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News media coverage and source selection in U.S. foreign policy debates : the case of Iran deal

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ABSTRACT

NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE AND SOURCE SELECTION IN
U.S. FOREIGN POLICY DEBATES:
THE CASE OF IRAN DEAL

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This research examines the American news coverage of the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the West, known as Iran deal, in broadcast news programs of ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX, using "indexing" theory as its theoretical framework. Previous research has shown that the debate surrounding foreign policy issues are indexed based on the range of debates in Washington, D.C. The results showed that Iran deal debate in the news coverage of broadcast channels tended to index based on the position of officials within the government, notably congressional and executive branch sources. The coverage included debates that involved both consensus and conflict among elites in the executive branch and the United States congress. The congressional sources were the most dominant source before the deal and the overall frequency of negative statements exceeded the positive ones. Furthermore, the results indicate strong evidence of power indexing in the coverage of this issue. The significant presence of Israel as a source of opposition before the deal, and the prevalence of presidential candidates as an oppositional source in the after deal period both corroborated the notion of power indexing in the media coverage.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SOURCE SELECTION APPROACH BY NEWS MEDIA

The news media play a fundamental role in shaping public opinion about different issues. Their role becomes even more important in foreign affairs, where the complexity of the issues as well as low-information citizenry challenge the public's ability to develop informed opinion (Baum, 2003; Berinsky, 2009). One of the most newsworthy issues of American foreign policy over the last decade has been Iran's nuclear program (Rasti & Sahragard, 2012). With the election of President Hassan Rouhani, described as moderate and pragmatic in Western mainstream media (Schwartz, 2013, November 3), the nuclear negotiations entered a new era. Iran nuclear issue gained momentum and dominated the American media. The negotiations and the subsequent deal received mixed reactions from world leaders and consequently these issues were covered differently by various news outlets (Robins-Early, 2015, July 14).

The importance of news media coverage in constructing the foreign policy debate and shaping the public opinion makes it a critical topic for communication scholars. The news media are the only source of obtaining information on U.S. foreign-policy initiatives for many citizens (Mermin, 1999). As a result, they are an important source of influencing the public opinion on questions of war and peace. There is no doubt that the media are of great significance in constructing the foreign policy debate in the United States, but the main question is how much they act independently. Do they simply report the officials' statements, or do they find their own voice and their own sources in news stories? Or even more important, is the voice of opposition

in news media a reflection of officials' voice or can they challenge the officials and have their own voice?

The journalistic approach in the source selection, and their decision to frame the issues according to, or against, the official voices play key roles in determining the news frames. Consequently, researchers "have been drawn to the question of how journalists know which official views to cover and how to represent the volume of extra-institutional political actors who seek to publicize their positions on disputed policies" (Alexseev & Bennett, 1995, p. 396). Their concern has been whether media discourse has been constrained by the boundaries of debate among political elites, and therefore "the public remains poorly informed, its voice silent or reduced to granted manipulated consent" (Althaus, Edy, Entman & Phalen, 1996, p. 408). In other words, do journalists investigate the issues outside the boundaries of official discourse and do they bring in the relevant sources in framing the stories. In this regard, Althuas et al. (1996) divide the U.S. elites into three segments: "governing elites as a whole, the executive branch or administration, which typically initiate foreign policy; and oppositional officials, whom the media generally identify among members of the opposition party in Congress" (p. 408). However, as Entman and Page (1994) argue, all U.S. elites are not equal in the eyes of media and those who have the power to affect policy are more likely to have the power to shape the news.

Studying the patterns of press-government relations in the United States and the position of domestic elites in shaping the news has led to the development of Indexing theory in communication studies. Indexing scholars argue that journalists operate differently from the ideal expectations of being independent and interrogative (Mermin, 1999). If the quality of foreign policy news would be determined by officials' debate in Washington, the independence of the journalists must be questioned. Investigating the coverage of nuclear negotiations between Iran

and the international community, one of the most important contemporary foreign policy issues, could shed light on the approach of the press toward such issues.

In July 14, 2015, after twenty months of negotiations, Iran and P5+1 (five permanent member of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany) reached a historic accord in regard to Iranian nuclear program. The role of media in coverage of this accord and how they have chosen their sources is of great importance given the controversial nature of this agreement and the objections of important allies and Congress toward it (see McCutcheon, 2016, March 4).

Previous research in indexing (e.g., Bennett, 1990; Entman, 1991) suggests that when the administration is supported by most elites, the coverage is in favor of White House. However, reporting on Iran deal could be more complicated than ordinary cases of foreign policy in the United States. It is a case that seems to include considerable conflict among elites, which means there is lack of consensus among U.S. elites on this issue. Furthermore, the involvement of Britain, China, France, Russia, and Germany as well as the United States in the process of negotiations (Krever & Berlinger, 2014, July 21) make them important voices in the news. Additionally, the strategic position of Iran in the Middle East and the potential impacts of the deal on important allies of the United States in the region make countries like Saudi Arabia and Israel as important sources of news making on this issue. These factors of opposition or support inside and outside of the United States make the Iran deal an ideal scenario for research on media independence and their preference for source selection.

Hershman and Griggs (1981) argue that the American public's interest in the Middle East started through television news programs. They cite the dramatic coverage of Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977 and the 14-month Iranian hostage crisis during the end of Jimmy Carter's

presidency as example of "television diplomacy" involving the Middle East. Moreover, television is one of the primary sources of national and international news for many Americans. As a PEW research on "Modern News Consumer" shows, "Americans express a clear preference for getting their news on a screen – though which screen that is varies. TV remains the dominant screen, followed by digital" (Mitchell, Gottfried, Bartell & Shearer, 2016, July 7). About 57 percent of Americans get their news from television. Studying the coverage of negotiations with Iran in television news and the way the sources are selected for this coverage is of great importance. In this regard, the focus of this study is on four broadcast television networks of ABC News, CBC News, NBC News and FOX.

CHAPTER 2

INDEXING THEORY

Media scholars have well established that reporters turn to public officials as their most important and prominent sources for political stories (Sigal, 1986; Hallin, 1989; Gans, 1979). Sigal (1973) argues that even when journalists are in a position that they can observe an event directly, they do not prefer to offer their own interpretations and instead they rely on news sources to tell the story. He believes that "for the reporter, in short, most news is not what happened, but what someone says has happened" (Sigal, 1973, p. 69). Journalists are attracted to official sources due to the easy access to the flow of information provided by the government (Hallin, 1989). Moreover, official sources are presumed to be more credible, whereas citing non-official sources might increase the possibility of inaccuracies and errors in the news (Mermin, 1999). Dependence of journalists on officials has become an ingrained feature of modern journalism and Bennett's (1990) theory of press indexing shows how this dependence has shaped the press-government interactions.

Indexing theory states that "official debate sets the parameters of media debate, establishing the boundaries or agenda of public discussion" (Bennett, 1990, as cited in Althaus, et al., 1996, p. 408). According to this theory, journalists are unlikely to challenge the government when there is strong consensus about an issue in the administration, but they become the voice of dissent when there is a lack of consensus among the officials (Niven, 2004, as cited in Harp, Loke & Bachmann, 2010). Indexing theory asserts that the journalists "tend to index the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views

expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic" (Bennett, 1990, p. 106). In other words, journalists portray the issues in the spectrum of perspectives of those who are in power. Bennett (1990) argues that the emphasis of official sources makes "other" (e.g. non-official sources) of secondary importance and they are covered when they have the same voice or opinion as official circles. Although according to some perspectives, officials are the representative of their people, others argue that the effectiveness of journalism as a safeguard in democracy is in danger by this pattern (Mermin, 1999). Bennett (1990) indicates that "The press in this system might be seen to have settled for a comfortable role as 'keeper of the official record' while abdicating its traditional mandate to raise an independent 'voice of the people' under appropriate circumstances" (p. 106).

