opposition to the invasion of Iraq, IR scholars are often bellicose on questions of the use of force to protect U.S. security, so long as the intervention is multilateral. The 2006 TRIP survey asked about support for possible invasions of North Korea and Iran, two countries included in President Bush’s “Axis of Evil” and which were, at the time of the survey, generally believed to be pursuing WMD development. Figure 7 shows that, as they had in Iraq, IR scholars in 2006 opposed a U.S. invasion of North Korea (70 percent) and Iran (77 percent). When asked if they would support United Nations mandated multilateral military action, however, 53 percent said yes about North Korea and 48 percent agreed for Iran. IR scholars do not oppose the use of force across the board, and they generally do not oppose military action to stop the development of nuclear weapons by rogue regimes. Rather, they often favor such action when it is done in concert with multilateral bodies such as the United Nations. These observations suggest that expert opposition to war in Iraq cannot be explained by any dovish inclination.

Figure 7 here
Second, those IR scholars who were more ideologically disposed towards the Bush Administration and more likely to support its policies might simply have been too few in number to influence expert opinion in an academy that is often criticized for being overly liberal. Even if scholars as a group do not mirror the ideological or partisan landscape of the U.S. public, those who describe themselves as conservatives may have been more likely to support an invasion, while liberals may have been more likely to oppose it. The TRIP survey findings certainly support conventional wisdom about the liberal academy: in 2008, 75 percent of IR faculty described themselves as liberal, while ten percent called themselves conservative; in 2006, 70 percent were liberal and 14 percent conservative; and in 2004, 69 percent were self-described liberals and 13 percent conservative. In such a liberal academy it would not be surprising to find overwhelming opposition to war in Iraq.

Indeed, as Table 2 shows, ideologically conservative scholars were far more likely than liberals or moderates to support the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In 2004 and 2006, respectively, 42 and 38 percent of conservative experts opposed the invasion, compared to 82 and 81 percent of moderates and 94 and 97 percent of liberals. While 58 percent of conservative experts in 2004 and 62 percent in 2006 reported that they had supported the 2003 initiation of war, only six percent of liberals in 2004 and three percent in 2006 said they had supported the administration’s 2003 decision. Politically moderate IR experts leaned heavily against the war, with only 18 percent and 19 percent in 2004 and 2006, respectively, supporting the invasion of Iraq.

Table 2 here
Ideology, however, does not completely explain the gulf between experts and the public on Iraq. In 2004, conservative scholars were about 20 percent more likely than conservative members of the public to oppose the war. Figure 8 below shows that among the general public, about 80 percent of political conservatives supported the war, compared with less than 60 percent of conservative scholars. As U.S. public support for the war in Iraq declined from 2003 to 2007, even political conservatives began to doubt the wisdom of the invasion. Among conservatives in both groups, in fact, opinion on the war had converged by 2007; that is, conservative public support declined by 2007 to the relatively unchanged level of support among conservative IR scholars. If anything, conservative support within the academy for the war increased slightly from 58 percent in 2004 to 62 percent in 2006.

Figure 8 here

Taken together, these findings suggest the existence of a body of shared knowledge and policy beliefs among IR scholars. They suggest, in other words, the plausibility of a third explanation, that IR scholars’ shared knowledge of world politics, causal beliefs about civil and international war, and preferred policy solutions constitute them as an epistemic community (Haas 1990; Adler 1992; Adler and Haas 1992) whose effects on respondents’ views on the Iraq war outstrip those of political ideology and general views about the use of force. A complete test of the claim that the beliefs of an epistemic community of IR scholars explain scholarly opposition to the war in Iraq would require that we establish the existence of such a community prior to the events we are studying here. We do not do that here, but we do show that a group of experts who share similar training and knowledge also share policy beliefs about the use of force
and particularly about the use of force in Iraq in the first decade of the 21st century. IR experts within the academy generally support military intervention under certain conditions, but they did not see those conditions in Iraq in 2003 and beyond. That IR scholars held similar beliefs about the Iraq invasion suggests that general and shared knowledge among IR scholars about international politics and the use of force, rather than political ideology or other factors, explains the strong opposition of IR experts to the war in Iraq.

