Introduction

News, National Security, and Civil Liberties

> "After September the eleventh, I vowed to the American people that our government would do everything within the law to protect them against another terrorist attack. As part of this effort, I authorized the National Security Agency to intercept the international communications of people with known links to al Qaeda and related terrorist organizations. In other words, if al Qaeda or their associates are making calls into the United States or out of the United States, we want to know what they're saying."
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> – President George W. Bush
> May 11, 2006

> "Last December, the *Times* reported that the N.S.A. was listening in on calls between people in the United States and people in other countries, and a few weeks ago *USA Today* reported that the agency was collecting information on millions of private domestic calls. . . . The N.S.A. began, in some cases, to eavesdrop on callers (often using computers to listen for key words) or to investigate them using traditional police methods. A government consultant told me that tens of thousands of Americans had had their calls monitored in one way or the other."
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> – Seymour M. Hersh
> *The New Yorker*
> May 22, 2006

These opening statements reflect fundamental, yet opposing, concerns in what has been one of the most important postmillennial debates for American democracy, the tradeoff between protecting national security and defending civil liberties. Though this debate has been evident since the dawn of U.S. history, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 raised its intensity to an unprecedented level, as the course of both foreign and domestic policy have been substantially altered. On the international front, these attacks led to protracted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. On the home front, and central to the focus of

this book, the Bush administration pushed the USA PATRIOT Act (officially titled the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) through Congress on October 25, 2001, substantially expanding the government's surveillance powers in ways that were unimagined at the time of its inception. Since that time, the law has been reauthorized twice, first in July 2005 and again in May 2011, with the key provisions now extended until June 2015. This law thrust the debate to the center of the American political stage, as policymakers, activists, and citizens considered the steps taken to prevent another terrorist attack.

The public visibility of this debate steadily gained intensity in the years that immediately followed the 9/11 attacks, but then began to subside toward the end of the decade. It is important to note that the declining visibility was not a function of a shift in policy accompanying the change in presidential administrations. In fact, the Obama administration "left the surveillance program intact [and] embraced the PATRIOT Act" (Baker, 2010). Though the public visibility of the debate was relatively dormant around the turn of the decade, prominent politicians from both parties expressed continued concern that the government was exceeding its authority in engaging in domestic surveillance. During the most recent debate over extending the PATRIOT Act in 2011, Senator Ron Wyden, Oregon Democrat and member of the Intelligence Committee, stated, "When the American people find out how their government has secretly interpreted the Patriot Act, they will be stunned and they will be angry" (Savage, 2011). Likewise, Senator Rand Paul, Kentucky Republican, argued, "We were so frightened after 9/11 that we readily gave up these freedoms. Not only would I let these expire, but I think we should sunset the entire PATRIOT Act" (Associated Press, 2011).

In 2013, two major news events catapulted the issue of domestic surveillance back into the public limelight. First, on April 15, two bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three people and injuring another 264. Various security cameras captured the perpetrators in the vicinity, leading to the identification of the suspects and a massive manhunt. These bombings were the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil since the events of September 11, 2001, reinvigorating calls for government surveillance powers in the name of protecting national security.

Two months later, major U.S. media organizations began breaking a series of stories based on leaked government documents, which indicated that the scope of the government's domestic surveillance programs went far beyond what was commonly believed, both in terms of the intrusiveness of their tactics and scope in terms of who and what was being scrutinized. At the heart of these leaks was former CIA employee and NSA contractor Edward Snowden. Snowden was vilified in some circles as a significant threat to domestic security and hailed in others as a champion of civil liberties (Klein, 2013).

The Boston bombings and the Snowden leaks raised additional debate over the appropriate extent and scope of antiterrorism measures. Among the

persistent questions surrounding the PATRIOT Act are: What kinds of surveillance activities was the government pursuing, against what kinds of groups, and who would define the legal limits of these new powers? These queries have led to deeper questions about what kinds of surveillance techniques are acceptable for use in a democratic society, what the American citizenry will tolerate with regard to the reduction of civic liberties, and whether this would differ depending on what kinds of groups and individuals are being targeted.

Despite the high volume of stories about the government's domestic surveillance activities, only a minority of Americans expressed concern that the government has "gone too far in restricting the average person's civil liberties," with 46% of registered voters nationwide expressing this view in a July 29–31 Quinnipiac University Poll. Contrary to the belief that the public would grow angry when it learned about surveillance abuses, criticism of PATRIOT Act activities has been relatively muted. Indeed, more than half of those polled expressed support for federal surveillance programs, indicating they are necessary to "keep Americans safe" (Quinnipiac University Poll, July 29–31). Thus, even when the dragnet monitoring policies came to light, most people accepted these practices as an expected cost of life after the 9/11 attacks, likely as a result of how the threat of terrorism was presented to the public through the press.