Hallin (1989) was one of the first to talk about the importance of political environment on the media. While many believed that the Vietnam war faced the growing dissatisfaction due to the fact than it had been the first televised conflict, Hallin showed that the early coverage of the war was extremely supportive of the U.S. policy. The media changed its coverage only when the elites (mainly the Congress) showed dissent toward the administration policies and as Hallin puts it "the sphere of consensus" changed to the "sphere of legitimate controversy". In other words, he provided substantial evidence that changing in the political environment (declining consensus among elites) led to the shift in media coverage (negative coverage of the war).

Bennett (1990) by analyzing *The New York Time*s coverage of U.S. policy making on Nicaragua in the mid-1980s, found that journalists covered the opposition when the debate between the administration and the Congress was intense; but when the congressional opposition collapsed the volume of opposition in news and editorials collapsed accordingly. Additionally, the opinions in news stories, before and after the collapse of congressional opposition, derived

heavily from government officials. Even the investigation of editorials revealed a strong correlation with the levels of official opposition reported in the news stories. "Without exception, when the ratio of voices in Congress opposing administration policy went up, so did the ratio of opposing *New York Times* op-ed page opinion. When the ratio of congressional opposition went down, so did the ratio of *Times* opposition to support on its op-ed page" (Bennett, 1990, p. 119). Bennett mentions that the result could be seen more interesting when we consider that the *New York Times* has a reputation for having a liberal editorial policy and the favored policy of the conservative president, Ronald Reagan, could be seen inherently in contrast with the newspaper's ideologies. He concludes that "*Times* coverage of Nicaragua was cued by Congress, not by the paper's own political agenda or by a sense of "adversarial journalism" (Bennett, 1990, p. 121).

Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston (2006) tracked four labels that were most prevalent in news coverage of Abu Ghraib in 2004: mistreatment, scandal, abuse and torture. The results showed that mainstream press declined to counterframe Abu Ghraib in a way that challenged Bush administration framing. Although "torture policy" frame was supported by evidence and sources available to mainstream journalists, it was mostly ignored in the favor of the administration's preferred "isolated abuse" frame. It is interesting that "torture appeared most prominently in the two weeks after the story broke" (Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston, 2007, p. 95), but faded quickly when the voice of government official voices became rampant about the issue.

The term torture became more prominent in the news when it was mentioned by official figures like Senator John McCain and other leaders who opposed the policy (Bennett et al., 2006). In 54 articles that mentioned McCain amendment, which proposed to limit the cruel and

inhuman treatment of prisoners, 42 articles or 77% included the term torture. The finding of this study indicated that "lacking any consistent counter-framing by high-level officials, the national media declined to challenge the administration" (Bennett et al., 2006, p. 481). "The framing of events at Abu Ghraib by the mainstream press followed the predictable pattern of indexing" (Bennett et al., 2006, p. 481). Even when provided with considerable evidence, the U.S. media "proved unable or unwilling to construct a coherent challenge to the administration's claims about its policies on torturing detainees" (Bennett et al., 2006, p. 482).

In a study that examined eight years of *CNN* international affairs coverage from 1994 to 2001, Livingston and Bennett (2003) found that event-driven news stories have become more common in comparison with institution-based stories due to technological advancements in this era, but still the officials are as much a part of the news as before. Although event-driven news has become more prevalent, the spontaneous and unpredicted nature of it has not changed the predominance of officials as news sources.

Alexseev and Bennett (1995) in a comparative study of parallel national security issues in the news in three nations of the United States, Great Britain, and Russia at the end of Cold war found that "in all three cases policy coverage was driven overwhelmingly by government elites" (p. 395). The coverage in the United States was mostly indexed according to institutional or congressional decisions, and in British the party debate was the most prominent source of news. In Russia, the journalists were found to report a mix of voices from the old and new elites. All three cases indicated a lack of press autonomy toward administration sources. These findings show that "the volumes of reported opinion in the American, British and Soviet press waxed and waned, coinciding with the highs and lows of government activity on the given issues" (p. 401).

Mermin (1999) argued that the coverage of U.S. intervention in the post-Vietnam era was based on the spectrum of debate in Washington. He writes that "the source of information on American foreign policy is the U.S. government, then what is being reported is not the story, but a story, one told by a powerful interested party" (p.145). Mermin finds that in the coverage of U.S. intervention in the post-Vietnam era, "the *New York Times*, *World News Tonight*, and the *MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour* have made no independent contribution (except at the margins) to foreign policy debate in the United States" (p 143). The results showed that the spectrum of debate in Washington had determined the spectrum of debate in the news.

Cook (1994) showed that in television news coverage of the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991, American newscasters were focused on key administration elites in the Pentagon, the State Department, and the White house as their main sources. In comparison to U.S., he states that French television news at that time used the party leaders to frame the story of war. He argued that in U.S. case the administration had the complete control on media framing of news, while the French system of party cuing made the partisan opposition to administration policy part of the developing story.

Shaw and Martin (1993) found that in the first Gulf War, most of the reported story in *The Washington Post* contained supportive viewpoints of administrative officials and they had President George H.W. Bush as the main source of the news. Entman and Page (1994) also found that George H. W. Bush administration in the Gulf War policy activities had the dominant voice in the news even in the periods of major congressional opposition. Similarly, Entman (2004) found that in 1988 incident in which a U.S. naval vessel shot down an Iranian civilian airliner and killed 290 people, the media frame discouraged any dissonant administrative

interpretation. The media by de-emphasizing the American agency and the victims, showed the incident as a technical problem and refused to challenge the discourse of officials about the issue.

Harp, Loke and Bachmann (2010) examined 2003-2007 *Time* magazine coverage of dissenting voices against war in Iraq. They found that these dissenting voices were mostly from official sources, although American and Iraqi civilians had space to voice their dissatisfaction. Therefore, this research supports the prediction of indexing theory and shows that even when it comes to criticizing the war, still the traditional power sources have the highest representation in the news. "This finding is interesting and also expected under the indexing hypothesis_ it shows that even when questioning or criticizing a president's decisions, critique comes from an official voice" (Harp, et al., 2010, p. 476).

Rendall and Broughel (2003) examined 1617 on camera sources broadcast on network and cable television in the period of three-week after the first day of bombing in Iraq in March 19, 2003. They found that official voices dominated the newscasts and the opponents of the war had been notably underrepresented. More than 60% of all sources were officials and 3% of the U.S. sources were anti-war. Research also showed that in framing the war stories, the victims of war and alternative viewpoints constitute the weakest part of the narrative (Ettema, 1994).

Lewis and Rose (2002) based on an analysis of *ABC News*, the *New York Times*, and presidential news conferences found that prior to the Persian Gulf War, the issue of the power to declare war was ignored by media sources until it became a source of conflict between Congress and Bush administration. The authority of George Bush to start a war was not questioned by the media until it became a question and source of controversy among officials in Washington. This research showed the passivity of media to frame the central issues and how they judge the newsworthiness of stories according to official actors in Washington. In their conclusion they

write: "Like Mermin (1999), Zaller and Chiu (1996), Bennett (1990), and Hallin (1986), we found that media coverage of foreign policy was largely passive rather than independent, with journalists taking cues about the newsworthiness of their stories from official actors in Washington" (p. 570). Therefore, like previous researches, they showed that the range of foreign policy debate reported in the media is a function of the range of debate in Washington, DC.

