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## Press independence in newspaper coverage of the 2009 health care debate

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PRESS INDEPENDENCE IN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE  
OF THE 2009 HEALTH CARE DEBATE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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in

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by  
Matthew Holt Barnidge  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines press independence from the government in the 2009 national health care debate. Through a content analysis examining source expressions, or the words journalists attribute to various people in the news, the study captures the essence of the discourse represented in the news about the debate. This paper also outlines a distinction between various types of autonomy, and offers a new conceptualization of independence. Procedural autonomy, which is autonomy in journalistic norms and routines, does not necessarily result in content autonomy, which is autonomy of viewpoints expressed in the news. In other words, if non-governmental sources say substantially similar things to governmental sources, then the news content is not independent from government influence. This study determines, therefore, whether there is a substantial difference among the various viewpoints expressed by different types of news sources. Using as its framework the indexing theory, which posits that journalists will tie the range of news discourse the governmental elite opinion, this study determines whether some discourse falls outside the range of elite opinion. The results indicate that while the press did heavily focus on governmental elite debate in the health care debate, they made a moderate effort to bring in non-governmental voices and views. Despite this, however, those voices did not represent substantially different views. The exceptions to this rule were experts and, at least in the contentious months of late summer, popular voices.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“Creating a government bureaucracy that denies, delays and rations health care is not the reform they want. They don’t want the people who brought us the Department of Motor Vehicles making life-and-death decisions for them.”

-Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), to the *Washington Post* on June 10, 2009

“I think my health care is expensive, but I like it and I’m scared to death of the government running it. I’m worried about the bureaucracy of the federal government getting involved.”

-David Seward, 35, Atlanta, Ga. to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on November 6, 2009

Although these quotes were published months apart, come from very different individuals, and were taken from very different circumstances, they are strikingly similar. Each expresses a mistrust of government bureaucracy, and an anxiety about the idea that government should be involved in health care. These quotes illustrate the possibility that the statements in the news from governmental elites heavily influence the statements in the news from other sources of information. In other words, it is possible that different types of news sources all say the same things, or at least similar things.

This study investigates that possibility, following two main lines of inquiry. First, whether journalists use a relatively high number of non-governmental elite news sources in coverage of the 2009 Congressional health care debate. Second, if they do, whether those different types of sources say things that are substantially different than what governmental elites say. In answering these two main questions, this study will be able to answer the larger question of whether the press exhibited a high level of independence from the government, in terms of the content of the statements from news sources in the media.

Most studies of press independence assume that the use of different types of news sources makes the press relatively more independent than if it only used quotes from governmental elites.



While approaching different types of people represents a level of autonomy, or self-governance, that autonomy is limited to action if that action does not result in substantially different news content. Using non-governmental elite news sources, therefore, does not necessarily mean the press is independent, or rather, free from the external influence of the government. In an effort to move toward a more nuanced theoretical framework for conceptualizing press independence, this study proposes a new standard of ideal independence, and argues that independence of content is needed in addition to autonomy of action in order to live up to this standard. This study will examine the 2009 health care debate to determine whether and in what ways the press lived up to this standard of independence during this particular domestic policy debate.

Fundamental to this study is an often-overlooked quote from Bennett (1990) in his paper proposing the indexing theory. The theory “implies that ‘other’ (i.e., non-official) voices filling out the potential universe of news sources are included in news stories and editorials when those voices express opinions already emerging in official circles” (p. 106). In other words, journalists only report non-governmental views that are substantially similar to those expressed by governmental elites. The indexing theory hypothesizes that journalists calibrate their news coverage to reflect the range of powerful voices and views in governmental elite circles. The press grants favor to those governmental elites whose opinion is powerful enough to influence the outcome of the debate. Journalists internalize a picture of the range of powerful elite debate, and seek to recreate this internal balance when writing news stories. The balance is expressed in the themes and tone of their stories, as well as in the sources they approach for comment. When powerful governmental elite opinions widely differ, the news reflects a greater range of elite views. When those opinions do not differ, the news does not reflect a wide range of views. Journalists also carry this balance over to other types of sources, and therefore narrow the range of opinions from organizational representatives and popular, or “person on the street” sources to

fit with governmental debate. Thus, the dominant governmental viewpoint ultimately dominates the public discourse. This study determines whether the indexing theory fits the 2009 health care debate. Because research on the indexing theory has, to this point, focused primarily on foreign policy and dramatic domestic events like Hurricane Katrina and school shootings, this study will explore ways in which the indexing theory might be expanded or qualified in order to fit news coverage of a Congressional policy debate. Specifically, this study suggests that the use of experts and popular sources may make the press more independent in some ways, even if the press did not exhibit a high level of independence overall.

The 2009 health care debate presents an excellent opportunity to study the indexing theory and press independence in the context of a domestic policy debate. First, the public debate really got started during the Democratic primaries of 2008, and represented a resurrection of some of the ideas of the Clinton-era debate. Indeed, both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama made health care reform one of the pillars of their respective campaign platforms. It was almost certain that if a Democrat won the White House, health care reform efforts would follow. One could see the debate coming, so to speak, from a mile away. Supporters and critics alike had time to mull over their arguments, to cache their rhetorical ammunition, and wait poised for the debate to ensue. Naturally, the debate (just finishing at the time of writing the final version of this thesis in March 2010) was quite contentious. The debate saw the introduction of eight bills in Congress, not including the children's health care bill. But the coverage was not completely focused on governmental elites. Health care is a critical issue, and it affects average people directly. As such, most people are likely to have an opinion about universal health care or health care reform. Journalists could reasonably be expected, therefore, to seek out a representative sample of public opinion, whether represented by interest group spokespersons, popular sources, or polls. The health care debate presents, therefore, a test case that might possibly threaten the

indexing theory's proposition that "other" views are expressed in the news only once those views have been expressed by governmental elites. With so many voices and opinions to be gathered, with such a variety of competing interests and ideologies on the subject, and with such nuance and complexity to the issue, journalists could represent voices and views that are truly alternative, or completely outside of the mainstream political framework. If the findings of this study fit with the indexing theory's proposition that "other" views are tied to governmental views, however, one could make a strong argument that this proposition accurately describes a very real phenomenon in news writing.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Norms and Routines**

Journalists generally adhere to the norms and practices of their news organization and their profession when gathering information (Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Cook, 1998). Journalistic norms and routines are strong patterns of behavior that determine the content of news stories. Norms are standards of conduct that evolve over time, which may include autonomy, objectivity, fairness, and trustworthiness. Routines, on the other hand, are patterned practices journalists use to produce stories. Change in routines will eventually lead to changes in content of stories. This study examines press independence and the indexing theory, which developed to explain certain norms and routines prevalent in the mainstream news, in the context of congressional domestic policy debate.