**Expert Consensus Ignored**

The U.S. public overwhelmingly supported the Bush Administration’s decision to go to war in Iraq, while international relations scholars overwhelmingly rejected the policy from the outset, suggesting that IR experts may comprise a knowledge-based community that influenced their thinking about the Iraq War. Previous research suggests that such a network or community of professionals may influence policy by providing information to national leaders and speaking authoritatively about their area of expertise. Epistemic communities have shaped public debates, internal policy deliberations, and policy outcomes on issues as diverse as marine pollution (Haas 1989, 1990), ozone depletion (Haas 1992), global warming (Demeritt 2001), trade in services (Drake and Nicolaidis 1992), and arms control (Adler 1992).

A complete understanding of why the IR epistemic community failed to influence US policy (or even the public discourse) toward Iraq is outside the scope of this paper. Certainly, part of the reason may have to do with the nature of epistemic communities, which tend to have the greatest impact in conditions of uncertainty (Adler and Haas 1992). In retrospect, the lead-up to the war in Iraq was characterized by unfounded assumptions and faulty intelligence, but it was not characterized, at least publicly, by uncertainty among policy makers in the Bush
Administration. Instead, even the small number of skeptics within the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency who were initially uncertain about whether Iraq had operational WMD, eventually came to believe that Iraq did have such capability. Indeed, many of the Administration’s critics shared the widespread belief that Iraq possessed WMD, but nevertheless encouraged a continued policy of containment (Walt and Mearsheimer 2002/03; Woodward 2004). In any case, IR scholars’ expertise and policy prescriptions in this issue area were not reflected in the Administration’s Iraq policy.

As important, and perhaps part of the reason for policymakers’ neglect of scholarly opinion, this expertise was ignored by or mis-represented in the U.S. media, which portrayed expert opinion on the war as divided. We know from the findings of the TRIP survey and other sources (e.g., Jackson and Kaufmann 2007), however, that expert opinion was strongly unified. Media attempts to provide a balance of opinion meant that it was relatively easy for both the public and the policy-making elite to mistake this overwhelming consensus for a robust debate among experts. The pages of the major U.S. newspapers highlighted a biased sample of expert opinion, or did not print the evaluations of IR scholars as frequently as those of politicians, journalists, pundits, and Iraqi expatriates.

Public opinion, elite opinion, and the media interact to influence each other and U.S. foreign policy. Baum and Potter (2008) present a framework for understanding this relationship during a military conflict. The public’s foreign policy attitudes generally are less informed and less deeply felt than are their beliefs about pocketbook or moral issues, so their demand for information about foreign policy during the early stage of a conflict is low. As the conflict continues, however, and especially as casualties mount, the public is likely to demand more information from the media. This increased demand on the media helps close the information
gap between national leaders and the public. In the Iraq case it appears that, as the public received more information about the war, opinion shifted against U.S. policy and closer to the opinion of the IR experts. Even had the public sought more information from the media early in the conflict—before the U.S. invasion of Iraq—rather than rallying ‘round the flag, media consumers would have found a relatively balanced, and therefore biased, sample of expert opinion. Public attitudes on foreign policy may be more malleable and open to persuasion by the media than are domestic or budget views (Berisky and Druckman 2007), but the pages of the major dailies painted a view of the situation in Iraq that did not accurately reflect the overwhelming opposition among the IR experts to war.