Zaller and Chiu (1996) found that the reporters in the news coverage of U.S. foreign policy crises from 1945 to 1991 "tended to index their coverage to reflect the range of views that exists within the government" (p. 385). This study presented strong evidence for the slant of press coverage toward official sources and notably members of Congress and president.

Studying the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, Domke, Graham, Coe, John and Coopman (2006) found support for the indexing theory. The researchers focused on the Patriot Act that was quickly adopted after the attack and granted Bush administration extensive powers to combat terrorist activities. This research suggested that the Bush administration used the media to gain Congressional support for the Act. The official voice was dominant in this period, whereas many human right advocates and interest groups spoke against the Act. The Patriot Act comprised the suggestions that federal agents could detain noncitizens, initiate e-mail and internet surveillance, and intensify the monitoring of student visas. Similarly, Entman (2003) showed that George W. Bush's framing of the 9/11 attacks as the commencement of a global war against terrorism was not significantly challenged by the press for some time after 9/11. Griffin (2004) also found that photographs in *Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report* after 9/11 were in accord to the president's War on Terrorism frame.

However, some studies have cast doubt on this theory. In a research of broadcast evening news during 1990-1991 Persian Gulf crisis, Althaus (2003) found that the news discourse was

not closely tied to the discourse of incumbent officials. Their results indicated that "just 36% of total Gulf crisis discourse came from administration sources, and only 6% came from members of Congress" (p. 390). Therefore, the administration and congressional sources were less dominant in television coverage that they expect to be in the indexing literature. The second most common sources were journalists (17%), followed by "American citizens (14%), foreign officials from countries other than Iraq (10%), Iraqi officials (7%), experts (5%), foreign citizens from countries other than Iraq (4%), and Iraqi citizens (1%)" (p. 390). This research showed that television news coverage did not merely voiced the Bush administration at that time. "Instead the evidence from this case suggests that journalists exercised considerable discretion in locating and airing oppositional voices" (p. 381).

Althaus, Edy, Entman, and Phalen (1996) analyzed the *New York Times* coverage of the U.S.-Libya crisis of 1985-1986 and discovered that journalists preferred foreign sources to provide opinions, and they marginalized some U.S. elite sources (administration, congress, and experts) which is in contrast with the indexing theory predictions. Althaus et al. (1996) suspect that as the allies were highly involved in the policy process of Libya bombing during the Reagan administration, citing domestic sources had been decreased due to their relatively low opposition. Consequently, the allies and foreign sources became the major opposition voices. Similarly, Lawrence (1996) found that in two incidences of police brutality in Los Angeles, non-official viewpoints became prominent in the incidents' news coverage. She argues that these findings could be related to the topic of police brutality and the fact that officials prefer to remain silent about it.

Bennett (1990) asserts that "among the issue areas in which indexing might be expected to operate most consistently are military decisions, foreign affairs, trade and macroeconomic

policy areas of great importance not only to corporate economic interests but to the advancement of state power as well" (p. 122). The issue of Iran negotiations and then Iran deal offers an ideal scenario for a research based on indexing theory. It is a U.S. foreign policy case and the United States has been polarized regarding this issue. The importance of this issue and the fact that it was faced with major opposition in the Congress and the widespread opposition that U.S. administration was faced from its allies during negotiations and after reaching the deal makes it a sensitive, eminent and long-term political matter in American news agenda.

Iran's Nuclear Negotiations: A Background

In August 2002, the national council of resistance of Iran, an opposition group based in Paris, revealed the existence of undeclared nuclear facilities in Iran (Tache, 2015). In February 2003, the incumbent president, Mohammad Khatami acknowledged the existence of Natanz facility (Kemp, 2003). He claimed that Natanz was only constructed to produce low-enriched uranium fuel for nuclear power plants. Iran agreed to visit request of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and in late February IAEA visited the mentioned site. Consequently, in June 2003, Iran allowed inspectors to visit the Kalaye Electric company. But it did not permit them to take samples, and IAEA reported that Iran failed to meet the obligations (Lyons, 2015, July 14). In 2004, Iran accepted the Paris agreement with EU-3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom). Due to this agreement, Iran suspended enrichment-related activities as well as enrichment itself (Chubin, 2006).

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the president of Iran in August 2005. As president he promptly accused Iranian diplomats who were engaged in the Paris agreement of treason, and in

April 2006, Iran announced that it has resumed nuclear enrichment at Natanz (Hadley, 2010, November 3).

Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, in May 2006 announced that the United States would engage in the EU-3's negotiations with Iran if Tehran suspended all enrichment-related activities. In a month the negotiations between Iran and P5+1 (five permanent U.N. Security Council members_ Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany) started (Hadley, 2010, November 3). Ali Larijani as the representative of Iran and Javier Solana had a series of meeting, but no result was achieved and Larijani resigned. Since the negotiations failed, stronger sanctions enforced on Iran, and the lives of millions of Iranians got harder to high unemployment, inflation, and medicine shortages. According to Guzman (2013, April 10) the goal of Washington to enforce these sanctions was to create instability, and "make life difficult for Iranian citizens in hopes that they can start a revolution to overthrow their government".

After the election of President Hassan Rouhani in June 14, 2013 the talks between Iran and six world powers entered a new era. Rouhani during his candidacy in a critique of Ahmadinejad's economic record said "my government will be one of prudence and hope and my message is about saving the economy, reviving ethics and interactions with the world" (George, 2013, April 11). By such statements he made it clear that restoring the economy from the burden of financial sanctions and improving the rocky relations with Western nations would be his government's priorities.

President Hassan Rouhani three days after his inauguration demonstrated his willingness to resume serious negotiations with P5+1 on Iran's nuclear program. On September 27, 2013, President Barak Obama described the Rouhani's government as "making the highest level

contact between the U.S. and Iran since 1979" (Davenport, 2016). He also mentioned that serious obstacles were to overcome, but he believed a comprehensive resolution could be reached.

On October 15 and 16, 2013, the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 formally started in Geneva. On April 2, 2015, Iran and P5+1 announced agreement on a general framework, and they agreed to continue meeting to finalize a deal before June 30 (Davenport, 2016). On November 24, 2013, the Geneva interim agreement titled as the Joint Plan of Action was agreed between Iran and six major powers in Switzerland (Gearan & Warrick, 2013, November 24). After 20 months of negotiations, with a delay of more than two weeks, on July 14, 2015, Iran and P5+1 reached a historic accord. According to it, Tehran's nuclear ability for more than 10 years would be limited in return for lifting international and financial sanctions (Gordon & Sanger, 2015, July 14).

As soon as the agreement was announced, the harshest criticism of this deal started in the press in the United States of America, and in other countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia. The countries that were afraid that this deal will ultimately empower Iran in the Middle East and will cause further conflict in the region (DeYoung, 2015, July 29) (Ryan, 2015, July 21) (Morris & Naylor, 2015, July 14). President Obama made it clear that he would fight to preserve the deal from critics in congress who will have 60 days to review it. He stated: "I will veto any legislation that prevents the successful implementation of this deal" (Gordon & Sanger, 2015, July 14).