One of the most important journalistic routines is sourcing. Research shows the sources journalists use in a story have a significant effect on news content (Shoemaker & Reese, 2006). Berkowitz (1987) argues that news sources tend to influence how journalists portray reality. The decisions about who to approach as a source, therefore, heavily impact the informational content of the story. Research shows news sources generally represent a narrow section of society that is most readily available to journalists (Sigal, 1973; Berkowitz and Beach, 1993; Berkowitz and TerKeurst, 1999).

Research has long documented the close relationship between the news media and government officials (Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Hallin, 1986; Zaller & Chiu, 1996; Wolfsfeld, 1997; Mermin, 1999). Cook (1998) argues the news media are a political institution, sustaining a mutually beneficial, but at times antagonistic, relationship with the government, political elites, and officials. Yet, Cook argues, the relationship between the two is

necessary in a democratic society in order for government to communicate with citizens. This close relationship means journalists are political actors, and that the norms and routines they adhere to may actually contain a set of assumptions that determine the nature and content of the news itself and in turn, may influence how policy making is carried out. Cook questions the capacity of the news media to perform such an important role in governance. He argues journalistic routines tend to favor news that is easy to gather, simple, and entertaining, which ultimately focuses attention on episodic occurrences rather than the bigger picture (Cook 1998). What this trend means is that journalists are most likely to choose those sources of information who place themselves in close proximity to news organizations, who usually have motivation to speak to the press. This study examines the choices journalists make when selecting the sources of information for their stories. In doing so, it determines whether, in this case, the press makes an attempt to swing open the gates of media access to include a greater diversity of sources and viewpoints, or whether the press tends to focus on official viewpoints and those non-official viewpoints that are relatively convenient to solicit. The recurring finding that journalists are typically deferential to government officials has naturally led to a deeper investigation of the conditions in which the media are more or less reliant on the government, a development that eventually led to the formation of the indexing theory.

Bennett and Lawrence (2008) note the press faces competing norms and ideals, which developed in part through practice and in part through public expectation of news content. On the one hand, the public expects the press to watch the government in order to protect the people against government abuses or assaults on democratic freedoms. On the other hand, the public has come to expect the press to be neutral or objective, because the modern American press has traditionally adopted a strategy of neutrality in order to attract larger audiences. If the press is too critical of the government, it may be seen as biased or politically partisan. If the press is too

deferential to the government, it runs the risk of exposing the public to misleading or politically orchestrated information, which could be detrimental to democratic governance.

The watchdog journalism tradition has its roots in early advocacy journalism, and was reinforced through the muckraking tradition of the progressive era (Bennett & Serrin, 2005). The watchdog role is one of the primary functions of a free press in democracy, and one of the main reasons the framers of the constitution included press freedom in the First Amendment. The norm of objectivity developed because of market forces and technological advances in printing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Schudson, 1978; Hamilton, 2004), aiding the democratization of the news audience from the elitist, subscription-based, and partisan press of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Objectivity represents an attempt to make the news more independent from both government and the corporate news media ownership by instilling a sense of professionalism in the trade (Bennett & Serrin, 2005). The purpose of describing the origins of each norm is not to suggest that one norm is more worthy or more ideal than the other because it developed earlier or, conversely, more recently, but rather to establish that each norm represents a long-standing tradition and accompanying expectations in American journalism that heavily influences the way professional news reporters gather and disseminate information today.

### The Indexing Theory

The indexing model developed in order to explain the tension between these two competing journalistic norms. The indexing theory posits that journalists “index” elite opinion about public issues, calibrating news coverage to reflect the range of viewpoints expressed in mainstream government debate (Bennett, 1990; Bennett & Manheim, 1993). The model seeks to explain the various scenarios in which the press may be more or less dependent on government officials. The indexing model predicts that when there is diversity of political elite viewpoints,

the news reflects that diversity. When political elite opinion is relatively unified, the news portrays a lesser degree of diversity in viewpoints.

Scholars subsequently tested the indexing hypothesis, comparing news content to the *Congressional Record*, and found that news content did not precisely match political elite opinion (Entman & Page, 1994; Althaus, Edy, Entman, & Phalen, 1996). They found newspapers both narrowed the debate and amplified oppositional voices disproportionately to their representation in Congress. This latter finding is consistent with the journalistic norm of objectivity, where journalists feel compelled to report two opposing sides of any issue on relatively equal footing (Tuchman, 1972; Althaus, 2003). Indexing scholars refined the theory to say journalists index only the most powerful political elite opinions (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007). News content tends to reflect those opinions which journalists deem powerful enough to have an impact on the outcome of the debate. The theory holds that objectivity takes effect where there is clear opposition to the dominant political elite opinion, and that journalists' notion of objectivity centers on balancing powerful political elite viewpoints. In one sense, therefore, the norm of objectivity is the media's mechanism for providing a balance of viewpoints. In another sense, the norm may artificially elevate one type of oppositional voice while suppressing other types, narrowly defining each debate as a two-sided issue. The indexing theory also allows for punctuated periods of autonomy in a relative equilibrium of political elite dependence. These studies and others concluded the press is semi-independent (Bennett & Livingston, 2003, Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007).

Recent research on indexing theory has turned to an investigation of the limits of press independence, and the identification of circumstances in which the press is more or less autonomous. These studies found that the press briefly becomes more autonomous in event-driven or technology-enabled news, investigative reports, or when sources outside political elite

circles offer “spin,” that can compete with that offered by political elite sources (Lawrence, 2000; Lawrence & Bennett, 2000; Livingston & Bennett, 2003; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2006; 2007). This research found alternate interpretations initially appear in news content in the wake of dramatic events, but official unity or government press management tactics can quash those interpretations. When governmental elites are unified, as was the case after 9/11, journalists tend to focus on the official version of reality (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007). These results are consistent with the predictions of indexing theory, where official unity ultimately limits the range of viewpoints in the news.

### Domestic Policy Coverage

Lawrence (2010) identifies three major categories of political news coverage: foreign coverage, election coverage, and domestic coverage. She asserts that the press exhibits less independence in foreign policy coverage because the executive has more control over the outcome, and because journalists may feel constrained by a patriotic norm (the so-called “rally-round-the-flag” effect). At the same time, the average citizen has little or no direct experience or knowledge about the topics under discussion. As such, most indexing research has focused on foreign policy coverage. Lawrence (2010) also asserts the press exhibits much more independence in election coverage because journalists have different norms and routines, such as the tendency to cover politics in terms of a game, discussing the strategy behind political moves and the way the main candidates play the game of politics. Compared to these other areas, there is less press independence research on domestic news coverage. The studies that have been done show the indexing theory largely fits domestic news coverage with slight modification.