Regardless of the reasons for the Bush administration’s neglect of the IR epistemic community’s consensus against the war, we show that that consensus was ignored in the mainstream print media. To measure media coverage of Iraq in the lead-up to and shortly following the 2003 invasion, we perform content analysis on opinion pieces in three major national newspapers: the New York Times, USA Today, and the Wall Street Journal. These news sources represent only a small percentage of the total news exposure Americans likely received on the issue, but we believe that these three newspapers reflected the content and tone of the larger debate within the wider media. In terms of editorial policies (if not reportage), the New York Times is generally considered a left-of-center paper, the Wall Street Journal is generally thought to be right-of-center, and USA Today is considered more middle-of-the-road. Insofar as these papers reflect prevailing liberal, conservative, and moderate opinions, respectively, we believe that they present a representative snapshot of the debate over the Iraq invasion in the mainstream media.
For each newspaper, we listed the universe of opinion pieces on the specific subject of a U.S. invasion published between the 11 September 2001 and December 2003, a period ranging from 19 months before to nine months after the invasion. The New York Times included 354 op-eds, the Wall Street Journal had 296, and USA Today published 89 opinion pieces on an Iraq invasion. We coded each op-ed on a five-point scale measuring the extent to which it was pro- or anti-war. A score of 1 indicates that the article was anti-war; 2 indicates it was leaning anti-war; 3 signifies a neutral position on the issue: 4 means it was leaning pro-war; and a score of 5 indicates that the op-ed was pro-war. Table 3 presents the mean score for each newspaper. The New York Times receives a mean score of 2.6, leaning slightly against war. USA Today’s editorial policy was neutral with a score of 2.9. The Wall Street Journal leaned fairly strongly toward war with a score of 4.4. Averaging across the three papers produces an overall mean score of 3.3: the pages of the nation’s major newspapers showed an overall balance of expert opinion, even leaning slightly toward a U.S. war against Iraq.

Table 3 here

Expert opinion printed in the nation’s major dailies differed markedly from the reality in the academy, where IR scholars overwhelmingly opposed war. Simply looking at the mean scores across the papers, however, masks another trend: the right-of-center Wall Street Journal presented a strong and consistent pro-war perspective, while the left-of-center New York Times leaned only slightly anti-war. The middle-of-the-road USA Today projected a relatively neutral stance toward the invasion. Overall, op-ed coverage was either relatively balanced or skewed
toward supporting the invasion, and these published opinions did not reflect the largely anti-invasion views among scholarly experts of international relations.

Indeed, IR scholars authored only five percent of the op-eds published on the topic of the Iraq War. These scholars, moreover, were not representative of the larger IR community: their average score was 3.1, leaning slightly pro-war but far more hawkish than IR scholars in general. A closer look at this sub-set of opinion pieces reveal that IR scholars are rarely heard in these leading outlets, and on balance the scholars whose essays are published are more “pro-war” than their fellow experts in the academy. At the end of the day, few IR scholars were heard on the most important foreign policy issue facing the United States and, if anyone was keeping score, and they likely were not, IR scholars in this sample were significantly more pro-invasion than their colleagues in the rest of the academy.

**Conclusion**

Scholars of international relations, experts on the workings of world politics and the use of force, opposed the U.S. war in Iraq early and strongly.\(^{17}\) Overwhelmingly united against the war from the outset, scholars did not exhibit the same rally effect shown in the early public support for the 2003 invasion. Public opinion grew gradually more disenchanted over time, only beginning to creep up again in 2008, but expert opinion was stable and relatively insensitive to events on the ground in Iraq. Perhaps more striking, scholarly opposition to the war holds even when we control for ideology; conservatives within the academy were far more likely than their conservative counterparts in the general public to oppose the war. Even more striking, the experts were largely ignored in the public debates leading up to and the early stages of the war. Indeed, most Americans probably were not even aware of the overwhelming scholarly consensus
against war, since the editorial pages of the nation’s major newspapers privileged a balance of expert views over an accurate representation of expert opinion.

Previous research on publications in IR journals over the last 28 years (Maliniak et al 2011), as well as the TRIP faculty surveys (Peterson et al 2005; Maliniak et al 2007; Jordan et al 2009; Maliniak et al 2011), portrays a scholarly discipline that wants to be policy relevant: large numbers of scholars consult for the U.S. government, believe that IR scholarship is useful to policy makers, and intend their research to be prescriptive. For this reason, scholars often lament and are puzzled by the irrelevance of their work to policy makers (Walt 1999; Nye 2008). At the same time, however, little scholarly research in the field actually draws links to current policy debates, except after a major international event (Maliniak et al 2011). It should not be surprising, then, that policy makers do not listen to the experts.