Finally, on January 16, 2016, oil and financial sanctions on Iran were lifted as the country had followed the promises to dismantle large sections of its nuclear program (Sanger, 2016, January 16). With the start of implementation day, although the critics continued to attack the deal, decades of isolation of Iran started to disappear and hope of a normal relationship with world powers emerged among Iranians.

As the history of negotiations reveals, there have been three hallmark events since the start of negotiations until the implementation date in this process. November 24, 2013 (Interim agreement), July 14, 2015 (Final agreement), January 16, 2016 (implementation of deal). According to these important dates the news transcripts were divided into two time periods:

- Time period #1: August 1, 2013 to July 14, 2015. Iranian president Hassan Rouhani was inaugurated on August 3, 2013 and soon thereafter on August 6, he called for resumption of negotiations. On July 14, 2015, the final deal was signed.

- Time Period #2: July 15, 2015 to June 16, 2016. The deal was implemented on January 16, 2016 and the aftermath of implementation was analyzed until June 16, 2016.

Research Questions

The decision to make a deal with Iran did not happen in an urgent situation. Therefore, there was enough time for journalists to debate different sources and to investigate the issue. Accordingly, it is important to study the prominence of sources in the period under study. The analysis focuses on two crucial periods of this deal (pre-deal & post-deal periods) when critical and supportive assertions would be expected to be at especially high levels.

This study examines the following research questions:

RQ1: What sources are most prominent in ABC News, CBC News, NBC News and *FOX News Sunday* coverage of nuclear negotiations with Iran?

RQ2: How prominent are U.S., Iranian, and other international governmental sources in ABC News, CBC News, NBC News and *FOX News Sunday* coverage of nuclear negotiations with Iran?

RQ3: Are there differences in source prominence in ABC News, CBC News, NBC News and *FOX News Sunday* coverage of nuclear negotiations with Iran during the two time periods examined?

RQ4: What is the distribution of positive, negative and neutral/divided evaluative statements by sources in ABC News, CBC News, NBC News and *FOX News Sunday* coverage of nuclear negotiations with Iran?

RQ5: Are there differences among source types in the distribution of positive, negative and neutral/divided evaluative statements in ABC News, CBC News, NBC News and *FOX News Sunday* coverage of nuclear negotiations with Iran?

RQ6: Are there differences among source types in the distribution of positive, negative and neutral/divided statements in ABC News, CBC News, NBC News and *FOX News Sunday* coverage of nuclear negotiations with Iran during the four time periods examined?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The principal method employed in this research is content analysis. Harold Lasswell (1927) was among the first to use content analysis to study propaganda. Lasswell, Lerner, and Pool (1952) state "content analysis operates on the view that verbal behavior is a form of human behavior, that the flow of symbols is a part of the flow of events, and that the communication process is an aspect of the historical process…content analysis is a technique which aims at describing, with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time" (p. 34). The purpose of content analysis could be encapsulated in the statement of Lasswell (as cited in Shoemaker and Reese, 1969) about this method: "Who says what Through which channel to whom with what effect" (p. 12).

Stroud and Higgins (2011) argue that "content analysis is a method of quantitatively analyzing communication messages" (p. 123). This method is "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of mass communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). Kerlinger (1986) defines content analysis as "a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables" (p. 476). According to this definition, the important qualities of content analysis are systematic, objective and quantitative.

Neuman (1997) describes content analysis as "a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of text. The content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated. The text is anything written, visual or spoken that serves

as a medium for communication" (pp. 272-273). Berger (1991) says Content analysis "is a research technique that is based on measuring the amount of something (violence, negative portrayals of women, or whatever) in a representative sample of some mass-mediated popular form of art" (p. 25). This method was chosen for this study because its purpose is to measure the frequency of different sources that were cited by journalists about Iran deal. This study by using content analysis examines the frequency of sources and the valence of statements (Positive/Negative/Neutral).

<div align="center">Population and Sample</div>

White (1961) writes, "it was possible for the first time to answer an inquiring foreign visitor as to what Americans do in the evening … they watch television" (p. 336). By 1970s television has become a major source to get the news for Americans (Comstock, 1991). It still dominates the news in the United States. According to *American Press Institute* (2014, March 17) among a wide variety of devices which are used by Americans to follow the news, television has been reported the most frequently utilized device (87%). A recent study by Pew Research Center shows, although digital platforms are rising as a source of news, television remains the top source for news for most Americans (Anderson, 2016). Moreover, television can have an impact on public opinion and consequently on the government's formulation of foreign policy (Utley, 1997). The role of television coverage of "Vietnam in 1968, the seizure of American embassy in Tehran in 1979, the terrorist attacks on the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut in 1982, and the killing of American troops in Somalia in 1994" as a challenge to policymakers has been established (Utley, 1997, p. 4). Due to the prevalence and importance of television news, especially for the dramatic coverage of the Middle East in the United States, the theoretical

population in this study was all the American broadcast networks discussing the negotiations

between Iran and P5+1, often referred to as "the Iran deal." The sample included news

transcripts of ABC News, CBS News, NBC News and *FOX News Sunday* from August 1, 2013

to June 16, 2016. It should be mentioned that FOX broadcast network does not have a nightly

news program. However, the network broadcasts *FOX News Sunday*, a new program from FOX

News Channel on Sunday mornings. That explains why this program is the only news broadcast

from FOX in the data collected for this research.

The transcripts were accessed via the LexisNexis Academic database. A search was

conducted for transcripts in the above mentioned broadcast networks using the index term "Iran

deal." Different relevant index terms were searched and it was clear that using "Iran deal" leads

to the most inclusive results. In LexisNexis "Search the broadcast transcripts" section, an

advanced search was used. The goal was to find news transcripts, in any form, including

interviews, roundtables and news sections about the Iran deal.

Unit of Analysis

Each evaluative statement was used as the unit of analysis. Statements that were about

matters or individuals related to the nuclear negotiations with Iran, including the Iran deal,

characterizations of Iran, the U.S., Iranian leaders, U.S. leaders or the Iranian and U.S.

negotiating teams were coded. Statements providing only descriptive, technical or logistical

information related to the U.S. nuclear negotiations with Iran were not included. Like Mermin

(1999), this study examined each paragraph of the transcripts to see if evaluative statements were

present. If the same person makes more than one statement in a paragraph, this study code that

source once for the statements.

<u>Categories for Analysis</u>

Each statement has been coded according to three criteria. The statements were coded based on their date: 1) Pre-deal period (August 1, 2013 to July 14, 2015), 2) After-deal period (July 15, 2015 to June 16, 2016).

Based in part on prior research on sourcing patterns (Hallin, Manoff & Weddle, 1993), the types of sources were coded into 44 categories: (1) U.S. President; (2) White House; (3) Vice-president of U.S.; (4) Secretary of State; (5) State Department; (6) Secretary of Defense; (7) Pentagon; (8) Negotiating team U.S. (other than Kerry); (9) Spokesperson _if this is the only identifier; (10) U.S. Senators; (11) U.S. Congressmen; (12) Former U.S. President; (13) Former U.S. Vice-president; (14) Former Secretary of State; (15) Former Secretary of Defense; (16) Former Pentagon; (17) Former U.S. Senators; (18) Former U.S. Congressmen; (19) Government Unspecified; (20) Think Tank; (21) U.S. Academic; (22) Lobbyist; (23) Activist; (24) Public Opinion Polls; (25) Celebrity; (26) Other Non-governmental sources; (27) Governmental sources other than U.S. or Iran; (28) President of Iran; (29) Supreme Leader of Iran; (30) Members of Iranian Parliament; (31) Other Iranian Governmental sources; (32) Iranian Non-governmental sources; (33) Iranian Foreign Minister (Mohammad Javad Zarif); (34) 5+1; (35) United Nations; (36) International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); (37) Unknown; (38) Other; (39) Former Iranian Governmental sources; (40) Journalists; (41) Iranian Negotiating Team; (42) Israel; (43) Saudi Arabia; (44) Presidential Candidates.