For example, Lawrence (2000) examined the indexing theory in domestic news coverage and found that the overall sourcing patterns in stories about police brutality show a focus on official sources and frames. However, the proportion of non-official sources and frames in these



stories does not precisely fit the indexing theory as originally conceived. Lawrence notes that the proportion of non-official voices and views was highest after particularly dramatic events, such as the Rodney King beating. Although these stories reflected official viewpoints more than non-official viewpoints, non-official sources and frames did appear prominently in the debate. These findings indicate that while the indexing norm still generally fits in domestic policy coverage, in some circumstances journalists tend to broaden the kinds of sources in the news and amplify different kinds of voices, if only temporarily.

Domke (2006) studied the passage of the Patriot Act and found that the press largely echoed the unified governmental message in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. This finding fits with the indexing prediction that the press, while it may initially include non-official sources in the aftermath of dramatic news, will quickly echo the message of unified governmental elite opinion. These studies provide valuable insight into the differing patterns of reporting in domestic news. Drawing from and building on these previous studies that have focused on sources and their views, this study examines individual “source expressions” in order to determine whether any substantive differences exist between expressions of various types of sources and in what proportion they appear in news about the health care reform debate.

Callaghan and Schnell (2001) found that in coverage of the gun control policy debate, journalists tended to rely on interest group representatives in addition to officials. This finding fits with the indexing theory, which claims that the journalists report powerful opinions they think might influence the debate, but also suggests that government officials are not the only key sources in domestic policy debates. Rather, journalists also tend to represent the views of those powerful lobbies that might influence the outcome of a debate. Callaghan and Schnell concluded that the news media actually exhibit a degree of autonomy. Similarly, Jerit (2006) studied the social security debate in the late 1990s, and found the press exhibited considerable independence

in how they described the debate. This meant, however, that non-official accounts actually contained more misleading information than official accounts. These studies are valuable because they show that the press is likely to produce relatively more independent coverage of domestic policy than in coverage of foreign policy, where the indexing pattern is most strongly prevalent.

Bennett & Klockner (1996) found that journalists tend to broaden the range of sourcing beyond political elite circles in a pitched, or contentious, domestic policy debate, as compared to a foreign policy debate. This study assumes the health care debate of 2009 is such a pitched debate. Evidence supporting this assumption includes the introduction of several competing bills from both major parties, a clear and unified oppositional voice in the Republican Party, and the heated town hall meetings. The indexing model predicts, therefore, that journalists will bring in a relatively high proportion of non-elite sources. In a rarely cited passage in Bennett's (1990) original article introducing the indexing theory, he writes that the main hypothesis "implies that 'other' (i.e., non-official) voices filling out the potential universe of news sources are included in news stories and editorials when those voices express opinions already emerging in official circles" (p. 106). This implication means that the representation of non-elite opinion in the news follows the lead of governmental elite opinion. While it is impossible to determine, with exact precision, where an idea originates, it is possible to measure the similarity in the substance among the viewpoints expressed by the various types of sources. The question then becomes, in addition to whether non-elite views are featured with relative prominence and frequency compared to political elite views, whether non-elite sources offer substantially different viewpoints from those governmental elites offer in the same context, and furthermore, how to describe those differences, if any exist.

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) studied the Clinton-era health care debate and found that the news focused largely on the strategy of political actors. They argue citizens learn substantial and unsubstantial political information from news stories about the health care debate. This finding indicates the content of the news about domestic policy has an effect on the citizen's views of the debate. Cappella and Jamieson also found that the focus on strategic information caused citizens to recall more of that type of information, which fosters cynicism and mistrust in the government. This seminal work is valuable for understanding the make-up of domestic policy coverage. This study examines news coverage for source expressions about strategy, process, and issue, in addition to various other categories to be explained below. The finding that journalists tend to focus on the strategy of politics is consistent with the indexing theory, which posits that the press focuses on powerful public officials that might have an outcome on the debate or the issue at hand. The focus on strategy means that media organizations identify who they think are the important players in the game of politics and analyze the impact or potential impact of the moves those players make. Those officials who are not considered important players are ignored or, at the least, their coverage is diminished. Furthermore, these findings suggest that, even in a domestic policy debate, journalists are less interested in the discussion of issues and the representation of a diversity of viewpoints about those issues than they are concerned with finding opinions about the game of politics. This study will examine whether, in the case of the 2009 health care debate, journalists tend to cover issues and whether they report a diversity of views about those issues.

#### Non-official Sources

Research has identified various categories of non-official sources that this study refers to as organizational elite sources, which are not political elites but not popular (person on the street) sources, as important potential sources of news and interpretations. This three-tiered

categorization of sources – governmental elite, organizational elite, and popular – draws from Entman’s (2004) cascade model, which describes a hierarchy of official, quasi-official, and non-official sources. Journalists do not approach organizational elite sources for the purpose of reflecting general public opinion, as they do popular sources, but rather for the viewpoint of interested segments of society, or an informed or professional opinion. These sources represent the various interested segments of civic society (Voakes, Kapfer, Kurpius, & Shano-yeon Chern, 2002; Kurpius, 2002). Some note journalists often turn to spokespersons for interest groups or grassroots movements as important sources of information in domestic policy (Pride, 1995; Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Kurpius, 2002). A second group of organizational elite sources includes prominent business and industry leaders (Sigal, 1973; Kurpius, 2002). These people do not officially represent a particular segment of society or group. Instead, journalists approach these sources because of their prominence within a particular industry or business. Another group of organizational elite sources is experts. Research shows that the use of experts enhances the credibility of information, a value journalists seek in news stories (Steele 1995; Conrad 1999; Brewer & Sigelman 2002; Matheson 2005). Journalists approach these sources for their topic-specific knowledge and informed opinion. Some studies have found a disproportionate representation of expert opinion compared to person-on-the-street opinion (Myburg, 2009). A final type of organizational elite source is the pundit, or media opinion professional. Not much literature exists about pundits, but Jamieson & Cappella (2008) found that conservative pundits on radio and cable television talk shows amplify and increase the promulgation of the Republican agenda in the news. While this study does not expect to find many instances of pundit sourcing in newspapers, it will nonetheless measure to determine whether pundit sourcing exists in coverage the health care debate.