In the Iraq case, though, scholars made clear arguments about why they opposed the war, but national leaders did not heed their arguments and policy prescriptions. Perhaps, even probably, they were ignored because the prescriptions emerging from the academy, where 69 to 75 percent of IR scholars described themselves as liberal, were wholly at odds with the preferences of administration officials. Recall, however, that the leading “foreign policy voices” in the Democratic Party (Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, and Joe Biden) also failed to articulate the arguments being pushed by IR experts in the academy. All of these opposition politicians and many of their colleagues also voted to authorize the use of force in Iraq. The IR epistemic community not only failed to shape the decisions of the executive branch, but it was not even taken seriously by the media or the opposition party in the legislature. Regardless, expert opinion and U.S. foreign policy diverged sharply, even when controlling for ideology. Over time, as the public demanded and received more information, public opinion aligned much more
closely with IR scholars and came to oppose the war in much larger numbers. Early in the war, though, the experts were advocating different policy positions than the public, and the general public and policy makers did not see those policy positions represented in the media.

Many commentators, including some scholars, criticize what they perceive as the silence of the academy about the U.S. war in Iraq. Stephen Walt (2009) describes a news story about a well known IR scholar who believes that academics remained silent because they knew they could not influence the Bush administration. This scholar noted, “I don’t think all the academics in the world could have had much impact on American public opinion. . . I don’t think academics matter.”

The academy was not silent, however. IR experts opposed to the war took their arguments to the media. Hundreds of IR scholars signed an open letter in the *New York Times* opposing what they saw as the Bush administration’s “misguided” policy in Iraq, and many others wrote analyses, op-eds, and articles. Some were published in major newspaper outlets, but many more were not well represented in the marketplace of ideas. Nearly a decade of war in Iraq, however, helped galvanize a movement toward greater policy relevance for the IR discipline. Numerous efforts to study and improve the interaction between the academy and the beltway have emerged in recent years, as academics strive for a greater role in the policy process and seek to ensure that their voices will be heard on major national security issues.\textsuperscript{18}
Figure 1: Public Support for the Iraq War$^{19}$
Figure 2: Public beliefs about whether an Iraq invasion enhanced US security
Figure 3: Public beliefs about the progress of democracy in Iraq\textsuperscript{21}
Table 1: Public Perception of Likelihood of Democracy in Iraq

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>In the next year or two</th>
<th>Longer</th>
<th>Will never become a democracy</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 21-22, 2003</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 29-31, 2005</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21-25, 2006</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 8-10, 2006</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 14-16, 2007</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 30-June 3, 2008</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4: Public and Expert opinions about invasion
Figure 5: Public vs. Expert Opinion: Will Invasion Enhance U.S. Security

![Graph showing public vs. expert opinion on security enhancement due to invasion over time.](image-url)
Figure 6: IR Expert Perceptions of Democracy in Iraq (2006)

If the 2003 Iraq war had not occurred, what would be the likelihood of a stable democracy in Iraq today?

If the 2003 Iraq war had not occurred, what would be the likelihood of a stable democracy in Iraq in 10-15 years?

Given that the war did occur, what is the likelihood that Iraq will be a stable democracy in 10-15 years?
Figure 7: Expert Support for Unilateral and Multilateral Action against North Korea and Iran (2006)
Table 2: Ideology and IR Scholars Support for 2003 Invasion

Support Iraq Invasion (2004 Percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderates</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support Iraq Invasion (2006 Percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderates</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 8: Support for the War Among Political Conservatives

[Graph showing support for the war among political conservatives over time with two lines representing public opinion and IR scholar's opinion.]
Table 3: Balance of Opinions Expressed in Major US Newspapers regarding Iraq Invasion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New York Times</th>
<th>USA Today</th>
<th>Wall Street Journal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>739</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1=anti-war and 5=pro-war.
References


Haas, Peter M. “Do Regimes Matter? Epistemic Communities and Mediterranean Pollution.”