Because the data collected for some categories were too small for statistical analysis after the tabulation of the results, categories were collapsed into broader but still inclusive ones. The new 23 categories were as follows: (1) U.S. President; (2) White House/ Vice-President; (3) State Department; (4) Pentagon; (5) U.S. Negotiating Team; (6) U.S. Senators; (7) U.S.

Congressmen; (8) Former U.S. Governmental; (9) Think Tank; (10) U.S. Academic; (11) Public Opinion Polls; (12) Other U.S. Non-governmental; (13) Governmental Sources other than U.S, Iran, Israel or Saudi Arabia; (14) Iranian President; (15) Iranian Supreme Leader; (16) Other Iranian Governmental; (17) Iranian Non-governmental; (18) Iranian Foreign Minister; (19) Other; (20) Journalists; (21) Israeli Governmental; (22) Saudi Arabian Governmental; (23) Presidential Candidates.

23 Categories were collapsed into 11 broader categories to achieve a conclusive picture of all sources. For example, different parts of the U.S. executive branch were collapsed to create a single category as the representative of the executive branch. Additionally, in order to meet the statistical assumptions of conducting a reliable Chi-Square analysis, the 11 categories were used to conduct Chi-Square analysis. The 11 categories were as follows: 1) U.S. Executive Branch; 2) U.S. Congressional; 3) Former U.S. Governmental; 4) U.S. Non-governmental; 5) Governmental sources Other than Iran and U.S. (Except Israel); 6) Iranian Governmental; 7) Iranian Non-governmental; 8) Other; 9) Journalists; 10) Israel; 11) Presidential Candidates.

The analyzed statements were coded into three categories: (1) Positive: A statement expressing support of matters or individuals related to the Iran deal, (2) Negative: A statement expressing opposition to matters or individuals related to the Iran deal, (3) Neutral/Divided: A statement that is neutral or expressing conflicting or mixed information (both positive and negative) about matters or individuals related to the Iran deal.

Coding Procedure. Two coders were used to analyze news transcripts in this study. The coders coded according to the instructions in the codebook (see Appendix A) and they conducted a content analysis of the mentioned categories in sampled news transcripts. First, the coders noted the name of channel and the date. Then, the coders analyzed each paragraph of news transcripts to see whether it is consisted of a statement which meets the criteria mentioned before. The appropriate statements were coded based on the source categories and then they were coded according to their tones. As mentioned before, each individual source was coded once in a paragraph, even if more than one statement had been attributed to that source. Furthermore, each source has been coded according to the way it was identified in the news transcript. The statements were coded as positive, negative, neutral/divided, if they were presumably supportive, critical or neutral. Most officials are not explicit in their messages (Mermin, 1999), and ruling out the implicit statements could have caused excluding most of the data.

If the news transcript was an interview, we coded the sources that were used by the interviewer in his/her questions, but not the sources that were used by the interviewee. Therefore, each paragraph that was a statement of the interviewee was just coded for that person without considering if other sources were mentioned in the interviewee's responses. The purpose of this study is to measure the sources that are considered as prominent by the media. Accordingly, this study coded these sources as they appeared on these broadcast news programs.

Reliability. Reliability is defined as the degree of agreement between two sets of frequencies of nominal data which are achieved based on the results of analysis of the same communication by two different and independent analysts (Janice, Fadner & Janowitz, 1943).

In this study, coder 1 coded 100% of the news transcripts (137 news transcript articles). For intercoder-reliability, coder 2 coded more than 10% of articles which were selected randomly (14 news transcript articles). There were 105 evaluative statements in the sample.

Intercoder reliability was measured using Scott's Pi method. Scott's Pi formula "takes into account both the observed proportion of agreement (PA_0) and the proportion that would be expected by chance (PA_E)" (Craig, 1981, p. 260). Expected agreement formula for Scott's Pi is $\sum pi^2$, pi is the proportion of samples coded as they belong to the ith category (Scott, 1995). To calculate this quantity, first we should add each coder's respective totals or marginals within each coding category and then the calculated marginal sum is divided by the number of decisions for the variable multiplied by the number of coders (Freelon, 2010). Finally each joint marginal proportion is squared and the sum of these squares is the expected agreement value for Scott's Pi. Observed agreement is the number of coders' consensus decisions divided by the total number of decisions that the two coders have made. The Scott's Pi formula is as follows:

pi = observed agreement in decimal - expected agreement / 1 - expected agreement

In this study, the observed agreement for the first category (sources) has been approximately 0.9143. Using Scott's Pi the level of agreement was approximately 0.86 for this category. The observed agreement for the second category (valence of the statement) has been approximately 0.9905 and the amount of agreement according to Scott's Pi was 0.981. As the scores have shown, both categories appear to be quite reliable.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

A total of 137 (n=137) news broadcast transcripts were examined, 36 of which were in

ABC News transcripts (n=36, 26.3%), 41 in CBS News transcripts (n=41, 29.9%), 13 in *FOX*

News Sunday transcripts (n=13 9.5%), and 47 in NBC News transcripts (n=47, 34.3%). The

stories contained 1019 (N=1019) evaluative statements. There were 137 evaluative statements

(n=137, 13.4%) in ABC News transcripts, 454 in CBS News transcripts (n=454, 44.6%), 156 in

FOX News Sunday transcripts (n=156, 15.3%) and 272 in NBC News transcripts (n=272,

26.7%).

RQ1 addresses the overall prominence of sources in coverage of nuclear negotiations

with Iran. Table 1 shows that U.S. Senators were the leading source category with 169 (16.6%)

of the evaluative statements. Journalists made 161 (15.8%) evaluative statements, followed by

presidential candidates with 143 (14%), the State Department with 109 (10.7%) and Israeli

governmental sources with 102 (10%) evaluative statements (See Table 1). However, according

to Table 2, U.S. executive branch sources were the most prominent source of statements (n=255,

25%), followed by U.S. congressional sources (n=197, 19.3%), journalists, presidential

Candidates and Israeli governmental sources.

RQ2 examines the prominence of U.S., Iranian and other international governmental

sources. U.S. executive branch sources made 255 (25%) of the evaluative statements, while U.S.

congressional sources made 197 (19.3%) evaluative statements (Table 2). In all, U.S.

governmental sources made 452 (44.4%) of the evaluative statements.

Iranian governmental sources combined to make 31 (3%) evaluative statements (Table 2). The most Iranian prominent source was "other Iranian governmental" (n=12, 1.2%), followed by Iranian Foreign Minister (n=10, 1%) (Table 1). Supreme Leader of Iran has made 8 (0.8%) statements and President of Iran has made only 1 (0.1%) statement (Table 1).

Other international governmental sources except Israel made a total of 16 (1.6%) evaluative statements (Table 2). Israeli governmental sources made 102 (10%) statements and this country has been the most prominent governmental source of news after U.S. governmental sources.