Most importantly, this study examines the use of and the content from the various types of sources described above as compared to elite and popular sources. The findings of Callaghan and Schnell (2001) indicate that the major metro newspapers tend to “index” the opinion of interest groups. For example, in the case of the health care debate, the press might index the viewpoints of the American Medical Association and the American Association of Retired People in addition to the viewpoints of political elites. This indication is consistent with the indexing theory, which predicts that a contested policy debate in elite circles prompts journalists to include a relatively higher number of non-official sources. It is still unclear precisely what types of sources the indexing theory would predict journalists would turn to in the 2009 health care debate. Past research on the indexing theory suggests that journalists would not seek out just any source, but rather sources representing powerful opinions that might have an effect on the outcome of the debate. In the case of the health care debate, it makes sense that these opinions could be embodied by interest groups and perceived public opinion through polls. Furthermore, Bennett’s (1990) formulation of the indexing theory suggests journalists would turn to those non-official opinions that are similar to those already emerging in governmental elite circles.

### Press Standards

Most inquiries into press independence begin with concerns about the ability of the press to provide information necessary for citizens to function as voters in a democracy. Scholars disagree on what the normative standard of the press should be because each bases the standard on a particular view of citizen capacity.

The most traditional notion of a free press is the classic libertarian idea of the “marketplace of ideas,” where the press is free to populate the universe with any and all ideas, and the best and most “right” idea will win out in the arena of philosophical competition. Indeed, this type of negative freedom is exactly what the First Amendment prescribes when it prohibits

Congress from enacting laws abridging the freedom of speech or the press (Cook, 2005). Some scholars and democratic theorists, however, assert that the a press free from government control is not an end, in and of itself, but rather a means to the end of providing citizens with the information they need in order to be rational participants in the democratic process (Fiss, 1996; Glasser & Gunther, 2005). This notion developed during the progressive era and led to the formation of the full news standard.

The full news tradition holds that citizens have the capacity to make fully informed decisions about matters of public importance and the press should facilitate the realization of that capacity through the provision of all or nearly all political information and an accurate representation of the viewpoints of various groups in society (Dewey, 1927; Committee on the Freedom of the Press, 1947). The full news standard expects citizens to acquire as much political knowledge as possible and to use that information to involve themselves in civic life. Those who promote a deliberative standard of democracy push this logic to the extreme, calling for not only the full range of society's viewpoints in the news, but also relatively equal representation of, and active debate among, those viewpoints (Habermas, 1989). As Nerone (1994; 2006) argues, the press is a representative public sphere. While Habermas' backward-looking notion of a truly democratic public sphere in 18<sup>th</sup> century may never have existed (Schudson, 1998), the press should be viewed as a public sphere because it attempts to represent a cross-section of society and public opinion (Nerone, 2006). The press, therefore, should be expected to present such diversity and active debate among views (Bennett, et al., 2004). Scholars in the full news tradition have long criticized press performance, claiming the rise in soft news and deference to officials limits the quality and diversity of information the news provides (Edelman, 1988; Bennett, 1988; Patterson, 2000). These limitations in information result in the erosion of citizen capacity and, thus, of the ability of the electorate to make informed decisions about public

affairs. The full news standard, however, is flawed because of two assumptions. First, this standard assumes that the press has the motivation and ability to supply the totality of information. Many argue (Lippmann, 1922; Cook, 1998) that the press is and must be selective about the information it presents to the public, and that it cannot possibly provide the totality of information. Furthermore, others hold (Bennett, 2003; Patterson, 2003) that the modern-day press is motivated by market standards to provide less hard news and issue coverage and more soft news and feature stories. Market forces, they argue, have led to the rise of infotainment at the expense of quality news. Second, the full news standard is flawed because it assumes that citizens have the capacity and the motivation to pay attention to and absorb the full range of information.

Some scholars argue the full news standard is fatally unrealistic for this very reason, and that progressive era standards of citizenship are burdensome for the modern person (Schudson, 1998). Scholars in this tradition hold citizens create heuristic patterns to make sense of the political landscape. They argue cognitive short-cuts are not only efficient, but also necessary and possibly even rational (Lippmann, 1922; Key, 1966; Zaller, 1992; Gamson, 1992). Some also assert there is some quality information in soft news (Prior, 2003; Baum, 2002). Still others argue that, because political disagreement tends to decrease voter participation, representing a variety of disagreeing viewpoints may not serve the purpose of enhancing democracy (Mutz, 2006). These scholars point out that cross-cutting political debate actually decreases citizen participation in politics. There exists, therefore, an unclear ideal balance point between the conflicting values of participation and tolerance of diverse expression. On the one hand, citizens need exposure to various viewpoints or they could potentially be subject to the manipulation of press management tactics, readily employed by government and corporate public relations professionals who have access to the media. On the other hand, the representation of conflict

may decrease democratic participation, undermining the very system on which the American government is based.

Recently, critics of the full news standard have moved to create a new press standard based on the patterns of cognitive salience in the so-called monitorial citizen, a model of citizenship where politically aware citizens monitor the news media only for important news or occurrences that demand the citizen's attention because the issue affects them or requires their input (Schudson, 1998; Zaller, 2003; Graber, 2003). They argue society only needs the press to alert citizens about particularly important issues or events. This argument is problematic, however, because the corporate media determine what news is important and what news is not. Some assert that market forces create patterns of news that are constantly setting off false alarms, a practice which evidence has shown decreases citizen attention to news and, therefore, has the potential to degrade the functionality of democracy (Bennett, 2003; Patterson, 2003).

The recognition of the shortcomings of both the full news and the burglar alarm standards has led other scholars to seek a reasonable middle ground. Patterson (2005) argues the standard for a good citizen should not be the mindless accumulation of political facts, as critics characterize the progressive era citizenship standard, but should be "critical thinking [...] in the context of interests, values, beliefs, understandings, and principles" (p. 190). In other words, citizens should actively and critically think about public matters. The news media, therefore, should foster public interest in political affairs in a way that promotes critical thought about those affairs. In short, the news should be both interesting and informative. Porto (2007) criticizes both the full news and the burglar alarm standard for ignoring power relationships and interpretive struggles. He offers a critical-cultural standard for citizen capacity, which asks voters not to pay attention to every bit of information in the news, but rather that they "interpret political reality in a consistent way" (p. 311). Porto argues the press can only enable this



consistency if it provides a diversity of interpretations. This idea of diversity in sourcing and framing represents a key idea in this study, which will attempt to measure the use of sources other than political elite and popular sources, and the viewpoints those sources express.