As the epigraphs indicate, the press framed this debate in ways that only at times questioned the limits of government power, with journalists giving voice to the perspectives of the administration with comparatively less attention to their critics. It is the relationship between the press, politics, and public policy that is the focus of this book. The research reported herein looks at how the nature of news coverage of these surveillance efforts affects audience thoughts about the controversy, tolerance toward the targets of government action, and responses to government power. We contend that the way that journalists have chosen to cover the threat of terrorism seems to have contributed to public acceptance of the erosion of civil liberties.

With the passage of the PATRIOT Act, critics rallied in opposition, first decrying the erosion of civil liberties and more recently contending that the surveillance provisions have been misused. Indeed, news reports have revealed that the FBI, under the Bush administration, applied provisions of the PATRIOT Act to monitor civil rights, antiwar, environmental, and other progressive advocacy groups, maintaining thousands of pages of documents on these legal, mainstream organizations. Under the Obama administration, these same policies have been applied to conservative groups such as citizen militias, Christian activists, and the Tea Party (Priest and Arkin, 2010a), and now, according to the Snowden revelations, to journalists, political elites, and even to the general public. Prior to Snowden's leaks regarding the secret NSA surveillance programs, analysis by the Electronic Frontier Foundation indicates that the FBI may have committed more than 40,000 possible intelligence violations since being granted these new powers (Rumold, 2011, January 30). Since that time, it has become clear that government surveillance was far more

extensive, touching nearly every American citizen. Given the extent of these monitoring activities, public response to these revelations has been surprisingly muted, which we believe can be explained by the patterns of news production and the effects of resultant news coverage. Specifically, the personification of threats (from Osama bin Laden to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, from Julian Assange to Edward Snowden) has figured large in the framing of terrorism policy.

This book, then, explores the effects of the media in this domestic front of the War on Terror asking questions of central importance to the fields of communication, political science, psychology, and sociology in post-9/11 America: How does news coverage concerning government scrutiny of individuals and groups shape citizens' thoughts and actions concerning the tension between national security and civil liberties? Under what conditions is a citizenry that values liberty willing to sacrifice these basic freedoms in the name of security? Do the frames favored by journalists and editors reduce tolerance toward outgroups and constrain participation in defense of civil liberties? Does it matter who is presented as the targets of surveillance? Do singular targets, by accentuating fear and minimizing the scope of government surveillance and resulting media coverage, make it easier for the public to accept the erosion of civil liberties?

We explore a range of answers to these queries guided by two integrated models of communication framing. The first model, the Message Framing Model (MFM), connects communication framing to different levels of the message system – from the language cues used to label issues and groups, to the news frames used to organize press accounts. Our second model, the Message Processing Model (MPM), synthesizes concepts identified by past research into a comprehensive model of how messages are processed, and links these processes to effects on a wide range of thoughts, feelings, judgments, and actions. Together, these models clarify a media effects process that remains fractured and disparate with different definitions and theoretical explanations for what framing is and how it works. As such, they unify a variety of communication phenomena concerning message effects on individual responses, ranging from the micropsychological to the social-behavioral. These models, which we develop and then test through a series of experimental studies, are the central theoretical contribution of the book.

In applying these models to our research, we focus our attention on the journalistic practice of framing news stories around individual exemplars. That is, journalists tend to personalize news stories about social issues and problems by framing stories around specific cases for the purpose of illustration, which may shift emphasis away from the broader implications of the issue. We focus on this individual vs. collective framing distinction because we believe that it is particularly consequential for social tolerance and related democratic judgments. Personifying frames, as opposed to generalizing ones, are thought to shape attributional processes and alter the spread of activation through memory (Iyengar, 1991). As such, this work not only has relevance for scholars

studying political culture, national security, and civil liberties after 9/11, but also broadly informs all explorations of citizen sensitivity to communication framing, and the conditions under which responsiveness to framing devices is most pronounced. The results of our efforts specifically add to our understanding of political communication, media psychology, news sociology, and democratic theory.

Our conclusions are based on a series of experimental studies that investigate how the construction of news stories, more specifically the framing of language in news texts, influences audience members' news processing, interpretations, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. This research yields a set of findings and implications relevant to a wide range of audiences, including policy makers, working journalists, academic researchers, and graduate and undergraduate students in a range of disciplines. It weaves together several of the most active areas of political communication, media psychology, and news sociology research, including the conditional nature of news framing and cueing effects, the political sophistication of citizens, the sources of social prejudice, and the nature of political participation, examining them in the context of this highly salient debate from contemporary American society. We use these findings to further revise and expand our theoretical models of communication influence.

Outline of Book

The book consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides our theoretical overview and presents a new framework for understanding communication framing effects. It is here that we present and detail the two models, the Message Framing Model (MFM) and the Message Processing Model (MPM), that guide the research contained in this book. Chapter 2 discusses the context of this research and the implications of our models for a range of democratic outcomes related to the debate between national security and civil liberties. In particular, we focus on three core citizen competencies: the sophistication and integration of political cognitions, the nature of political tolerance judgments, and the degree of political engagement. Chapter 3 covers elements of our research design and concept explication for our experimental research on framing in the context of the domestic War on Terror.