Table 1

Frequency of Evaluative Statements by Source (23 Categories) (N=1019)

Source	Frequency	Percentage
U.S. President	86	8.4
White House/Vice President	44	4.3
State Department	109	10.7
Pentagon	15	1.5
U.S. Negotiating Team	1	.1
U.S. Senators	169	16.6
U.S. Congressmen	28	2.7
Former U.S. Governmental	43	4.2
Think Tank	15	1.5
U.S. Academic	1	.1
Public Opinion Polls	6	.6
Other Non-governmental	15	1.5
Gov. (Other than U.S. & Iran)	13	1.3
President of Iran	1	.1
Supreme Leader of Iran	8	.8
Other Iranian Governmental	12	1.2
Iranian Non-governmental	6	.6
Iranian Foreign Minister	10	1.0
Other	28	2.7
Journalists	161	15.8
Israel	102	10.0
Saudi Arabia	3	.3
Presidential Candidates	143	14.0
Total	1019	100.0

Table 2

Frequency of Evaluative Statements by Source (11 Categories) (N=1019)

Source	Frequency	Percentage
U.S. Executive Branch	255	25.0
U.S. Congressional	197	19.3
Former U.S. Governmental	43	4.2
U.S. Non-governmental	37	3.6
Gov. Other than U.S. Iran & Israel	16	1.6
Iranian Governmental	31	3.0
Iranian Non-governmental	6	.6
Other	28	2.7
Journalists	161	15.8
Israel	102	10.0
Presidential Candidates	143	14.0
Total	1019	100.0

RQ3 asks if there were differences in source prominence during the two time periods examined. Table 3 shows a significant overall difference (Chi Square (10, N=1019) =151.888, p < .001). Most of the U.S. congressional sources' statements were stated in the pre-deal period (72.1%). Israeli (60.08%) and Iranian governmental sources (87.1%) also were more prominent in the pre-deal period. However, U.S. executive branch (53.3%), former U.S. governmental (86%), U.S. non-governmental (64.9%), presidential candidates (79%), and governmental sources other than U.S. and Iran (except Israel) (81.3%) were more prominent in the after-deal period.

Table 3

Frequency of Evaluative Statements by Source in Each Time Period

Source	Pre-deal	After-deal	Total
U.S. Executive Branch	119	136	255
% within Source	46.7	53.3	100.0
% within Timeframe	22.8	27.4	25.0
U.S. Congressional	142	55	197
% within Source	72.1	27.9	100.0
% within Timeframe	27.2	11.1	19.3
Former U.S. Governmental	6	37	43
% within Source	14.0	86.0	100.0
% within Timeframe	1.1	7.4	4.2
U.S. Non-governmental	13	24	37
% within Source	35.1	64.9	100.0
% within Timeframe	2.5	4.8	3.6
Gov. Other than U.S. Iran & Israel	3	13	16
% within Source	18.8	81.3	100.0
% within Timeframe	0.6	2.6	1.6
Iranian Governmental	27	4	31
% within Source	87.1	12.9	100.0
% within Timeframe	5.2	0.8	3.0
Iranian Non-governmental	4	2	6
% within Source	66.7	33.3	100.0
% within Timeframe	0.8	0.4	0.6
Other	19	9	28
% within Source	67.9	32.1	100.0
% within Timeframe	3.6	1.8	2.7
Journalists	97	64	161
% within Source	60.2	39.8	100
% within Timeframe	18.6	12.9	15.8
Israel	62	40	102
% within Source	60.8	39.2	100.0
% within Timeframe	11.9	8.0	10.0
Presidential Candidates	30	113	143
% within Source	21.0	79.0	100.0
% within Timeframe	5.7	22.7	14.0
Total	522	497	1019
% within Source	51.2	48.8	100.0
% within Timeframe	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi-Square (10, N=1,019) = 151.888, p < 0.001

RQ4, RQ5 and RQ6 are concerned with the valence of evaluative statements made by sources. Table 4 shows that overall, 33.1% (n=337) of the evaluative statements were classified as positive, 53.2% (n=542) as negative and 13.7% (n=140) as neutral/divided (RQ4).

Results (Table 5) show a significant difference in individual source types in terms of valence (Chi-Square (20, N=1019) = 618.478, $p < .001$) (RQ5). As shown in Table 5, U.S. executive branch sources made the most positive evaluative statements. 62.6% of all positive statements have been made by them. However, evaluative statements by U.S. congressional sources were primarily negative and 79.2% of their total statements have been negative. Likewise, the most negative statements among sources were made by U.S. congressional sources (28.8%), followed by presidential candidates (23.4%), Israel (18.6%), and journalists (13.7%).

Results (Table 4) show a significant difference in source valence during the two time periods (Chi-Square (2, N=1019) = 13.962, $p < .01$) (RQ6). As shown in table 4, negative evaluative statements were the leading category in pre-deal period (54.4%) and After-deal period (51.9%). However, the share of positive statements has risen in the after-deal period (37.6%) in comparison to the pre-deal period (28.7%). The share of neutral/divided statements has been the least in both time periods, although they have been more noticeable in the first time period (16.9%) in comparison to the second time period (10.5%).

Table 4

Valence Distribution of Evaluative Statements in Each Time Period

Opinion	Prep-deal	After-deal	Total
Positive	150	187	337
% within Opinion	44.5	55.5	100.0
% within Timeframe	28.7	37.6	33.1
Negative	284	258	542
% within Opinion	52.4	47.6	100.0
% within Timeframe	54.4	51.9	53.2
Neutral	88	52	140
% within Opinion	62.9	37.1	100.0
% within Timeframe	16.9	10.5	13.7
Total	522	497	1019
% within Opinion	51.2	48.8	100.0
% within Timeframe	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi-Square (2, N=1,019) = 13.962, $p < 0.01$

Table 5

Valence Distribution of Evaluative Statements by Source Type

Source	Positive	Negative	Neutral
U.S. Executive Branch	211	14	30
% within Source	82.7	5.5	11.8
% within Opinion	62.6	2.6	21.4
U.S. Congressional	18	156	23
% within Source	9.1	79.2	11.7
% within Opinion	5.3	28.8	16.4
Former U.S. Governmental	19	19	5
% within Source	44.2	44.2	11.6
% within Opinion	5.6	3.5	3.6
U.S. Non-governmental	8	20	9
% within Source	21.6	54.1	24.3
% within Opinion	2.4	3.7	6.4
Gov. Other than U.S. Iran & Israel	13	3	0
% within Source	81.3	18.8	0.0
% within Opinion	3.9	0.6	0.0
Iranian Governmental	16	11	4
% within Source	51.6	35.5	12.9
% within Opinion	4.7	2.0	2.9
Iranian Non-governmental	5	1	0
% within Source	83.3	16.7	0.0
% within Opinion	1.5	0.2	0.0
Other	8	16	4
% within Source	28.6	57.1	14.3
% within Opinion	2.4	3.0	2.9
Journalists	31	74	56
% within Source	19.3	46.0	34.8
% within Opinion	9.2	13.7	40.0
Israel	0	101	1
% within Source	0.0	99.0	1.0
% within Opinion	0.0	18.6	0.7
Presidential Candidates	8	127	8
% within Source	5.6	88.8	5.6
% within Opinion	2.4	23.4	5.7
Total	337	542	140
% within Source	33.1	53.2	13.7
% within Opinion	100.0	100.0	100.0

Chi-Square (20, N=1,019) = 618.478, p < 0. 001

CHAPTER 5

"AN AWKWARD PROBLEM IN U.S. JOURNALISM"

Discussion

The goal of this research was to examine news coverage of Iran deal in broadcast news

channels of ABC News, CBS News, NBC News and *FOX News Sunday* with respect to

Bennett's "indexing" hypothesis.