No matter the standard one prefers, at least within the scope of Western press standards, a common requisite is at least some degree of media autonomy. Indeed, whether the press must present a full range of information or only information it deems important, the press must independently determine precisely what pieces of information or viewpoints are important enough, representative enough, and entertaining enough to pass along if basic expectations of “press freedom” are to be met. If the press is too dependent on government sources of information the press would fail to perform the watchdog function of the press, which is one of the primary reasons the press has special protection under the American law system (Bennett & Serrin, 2005). Such a circumstance would leave scholars and citizens to question the effectiveness of a free press if it continues to remain dependent on government. It remains important, therefore, to examine the extent and nature of press autonomy. These data permit inquiry and exploration of the implications for these evolving press standards and for democracy in the United States.

### Conceptualizing and Measuring Independence

Some of the main questions facing the study of press independence involve the definitions of press independence and methods of measurement. Althaus (2003) examined news about the Gulf War for expressions and frames critical of the government line. He found because White House beat reporters often receive more information than they can report, they tend to index to real rather than publically expressed governmental elite opinion. Furthermore, the press often instigated the rise of critical frames independently from oppositional official sources. Thus, he argues that even if journalists depend on official sources for information, critical reporting

about that information is a type of autonomy. Entman (2004) uses this concept of the critical capacity of the press as the trigger mechanism in the cascade model of frame contests. When circumstances surrounding a news topic are culturally ambiguous, involving competing cultural values or norms, journalists are more likely to respond critically to political elite opinion and amplify opposition voices. Counter frames will develop from this criticism, halting the cascading momentum of the dominant governmental elite frame from political elites to news media to citizens. These scholars argue, therefore, that the critical capacity of the press is a form of media independence. These studies and others found, however, that most press criticism focuses on the means the government proposes to accomplish a particular goal rather than the ends, or the goal itself (Althaus, 2003; Entman, 2004; Hallin, 1994; Entman & Page, 1994). These scholars assert, therefore, that media criticism still falls within the range of political elite debate in terms of defining the “problems” in public policy debates. While the ability to initiate criticism or agreement with the government represents some level of media autonomy, one must question whether or not this behavior is truly independent from governmental elite debate.

Clarification of the meaning of press independence is needed if scholars working in this area are to approach the subject from a common starting point. This thesis offers a distinction between procedural autonomy and content autonomy. Finally, there is the normative standard of ideal autonomy, or true independence from external influence. First, it is important to make a few distinctions for the sake of thoroughness and clarity. The words “independence” and “autonomy” have very similar meanings and are used almost interchangeably in studies of press independence. The two words, however, do have slightly different meanings. “Autonomy” means roughly “self governance” while “independence” means freedom from influences that would make an entity dependent upon another. Also, it is important to recognize a third type of autonomy called “structural autonomy,” which is not a topic of research in this study. Structural

autonomy refers to the organizational independence of an entity. For example, many news organizations claim to be autonomous simply because they are free from governmental control. Indeed, many classic libertarians hail this form of autonomy as the only form necessary for democracy because it provides for free speech that populates the universe with ideas, which compete in the free market. Scholars in the critical-cultural vein of media research, however, argue that these news organizations, while free from government control, are dependent upon economic interests for their livelihood, and therefore do not possess the level of structural autonomy they claim (McChesney 1997; Chomsky 1991). The inquiry into the independence of the American media system begins with the possibility that the media are not independent despite structural autonomy. The freedom from government control does not guarantee independence of content. Therefore, this study recognizes three levels of press autonomy: structural, procedural, and content.

A brief examination of literature from the fields of moral and political philosophy offers a distinction between two types of non-structural autonomy. This study posits that both types of autonomy are required to achieve true independence. Some philosophers (Dworkin 1989) assert the standard for independence should be procedural autonomy, or autonomy of action. All that should be needed for an entity's actions to be autonomous is for those actions to be self-determined. Many journalists argue that the professional norms of objectivity and neutrality insulate them from political or corporate bias, and that they therefore possess such procedural autonomy, or freedom of action. Critics of this view argue there are some cases in which procedurally autonomous entities may adopt oppressive or restrictive patterns of existence because of limited choices among actions. In the case of the media, restrictive patterns of sourcing might exert external influence on the content of the news. These scholars promote an ideal standard of autonomy. Ideal autonomy, which they describe as closer to true independence,

is the freedom from influences that tend to make one entity dependent upon another (Benson 1987; Oshana 1998; Stoljar 2000). It is not necessarily sufficient, therefore, for an entity's actions to be autonomous. Rather, the substance related to the action should also be free from influence that would make the acting entity dependent upon another entity. In the case of the news, for example, it is not enough to approach different types of sources. It is equally important that those sources present substantially different points of view. It is important to note that this standard of ideal autonomy is, as the name suggests, an ideal to strive toward and not an expected minimum standard of press freedom. This literature, however, provides an important distinction between procedural autonomy and content autonomy and establishes a clearer view of the range of press independence. Procedural and content autonomy should be prerequisites to independence while ideal independence remains a standard of independences toward which the press should strive.

This distinction is more than merely semantic. For example, the type of autonomy described in the studies of Althaus (2003) and Entman (2004) certainly qualifies as procedural autonomy. To unilaterally frame a news story as critical is a self-governing act. Yet, the act itself is only procedural. The matter of content still remains. For example, if criticism only focuses on the means for the accomplishing government's stated war aims, the press is less likely to criticize the overarching goal of going to war in the first place. While the former type of criticism fulfills the watchdog role of the press by criticizing the government, the criticism is nonetheless bound by the parameters of the government's interpretation of reality and therefore amounts to little more than a norm-triggered procedural reaction to predictable stimuli. The latter type of criticism, on the other hand, presents a deeper challenge to the official frame by questioning the very parameters of the discussion (to use the above example, the idea of going to war in the first place). It is not enough for the press to periodically engage in "ritualistic displays of antagonism"

toward the government based on predictable responses to negative stimuli, while maintaining an operational equilibrium of deference to government officials and political elites (Bennett & Serrin, p. 174). It is preferable that the press maintain a wider scope of political stances and issues, so that it may question the government's agenda from outside the parameters of governmental elite debate.

The question remains unasked, therefore, whether or not the critical capacity of the press approaches the standard of a true independence in terms of ideal autonomy or absolute freedom from influence that tends to cause dependence. If the media don't question the parameters of governmental elite debate, the debate won't include wholly different interpretations of reality. The press may adhere to a critical norm, but if they only criticize political elites for the means by which they accomplish their goals rather than the goals themselves, governmental elites ultimately still determine the boundaries of the discussion. So while these actions represent a degree of autonomy, this does not mean the discourse represented in the news is not dependent on governmental elite discourse. Autonomous action, therefore, is not necessarily enough to qualify as press independence. A truly independent press would autonomously bring in substantially different viewpoints, and represent those viewpoints with prominence and frequency.