The next four chapters present the results of our research. The research chapters are clustered around the potential consequences of media framing for the citizen competencies mentioned earlier: political sophistication, social tolerance, and political participation. Each of these chapters, which are co-authored by graduate students who worked on our research team (all of whom are now faculty members at other universities), explores the effects of communication framing – both the direct and conditional influences – in theory-driven yet innovative ways. Chapter 4 examines the interactive effects of frames and cues on indicators of the spread of activation through memory, specifically attitudinal

consistency and response latency, as they relate to tolerance toward Arabs in the United States. Chapter 5 explores the impact of framing on the complexity of attitude formation regarding the national security/civil liberties conflict. Chapter 6 considers the interplay of framing and political predispositions on tolerance toward various activists groups, focusing on how individual framing polarizes tolerance judgments both in support of and in opposition to political groups. Chapter 7 investigates framing effects on willingness to take expressive political action in support of or in opposition to the targets of government surveillance, reflecting orientations toward national security and civil liberties.

The concluding chapter synthesizes our research findings and discusses their broader social and political implications. Ultimately, this book provides an organizing framework for examining framing effects, an important, yet fragmented, area of mass communication research. We illustrate this framework by contributing innovative, original research to the existing literature on framing effects conducted in the context of the defining political issue of our time, the tension between protecting national security and honoring civil liberties. At the same time, we believe this application of framing theory provides unique insights into public acceptance of the erosion of civil liberties in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, as the modes in which the news media presented the threat of domestic terrorism implicitly supported national security efforts.

PART I

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1

Understanding Message Framing and Effects

> "Ever since the 1970s, when Army intel agents were caught snooping on antiwar protesters, military intel agencies have operated under tight restrictions inside the United States. But the new provision (Senate Bill S.2386, Sec. 502), approved in closed session last month by the Senate Intelligence Committee, would eliminate one big restriction: that they comply with the Privacy Act, a Watergate-era law that requires government officials seeking information from a resident to disclose who they are and what they want the information for."
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> – Michael Isikoff
> *Newsweek Magazine*
> June 21, 2004

> "Among the Americans who complain about the Patriot Act, Mohammad Junaid Babar probably dislikes it more than most. Absent that often-criticized federal statute, Babar still might stroll the sidewalks of New York, gathering money and equipment for al Qaeda. According to the unsealed transcript of his June 3 appearance before U.S. District Judge Victor Marrero, Babar pleaded guilty to five counts of furnishing 'material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization.'"
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> – Deroy Murdock
> *The National Review*
> October 25, 2004

Both of these passages from magazine articles – the first from *Newsweek* and the second from the *National Review* – discuss the implications of domestic surveillance activities by U.S. government agencies. But this is where the similarity ends. These two excerpts represent two very different ways of telling a story about government surveillance. One obvious difference is that the first excerpt emphasizes the issue of civil liberties, while the second emphasizes the issue of national security. In addition, the stories illustrate two different

common targets of government scrutiny: activist groups and Arab groups. But a more subtle difference is that the first story addresses the broader policy implications of surveillance in relation to large groups, while the second focuses on a single, potentially dangerous individual.

The differences in these stories raise a number of questions: Would audience members react differently depending on which of these stories they encountered about the debate over domestic security and civil liberties? How would the frame of the news story, whether it organized the issue around individuals or collectives, shape reactions of audience members? Are audience members more likely to favor national security over personal freedoms when seeing individuals or collectives targeted under the PATRIOT Act? This book shares insights from research designed to answer questions about the influence of such stories – news content concerning the surveillance of collectives or individuals, both domestic and international.

The answers to these questions are particularly important in a period when government surveillance of U.S. citizens has reached unprecedented levels. FBI agents have infiltrated groups of antiwar protesters to surveil their activities. The military has held over 500 suspected terrorists at Guantanamo Bay, including some who are U.S citizens. It was initially revealed that the NSA and other intelligence gathering units within the U.S. government were maintaining databases of over 300,000 individuals and tracking the phone calls of millions of others. Bank transactions and e-mail communications are also being monitored (Priest and Arkin, 2010a,b). More recently, leaks by Edward Snowden have made clear "the vast scope of the National Security Agency's reach into the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the United States and around the globe, as it collects information about their phone calls, their e-mail messages, their friends and contacts, how they spend their days, and where they spend their nights" (*New York Times*, 2014, January 1).

We contend that whether audience members respond with silence and support for these activities, or with outrage and opposition, is, in part, a function of how the news media frame this issue and the ways they depict implications of particular avenues of action. The research in this book explores these issues. Our research is based on two large experimental studies examining the effects of news stories about government surveillance of "terrorists" under the auspices of the USA PATRIOT Act. Certain features of the news stories, such as the story frame, were systematically altered so that we could examine how audiences would respond to different versions of the story. This research follows a tradition of inquiry that has been rather loosely organized under the label of framing effects research. This tradition of scholarship has long been fragmented, by some accounts "fractured" (Entman, 1993), and continues to require clarification and cohesion. In this chapter, we begin by providing an underlying theoretical structure to organize extant framing research and then use this structure to situate and guide this experimental research.