The findings can be summarized in four main observations:

1) U.S. Officials (the administration and Congress) were the most prominent sources. 2)

Criticism of the deal was reported frequently, although support was also covered. 3) The

prominence of media attention to critics and supporters was calibrated according to the degree of

power they could have over the deal. 4) Journalists were the most cited non-governmental

sources which shows some degree of independence from the officials in the television news.

This research has presented strong evidence of the association between American media

coverage of a foreign policy issue and the positions taken by officials within the government,

notably congressional and executive branch sources. As Bennett (1990) asserts the mass media

news professionals "tend to index the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials

according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debates about a given

topic" (p. 106). This is confirmed by finds that show the U.S. executive branch has been the

dominant source (25%) in the media coverage of Iran deal since August 1, 2013 to June 16,

2016, and the congressional sources were the second dominant source in this period. Mermin

(1999) expected in the coverage of the Grenada invasion critical perspectives would be covered

significantly in the news media because of the domestic conflicts among the elites. Likewise, because Iran deal faced a congressional challenge, it was expected that the critical perspectives towards the agreement with Iran would generate significant coverage of opposing views. The congressional sources have become the main voice of opposition in the news and they are even the most dominant source in the pre-deal period (August 1, 2013 to July 14, 2015). However, the executive branch sources dominate the news by far in the after-deal period (July 15, 2015 to June 16, 2016). 341 (33.4%) statements came from non-governmental domestic voices (think tanks, academics, public opinion polls, other non-governmental sources, journalists and presidential candidates). Journalists were the dominant non-governmental source (15.8). It should be mentioned that there is a reasonable explanation as to why there are more oppositional statements and contested positions expressed by journalists on these programs. According to that explanation, the debate format represented in the round table feature of these programs privileges expression of opinion. These are structural features of these shows which might be motivated by the desire to produce more compelling television or higher ratings. The discussions in these programs involved regular participation by columnists and journalists that offer their views on the ongoing debate. In this regard, the presence of journalists as interviewees and guests in the interviews and round table discussions was the main reason for higher numbers in terms evaluative statements issued by journalists.

The presidential candidates made 14% of these statements and their presence has become noticeable just in the second time period. This issue could be explained by the notion of "power indexing." The concept of power indexing in the news media was found by researchers in the coverage of major foreign policy issues (Entman & Page, 1994; Zaller & Chiu 1996; Nacos, Shapiro, Hritzuk & Chadwick, 2000). It argues that reporters pay the most attention to the

sources who appear to have the greatest influence on the course of events. (Bennett et al, 2007; Entman, 2004; Cook, 2005).

According to power indexing, "reporters pay special attention to the views of authoritative sources who are, in the media's judgement, most likely to project and influence the outcome of particular policy issues" (Nacos et al., 2000, p. 47). The presidential candidates became prominent due to the fact that they were talking to accept or reject the deal if they become the U.S. president after President Obama left office. Donald J. Trump, the front runner nominee of Republican Party for the president, as well as other republicans, made it clear that he opposes the Iran deal. He questioned the wisdom of the deal and described it as a "disaster" and "the worst deal ever negotiated" (Torbati, 2016, November 9). He claimed it could lead to a "nuclear holocaust" during his campaign. Therefore, in the after deal period, presidential candidates due to their power to destroy or keep the deal became the most prominent source after the executive branch, and 88.8% of their overall statements were negative.

The significant presence of U.S. ally, Israel, in this issue could also be explained by the notion of power indexing. Israel-United States relations are a very important factor in shaping the U.S. policy in the Middle East. Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, had supported congressional opponents of the deal and in his speech before a joint session of Congress on March 3, 2015, asserted that the deal "doesn't block Iran path to the bomb; it paves Iran's path to the bomb". Although Saudi Arabia, another U.S. ally in the region opposed the deal before its implementation (pre-deal period), its voice was marginalized in the news coverage compared to Israel.

After the deal is reached, by most conventional standards the Congress is no longer able to repeal it, and the hope of Israel to influence the path of the deal has been the Congress. The

presence of congressional sources and Israel declines in the news after the deal. However, the new president might still influence the deal after implementation and the results show that presidential candidates become significantly prominent after the deal. The media's judgement of the power of sources due to the situation (power indexing) could be the best explanation for these results.

The involvement of China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom besides the United States in the negotiations could have been a great opportunity for the media to prove their independence by giving voice to official foreign sources. Moreover, Iranian governmental sources and even Iranian citizens who have witnessed the crippling of Iran's economy under the sanctions could be of great value for the media to elaborate the situation. However, the results show that Iranian sources were significantly marginalized in the news transcripts, and other foreign countries involved in the negotiations were not sought properly by the media. This observed trend of media is in contrast to the idea of political philosophers and democratic theorists who believe that each relevant voice should get its proper say (Althaus, 2003). According to them, "good news would seem to ensure that a relevant range of critical voices is included in the mix, and that none is systematically marginalized in the deliberative process" (Althaus, 2003, p. 403). On this account, the journalists failed to include perspectives that were expressed outside of Washington, but still they were an important part of the story. In other words, they failed to get each relevant voice its proper say in this issue. For example, one aspect of the Iran deal story was the fact that the Iranian families living in poverty rose from 22 percent to more than 40 percent, and the sanctions instead of making the government to stop the nuclear enrichment were "weakening the middle class, breaking the collective will and marginalizing democratic voices while solidifying the power of the ruling elite" (Farshneshani, 2014, January

22). However, this perspective which could be achieved in the voice of ordinary Iranians was significantly marginalized in the analyzed news transcripts. Furthermore, U.S. non-governmental sources as it was portrayed in "academics", "other non-governmental" and "public opinion polls" categories are the opportunity of the media to cover the voice of engaged American citizens, but the results show that they were also significantly marginalized in the news. As Entman and Page (1994) put it "the higher their power to shape newsworthy events, the more attention they receive. The lower the power, the less attention, even if the substantive information offered might be of great value to a deliberating citizen" (p. 97).

The dominance of the voice of the administration and influential elites in a foreign policy debate means the voice of an interrogative journalism has been omitted in favor of official rhetoric. Wright (1984) names this trend as "an awkward problem in U.S. journalism." He writes that the Reagan administration decided to launch the Grenada invasion in total secrecy, which meant no official voice was out for journalists to report to. Under this censorship, investigating and printing the truth became the only option to journalists. Soon the administration understood that censorship was exposing the truth, instead of hiding it. When the administration broke its silence, it became the credible source of news and the journalists defended the invasion. What happened in the news media during that invasion well illustrates how official voices fill the investigation vacuum on a given issue.

A press independent of government is the First Amendment Ideal. One that functions as "a fourth institution outside the government as an additional check on the three official branches" (Bollinger, 1991, p. 177). According to this view, the press should be an independent observer of political power and it has the right and responsibility to maintain its independence (Mermin, 1999). Journalists should consult sources outside of Washington, and investigate the issues

beyond the boundaries of official discourse to "balance the power of the government to establish the terms in which the story is told" (Mermin, 1999, p. 145). Journalism that indexes debate in the news according to debate in Washington is not revealing the reality, but it is displaying the official interpretations of reality, and it is abdicating its watchdog role on powerful sectors of society (Mermin, 1999).