Of course, the problem of determining precisely which "other" viewpoints to incorporate in the media debate remains. This paper will not opine as to whether or not the viewpoints incorporated in the health care debate are the "right" viewpoints. However, the results of this study shed light on the types of viewpoints journalists are more likely to solicit, and therefore it can analyze the implications of those findings to suggest whether the press does or does not incorporate more of certain types of viewpoints. In order to examine newspaper coverage of the national health care debate, this study measures the type of expressions the various categories of

sources make, along with the prominence of those expressions and the frequency of expressions each type of source makes. Again, it is important to note that the distinction offered here represents an effort to fully articulate the ideal standard of press independence, not with the expectation that the press should or even could live up to that standard in all cases, but rather with the recognition that some types of autonomy are more independent than others. This attempt at clarification of terms is not a normative assertion, but rather a definitional effort.

Some scholars suggest that media independence is not necessarily a good thing. As Bennett and Serrin (2005) describe the problem, “while news organizations and journalists may claim considerable political autonomy, the existence of autonomy without accountability or clearly defined public or political responsibilities may not always produce the most desirable democratic outcomes” (pp. 172-173). In other words, without a clearly defined standard of precisely what kind of autonomy journalists should strive to achieve, and what ends that autonomy should serve, procedurally autonomous criticism of governmental actions may not be sufficient to meet the informational demands of a democratic public. Jerit (2006) found that the media’s “independent” voices gave citizens more inaccurate information about the social security debate than official voices did. The findings of Callaghan and Schell (2001) suggest the media employed its own “culture of violence” theme, which focused on the prevalence of guns and violence in the country, in stories about the gun control debate. It is an open question, however, whether this theme has a beneficial or detrimental impact on society. Certainly, many people of liberal leaning would likely think it had a positive social effect because the frame would tend to promote certain considerations that might favor gun control. Many people of a more conservative bent, on the other hand, might disapprove of such a message for precisely the same reason: that the frame tends to promote gun control. This study does not address the question of whether or not truly independent behavior necessarily produces accurate news. While

one may hold that, normatively speaking, the press should provide not only accurate information but also a wide range of opinion and expression about a given issue, the questions of independence and accuracy remain empirically separate. The data permit, however, exploration and speculation into the issue of news quality in terms of diversity of voices and views in coverage of the 2009 health care debate.

The other main problem facing the study of press independence involves the question of measurement. One popular way to measure press independence is with framing (Entman, 2004; Bennett, Livingston, & Lawrence, 2007). As Entman (1994) points out, however, the framing paradigm suffers from long-standing definitional issues. Frames select and highlight some facets of events and issues, and make connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation. Measuring frames, however, can be difficult, because it involves making thematic judgments. These data may under represent opposing views expressed within the same unit of analysis. Thus, these data can oversimplify the make-up of the debate in the news. Althaus (2003) measures entire articles with more detail than most previous studies did, measuring at the level of expression. He determined that placement of expression was an important factor in measuring the overall tone or frame of the story. This study uses prominence as a measure of expression placement in the story. By extension, this measurement determines one way in which stories can express more or less independence. In an attempt to capture a general picture of the nature of the health care debate without focusing on article level judgments, this study measures source expression providing a unique methodology appropriately suited for the study of a Congressional policy debate. This method allows the study to narrow its focus on sources and their expressions, allowing for more accurate statements about particular aspect of newspaper coverage about the debate.

A typology of expressions was developed through a pilot study of the *Boston Globe*. The first three were borrowed from Cappella and Jamieson's typology of article frames in their seminal study of the Clinton-era health care debate (1997). Issue expressions focus on problems facing the country's health care system and the solution. Strategy expressions focus on winning and losing the health care reform debate. Process expressions focus narrowly on specific legislative tactics by various congressional committees as health care reform moves forward. Two more important expression types were identified relevant to the health care debate, which are policy and ideological expressions. Policy expressions are different than issue expressions because they relate to a specific bill proposal in Congress. For example, a statement about the so-called Baucus bill would be a policy statement, whereas a statement about the public option would be an issue statement. If the public option is discussed in the context of the Baucus bill, that is a policy statement. Ideological expressions are statements expressing a general philosophical viewpoint rather than addressing a particular bill or issue. In addition to these four main categories, this study provides for ad hominem expressions, or personal praise or attack, and off-topic expression. This study also measures the valence of each statement relative to the dominant liberal position in Congress. This study measures for support, criticism, neutral or factual statement. This study, therefore, uses an original methodology that borrows from past research while tailoring the approach to the measurement of expressions rather than articles. These measurements will allow me to make overall statements about the types of expressions journalists use for each category of sources. This study will be able to determine whether there are substantial differences in the types of expressions by political elites, organizational elites, and popular sources that appear in news coverage of the 2009 health care debate.



## The Mainstream Media

The question remains why a modern-day media scholar would research the mainstream media, including the major metro newspapers. As new media continue to proliferate, disseminating information at an ever-increasing rate and in an increasingly personalized manner, newspapers across the country are struggling to adapt to a changing media market and maintain their profit margins. Baum and Groling (2007) argue that the increase in competition from new media gatekeepers, including cable television pundits and amateur bloggers, means that studies of professional journalistic gatekeeping decisions are incomplete. Bennett and Lawrence (2008), however, call the mainstream media a “meeting point for political ideas and a main arena for the formation of public opinion” (p. 257). While new media grow more popular as alternatives to the mainstream press, their various audiences are small, targeted, and scattered. The mainstream media are still the representative public forum in which these various and segmented interpretations of political reality are most likely to collide in the contest of public debate.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The health care debate of 2009, just completed at the time of writing, was a hotly contested debate that saw the introduction of at least eight bills in Congress. The bills offered varying proposals for the reform or government provision of health care insurance. Most of the bills were introduced by Democrats, ranging from the ultra-liberal House single-payer bill to the relatively centrist Baucus bill, which would introduce state funded health insurance co-ops. The Republicans, however, have themselves introduced three bills into Congress and have mounted considerable opposition, namely through Senators Orrin Hatch, Charles Grassley and John McCain, and through House minority leader Mitch McConnell. Because of the high degree of variance in governmental elite opinion, the indexing theory would predict diversity in governmental elite viewpoints expressed in the news, and also that journalists would broaden the range of sources to include more non-elites. Common sense suggests that because the nature of the health care debate requires topic-specific knowledge, journalists could be reasonably expected to approach a substantial number of experts for detailed commentary about the proposals. Also, because the nature of the debate involves virtually every segment of society, one could reasonably expect a high level of civic interest, and therefore that journalists may therefore approach a high number of organizational spokespersons for their viewpoint in an effort to represent views of various interested segments of society. This study seeks to examine whether the types of expressions coming from the non-elite of sources are substantially different than those of governmental elite sources, in order to determine whether press autonomy, in this case, really means press independence. Based on the literature and concepts described above, I formulated the following research questions to answer the larger question of whether the expressions from non-elite sources are substantially different from those of governmental elite

sources in content; and whether those expressions are relatively prominent and frequent compared to governmental elite expressions:

In newspaper coverage of the 2009 health care debate:

RQ1a: Do journalists use governmental elite, organizational elite, and popular source expressions with differing frequency?