1 For a discussion of the gas tax controversy, see http://gastax08.blogspot.com.
2 The 2004 survey included all faculty at U.S. colleges and universities who taught or did research in IR; the 2006 survey covered both U.S. and Canadian IR faculty members; and the 2008 survey included faculty in ten countries. We report only U.S. responses in this paper. For a comparison of U.S. and Canadian results see Lipson et al 2007, and Maliniak et al 2007a. For a ten-country comparison, see Jordan et al 2009; and Maliniak et al 2011. The TRIP survey also was conducted in 2011, but it no longer included questions on the war in Iraq.
3 These data are available at http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/
4 At the time of the invasion in the late winter/early spring of 2003, survey questions took the form “Do you favor or oppose the US war with Iraq?” (Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, March 2003). Post-invasion (2004-2009), the question asked respondents the question retrospectively, usually in a form similar to “Looking back, do you think the United States did the right thing in taking military action against Iraq, or should the U.S. have stayed out?” (e.g, CBS News Poll October 2006).
5 February 2003 CBS News Poll.
6 The survey also was conducted in 2011, but in did not include any questions on Iraq.
7 An “IR scholar” is defined as an individual with an active affiliation with a university, college, or professional school, which excludes many IR experts employed in government, private firms, or think tanks.
9 Of the 4,673 individuals originally contacted in 2008, 547 respondents did not belong in the sample because they had died, changed jobs, retired, or been misidentified. We do not include these individuals in calculations of the response rate. 133 of the original 2,838 individuals were removed from the 2006 sample for similar reasons, while 86 of 2,406 were removed in 2004.
10 In 2008 scholars were not asked whether they had supported the Iraq War in 2003. This question was asked, however, of IR scholars in nine other countries. Much like U.S. responses in 2004 and 2006, only 11 percent of non-U.S. scholars surveyed in 2008 said that they had supported the war in 2003, and 80 percent reported having opposed it.
11 Fifty percent responded that the surge would somewhat increase U.S. security, while seven percent said it would sharply enhance it.
12 Thirty-seven percent of the 1,096 respondents opposed such a plan, and four percent didn’t know or were undecided.
13 The exact wording of the questions was: “If North Korea/Iran continues to produce material that can be used to develop nuclear weapons, would you support or oppose the US taking military action against North Korea/Iran?”
14 The exact wording of the questions was: “If North Korea/Iran continues to produce material that can be used to develop nuclear weapons, and the UN Security Council votes to use military force against North Korea/Iran, would you support or oppose the international community taking military action against North Korean/Iran?”
15 In recent retrospective analyses of the ten year anniversary of the Iraq War some scholars have argued that retrospective surveys asking people how they felt about something in the past are likely biased and over-represent scholarly opposition to the Iraq War (Drezner 2013). All contemporaneous qualitative evidence points toward broad opposition (Jackson 2007), however, and all systematic surveys, even if retrospective, are stable over time and do
not fluctuate as the situation on the ground improved for the United States after the surge. Ideally, we would have access to snap polls that survey scholarly opinion in real time, just as we have public opinion polls that serve this purpose.

Examples include the Cambridge-based Tobin Project, the Carnegie Corporation’s Cult of the Irrelevant Project, and the Bridging the Gap Project. As important, the U.S. government has self-consciously shifted resources toward applied IR and social science research in order to assist policy planning, intelligence analysis, or implementation of foreign policy in the field through the DOD’s Minerva Project, USAID’s Higher Education Solutions Network, and through the DOD’s Human Terrain Project.


Includes data from: CBS News & CBS News/New York Times Polls (February, August, September, December 2003; October 2004; July, August 2005; August, October 2006; September 2007) to the question: "As a result of U.S. military action against Iraq, do you think the threat of terrorism against the United States has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?" NBC News/Wall Street Journal Polls (November 2003; June, October 2004; July 2005) to the question: “Since the United States has taken military action against Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power, do you think the threat of terrorism against the United States has increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?” Pew Research Center Poll (December 2005; January, April, June, August, November 2006; February, May, September, November 2007; February, April, April 2008) to the question: “As I read a few specific things about Iraq, tell me if you think we are making progress or losing ground in each area: Preventing terrorists from using Iraq as a base for attacks against the U.S. and its allies.”

Figure 3 shows responses over time to the following question on the Pew Research Center Poll: “As I read a few specific things about Iraq, tell me if you think we are making progress or losing ground in each area: establishing democracy in Iraq.” Responses used from March 2003; June 2004; October, December 2005; January, April, June, August, November 2006; February, May, September, November 2007; February, April 2008.

Scholarly opinion is from the 2004 and 2006 TRIP surveys. Public opinion is from the same sources as cited in Figure 1.

Data on scholarly opinion comes from the 2004 and 2006 TRIP surveys. Public opinion data is from the same sources as cited in Figure 1.