Conclusion

One of the primary findings in political communication is that official voices dominate political stories (Sigal, 1973, Blumler, Gurewitch, 1981, Bennett, 1996). Likewise, in the case of Iran deal, the executive branch and congressional sources set the boundaries and circle of discourse. Before and after the deal, the main voice of dissent toward the administration policy came from sources who were influential on the deal based on media judgement. Consequently, in the coverage of this issue, Israel as a foreign source enjoyed a significant presence in the news. As the previous studies (Althuas et al., 1996; Bennett, 1996; Zaller et al., 1996) suggest, journalists appear to be "power indexing" the sources. Athaus et al. (1996) and Bennett (1996) argued that under certain conditions, journalists are drawn to foreign sources to provide counter opinion to the administration policy positions. They called this phenomenon as "power indexing," which means journalists follow the voices of those who are able to influence the outcome of a situation despite their nationality. This is why Israel become one of the most important voices of dissent against the administration policy.

Another thought provoking issue is that overall, various studies have shown that U.S. media coverage of American wars has been mostly positive and uncritical of the administration policy (Bennett, 1990; Bennett et al., 2006; Entman, 2003; Entman, 2004; Entman & Page 1994;

Hallin, 1989). Bennett (1994) found that at the height of the debate about the Gulf War buildup

in the Bush administration, White House position received the most prominent news displays,

although there were strong dissenting congressional opinions. News coverage of the Grenada

invasion "tended to propagate the worldview and policy preferences of the [Reagan]

administration" (Iyengar & Simon, 1994, p. 183), and in the Panama invasion, the news did little

to challenge the administration policy (Bennett, 1994). In contrast, our results show that in the

pre-deal period the voice of dissent by Congress dominated the news and the executive branch

came in the second position. Moreover, the negative statements surpassed the positive ones to a

considerable amount, and they were the leading kind of evaluative statements before and after

the deal. The biggest difference between these situations is that in the former ones the

administration was advocating the war policy, and in the latter it has become the advocate of

peace and diplomacy. Could it be true that sources who argue for war are more interesting to the

journalists than the ones who are the proponents of peace? There is no doubt that to find a

definite answer to this question, a vast amount of research is needed. However, it is still worth

mentioning and considering when scholars like Wolfsfeld (2004) argue that the news values of

immediacy, drama, simplicity, and ethnocentrism and peace process are inherently contradictory.

As Wolfsfeld (2011) says, a peace process is boring. It is about a bunch of stodgy diplomats

gathering in secret meetings dealing with complicated issues and details. They are trained to

keep the details of their meetings secret because leaks could be detrimental to the process and

this is contrary to the journalists' need for drama.

In the case of Northern Ireland conflict one of the respected journalists in Northern

Ireland said:

> I am unapologetic in saying I want peace. I want an end to all this violence, this war.
> Now journalists dream, journalists come into journalism to have wars. Many of them

want to see themselves as war correspondents. I certainly don't want to be a war correspondent. I've seen it all. I've been to the bomb scenes, I've seen life desecrated, wiped out. I've seen my own local pub and shop at home blow up where my sister worked for many years as a student. I saw young Michael Donnelley killed at a petrol pump serving petrol. I saw the bomb attack on those premises. I've seen dozens and dozens, many of my school friends are dead as result of violence. So I want an end to it all. (NI11, 1999, April 15, as cited in Wolfsfeld, 2004, p. 180)

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APPENDIX

CODING INSTRUCTIONS

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Unit of Analysis

evaluative statements provided by a source—can be a person, document, report and/or a
poll—about matters or individuals related to U.S. nuclear negotiations with Iran, including the
Iran deal, characterizations of Iran, the U.S., Iranian leaders, U.S. leaders or the Iranian and U.S.
negotiating teams. Statements providing only descriptive, technical or logistical information
related to the U.S. nuclear negotiations with Iran are not included.

Coding Procedure

As you read each story, you must first assess whether or not a statement meets the criteria
to be coded. Then, from the list provided, you must place the source of that statement into a
source category. Finally, you must then decide whether the statement should be coded as
positive, negative or ambivalent/neutral/undecided.
Code for one (1) opinion per paragraph, per source. If a source makes more than one evaluative
statement in a single paragraph that source will be coded only once. But, if a source makes
evaluative statements in five (5) paragraphs of a story that source should be coded five (5) times.
If a paragraph contains a statement attributed to more than one source, that statement should be
coded as coming from both sources. For example, if a sentence says "Both the president and

John Kerry say the deal has many virtues," you must code for two (2) statements from two (2) sources.

Code each source based on how they are identified in the story. Given your knowledge you might know that a particular source works for a think tank, but if the source is solely identified in the story as being an academic, you would place that source in the Academic category. However, it is also possible a source would be linked to more than one category. For example, a story could note that a source is a former state department official who now works as a lobbyist. In that case, you would code the source based on his or her current affiliation. Therefore the source should be coded as Lobbyist.

Categories for Statements

1. Positive—if the statement expressed was in support of matters or individuals related to the Iran deal, including characterizations of Iran, the U.S., Iranian leaders, U.S. leaders, or members of the Iranian and U.S. negotiating teams.

2. Negative—if the statement expressed was in opposition to matters or individuals related to the Iran deal, including characterizations of Iran, the U.S., Iranian leaders, U.S. leaders, or members of the Iranian and U.S. negotiating teams.

3. Ambivalent/Neutral/Divided—if the statement expressed was neutral or expressed conflicting information about matters or individuals related to the Iran deal, including characterizations of Iran, the U.S., Iranian leaders, U.S. leaders, or members of the Iranian and U.S. negotiating teams.

Categories of Sources

1. President of U.S.

2. White House

3. Vice-president of U.S.

4. Secretary of State

5. State Department

6. Secretary of Defense

7. Pentagon

8. Negotiating team U.S. (other than John Kerry)

9. Spokespersons—if this is only identifier (for example, "a government spokesperson"), place in this category.

10. U.S. Senator

11. U.S. Congressman

12. Former U.S. President

13. Former U.S. Vice-president

14. Former Secretary of State

15. Former Secretary of Defense

16. Former Pentagon

17. Former U.S. Senator

18. Former U.S. Congressman

19. Government Unspecified

20. Think Tank—sources identified as affiliated with an organization that conducts research and advocates a position on the Iran deal. Professors identified as affiliated with a think tank go in this category

21. U.S. Academic—source identified as affiliated with a university in the U.S., but not a think tank

22. Lobbyist—someone hired by a business or organization to persuade legislators to support or advocate against the Iran deal.

23. Activist

24. Public opinion polls

25. Celebrity

26. Other Non-governmental sources— sources other than activist, public opinion polls, celebrity, academic or think tank

27. Governmental sources other than U.S. or Iran (specify country, includes diplomats, EXCLUDE Israel and Saudi Arabia)

28. President of Iran

29. Supreme Leader of Iran

30. Members of Iranian parliament

31. Other Iranian governmental sources (not including members of the Iranian negotiating team)

32. Iranian Non-governmental sources

33. Iranian Foreign Minister (Mohammad Javad Zarif)

34. 5+1

35. United Nations

36. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

37. Unknown—sources whose affiliation cannot be determined. For example, "sources," "officials," "leaders."

38. Other—the source does not fit into any of the categories

39. Former Iranian Governmental sources

40. Journalists—other than the writer of the story being coded.

41. Iranian Negotiating Team (other than Zarif)

42. Israel

43. Saudi Arabia

44. Presidential Candidates