RQ1b: Do journalists use governmental elite source expressions from one party more frequently than sources from the other?

RQ1c: Do journalists use some categories of organizational elite source expressions more frequently than others?

RQ2a: Does a relationship exist between the various types of sources and the expressions they make?

RQ2b: Does an interaction exist between the type of source and political party by the type of expressions the sources make?

RQ2c: Within organizational elite source expressions, does a relationship exist between the types of organizational sources and the types of expressions they make?

RQ3a: Does a relationship exist between the various types of sources and the valence of their expressions?

RQ3b: Does an interaction exist between the type of source and political party by the valence of the expressions the sources make?

RQ3c: Within organizational elite source expressions, does a relationship exist between the types of organizational elite sources and the valence of the expressions they make?

RQ4a: Does a relationship exist between the various types of sources and the prominence of their expressions?

RQ4b: Does an interaction exist between the type of source and political party by the prominence of the expressions the sources makes?

RQ4c: Within organizational elite source expressions, does a relationship exist between the types of organizational elite sources and the prominence of the expressions they make?

RQ5: Does a relationship exist between the publication and the various types of sources, the type of expression, and the valence of expression?

## **CHAPTER 4 METHODS**

### **Unit of Analysis**

This study is a content analysis of coverage of the health care debate in six newspapers. The unit of analysis is the source expression, which is any statement a story directly cites or paraphrases from a source. Operationally, the study considers a source expression to be all of the words the journalist cites or paraphrases from the source in a single paragraph. This definition provides for the possibility that a story can cite two or more sources in a single paragraph, which the study counts as distinct expressions. The disadvantage of this definition of source expressions is that it does not provide for the possibility that a single expression can stretch across multiple paragraphs. In other words, if the journalist uses a literary device that splits the source expression into two paragraphs, this definition of source expression considers that two separate expressions. The advantage, however, is that the paragraph-centered definition provides an easily discernable unit of analysis, and takes the guess work out of determining when journalists use literary techniques, and when they use two distinct source expressions consecutively. Furthermore, the disadvantages described above are minimal, applying to a minority of cases.

The study defines a source as any provider of information the writer directly cites in the article. This definition includes humans, organizations, polls, and documents. The study is most interested in human and organizational sources, but must include polls in order to most accurately capture the ways in which journalists report public opinion, and documents for the sake of thoroughness.

The study defines an article as any news story in a newspaper where the national health care debate is the main topic of the article, as depicted in the headline. In some articles, only part of the article is about the health care debate. In these articles, only the portions of the article

about the health care debate were coded. This definition of article, with a focus on the national health care debate, excludes opinion articles or editorials, as well as articles about state or local health care issues, health care technology stories, and health care industry business stories. In other words, this study examines straight news coverage, not editorials and other opinion items.

### Publications

This study sampled articles from two newspapers with national circulations, and four newspapers with local or regional circulations. The two national newspapers include *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Four additional newspapers with local or regional circulation were randomly selected from the choices available on LexisNexis Academic. Because the study already included East Coast publications, papers from the Southeast, Midwest, Mountain West, and West Coast regions were selected. The four newspapers are *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, *The Denver Post*, and *The Oregonian* (Portland). In order to narrow the scope of the study, the random selection did not include weekly or monthly publications, nor did it include newspapers with a regional or hyper-local focus. This represents a limitation of the study, as well as an area for future study. Thus, source expressions in articles from six publications were coded that represent a reasonable variety of the different regions of the country.

### Population and Sample

The population included all articles from the six publications relating to the national healthcare debate within three designated sample frames, which were developed through qualitative analysis of a timeline of the health care debate to this point (see Appendix A). The three sample frames represent the beginning, middle, and end of the national health care debate in 2009. The first sample frame starts with the introduction of HR 676, the House single-payer bill, on Jan. 26, 2009, and ends on May 31, 2009. While this frame saw the introduction of at

least two health care bills in Congress, there was relatively less attention to the health care issue during the early part of 2009. The middle frame spans the summer months, from June 1, 2009 – August 31, 2009. This frame captures the raucous town hall meetings and “tea party” protests. The third sample frame begins on September 1, 2009, and runs through November 20, 2009, the date the Senate voted to proceed with the debate on the health care bill passed in the House, formerly called HR 3962. This sample frame captures debate on two major bills, the so-called Baucus bill and the aforementioned HR 3962. This method was drawn from previously research on age, race, and gender in the 2008 presidential election campaign that used this method of sampling from frames (Kirzinger, Barnidge, Jenkins, & Kurpius, 2008). The utility of this method of sampling from frames is that it enables a comparative analysis of the differences between the frames, even if the study does not set up that analysis with formal research questions. Finally, it must be noted that ideally, this study would capture the health care debate during the remainder of 2009 and into 2010. Indeed, at the time of writing in early 2010, the health care debate had just reached a conclusion. Due to time constraints, however, it is necessary to pick an arbitrary end point for this study, and to proceed with coding even as the debate over legislation continued.

The sample frames were developed through a pilot study of similar articles in the *Boston Globe* and inductive analysis of the major events and landmarks relating to the health care debate as represented in that publication. The pilot study included 75 articles from that publication between August 17, 2009 and October 3, 2009.

All articles in the population were drawn from the online LexisNexis Academic database. A systematic random sample was used within each of the three sample frames. Lists were developed of all articles within each sample frame. Each *n*th article was selected from each list, assuring that *n* allows for at least one rotation through each list. A test of statistical power was

used to determine the total number of articles to be drawn in order to minimize standard error to acceptable levels. This figure was first calculated based on articles, and indicated a sample of  $n = 435$  articles. The inter-coder reliability test was then performed using 10% of this sample (to be discussed below). The unit of analysis for this study, however, is the source expression and not the article. In order to calculate the statistical power for a sample size based on source expressions, the source expressions in the inter-coder reliability sample were averaged by article. There was an average of 7.8 source expressions per article. This average was then used to project the total number of source expressions in each respective sample frame, which are as follows: 1188 (sample frame A), 3384 (sample frame B), and 3856 (sample frame C). The total projected population of source expressions is  $N = 8428$ . The sample size in each sample frame was calculated at a 99% confidence level, with a confidence interval of 1. The test for statistical power was performed within each sample frame. The source expression sample sizes are as follows: 563 (sample A), 812 (sample B), and 836 (sample C). The total projected sample size is  $n = 2211$ . The projected total number of source expressions was projected in each sample frame by using the average number of source expressions per article in the inter-coder reliability sample in order to arrive at the number of articles for each sample frame. The number of articles sampled from each frame is: 71 (sample frame A), 103 (sample frame B), and 107 (sample frame C). The total number of articles, therefore, is  $n = 281$ . Each source expression was coded in those articles. The average number of source expressions per article in the inter-coder reliability test proved to be a reliable mechanism for projecting the total number of source expressions in the sample. After counting all source expressions, the total sample was  $n = 2150$  source expressions. This actual value is very close to the projected value of 2211, and the fact that the actual sample has 61 fewer articles than the projection does not affect the ability to perform statistical tests at a 99% confidence level.

## Coding

The pilot study of the *Boston Globe* was also used to develop the code guide (see Appendix B). First, the coder number was recorded, as well as the article number, the date and publication. The source expression number was then recorded, which is relative to each article, as well as a unique number, which is a running count of all source expressions. Each expression was then coded for high or low prominence, determined by whether or not the expression starts before the halfway point in the total word count (high) or not (low). The source name and source title was recorded for each source expression. Each source expression was coded for party: Republican, Democrat, Independent, other, or none specified.

Each source expression was assigned a source category: governmental elite, organizational elite, popular, poll, document, or other. The first category of sources is governmental elites. The study defines governmental elites as politicians, their staff, their administration, public officials or agencies, and party organizations or their leaders, staff, or spokespeople. The second category of sources is organizational elite sources, which includes experts, pundits, organizational representatives (spokespersons), and business leaders. The study defines an expert as a source cited in the story for his topic-specific knowledge or expertise; pundit as a media opinion professional; spokesperson as an official representative of an interested organization; and business leader as a high ranking executive of a prominent company. The third category of sources is popular sources. The study defines popular sources as people cited for their “person-on-the-street” perspective. Finally, the study includes two other categories of sources, polls and documents. A poll source is a citation of a specific poll or a general reference to polls in an article. Poll sources were also be coded for named or unnamed. A



document source is any cited document, including agency documents and academic studies, but not press releases, which were coded as human source expressions.

Expressions were then coded for valence and expression type. For valence, each expression was coded as supportive, critical, neutral, or factual, relative to the dominant democratic goals for health care reform. Each expression was then coded for expression type. The categories for expression type are bill, issue, ideological, strategy, personal attack/praise, and off-topic/other. The study defines bill expression as any statement relating to a bill in Congress. These expressions were coded according to which of the various bills in Congress they refer: HR 676 (or the single-payer House bill), HR 3200 (the first House public option bill), America's Healthy Futures Act (Senate universal health care bill), the so-called Baucus bill (Senate Finance Committee bill proposing insurance co-ops), the Patient's Choice Act or other Republican bills, and HR 3962 (the second House public option bill) and other bills.

The study defines issue expression as any statement relating to a health care issue that does not also specifically mention a bill. A list was developed of issues in the aforementioned pilot study of the *Boston Globe*. The list is as follows: government provision (of access to health care or health care insurance), government taxation (of citizens or corporations), government regulation of the health care or the health care insurance industry (including ending pre-existing conditions, insurance coverage of abortion, malpractice reform, and digitization), government regulation of individual right to health care choices (including mandates and "death panels") existing programs (including Medicare, Medicaid, CHIPS, and any other existing government health care programs), and other (any other issue). These categories are mutually exclusive. If the source expression mentions more than one issue, the coder counted the number of words about each to determine which issue is predominant in the expression.

Each issue has sub-categories. For government provision, the type of provision the statement discusses was coded: single-payer, public-option, co-op, or none/no-change. Once again, these categories are mutually exclusive. If the source mentions more than one type of government provision, the coder counted the number of words about each to determine which is predominant. For government taxation, the position advocated or described was coded: increase, decrease or neutral/no change. For government regulation of the health care or insurance industry, each expression was coded for increase, decrease, or neutral/no change. For regulation of individuals each expression was coded for more, less, or neutral/no change. For existing programs, each expression was coded for the action discussed: expansion, reduction, or reform.

The third type of opinion expression is ideological. Ideological expressions are any opinion statements that express a general ideological viewpoint or philosophical stance on health care that do not also mention a bill or an issue. Each expression was coded for liberal, centrist, conservative, or other. The study defines a liberal expression as any statement relating to the idea that government should assure citizens universal or near-universal access to health care or health care insurance. A centrist expression relates to the idea that government should expand access to health care insurance without the provision of universal or near-universal access; or expresses a preference for bipartisan effort. A conservative expression relates to the idea that the government should not expand involvement in the health care or health care insurance industries, but should have a limited role in regulating the private health care and health care insurance industries. Other ideological expressions are statements relating to any other ideological position, e.g. a socialist or libertarian position.

A fourth type of expression, taken from Cappella and Jamieson (1997), is the strategy/process statement. These statements are any statements relating to the process of policy-making or political strategy. These statements were coded as either process, which are statements

describing the political process, or strategy, which are statements regarding the way politicians play the game of politics and implications for public opinion. The final type of source expression is the personal praise/attack. These statements relate to the personal characteristics of people or organizations involved in the health care debate. All statements not relating to the health care debate were considered to be off-topic, and were coded as such.

One other coder was trained to analyze 10% of the original 435-count article sample in order to test for inter-coder reliability. Both coded the same articles. Agreement was measured using Cohen's kappa. We were able to achieve a Kappa of at least .700 for most variables, and at least 90% agreement for any others, a widely accepted level of inter-coder reliability. After we reached inter-coder agreement, the rest of the sample was coded. The dataset was then cleaned and entered into SPSS. Frequency descriptive, chi-squares, analysis of variance, and t-tests, and mixed effects models were used to analyze the data.

## CHAPTER 5 RESULTS

First, it would be useful to describe the health care debate in newspapers over time, in order to get a picture of the entirety of the debate. In terms of source level, or source type, journalists relied more heavily on governmental elites and, to a lesser extent, organizational elites early in the year. They swung open the news gates relatively wider later in the year to include more popular sources (see Figure 1). In January, no popular source expressions were used, and very few organizational elite expressions were used (12 governmental elite expressions to 3 organizational elite expressions). By February, after Obama had settled into office and the Democrats' health care agenda became clearer, journalists sought out organizational elites (42 organizational elite expressions to 78 governmental elite expressions). This pattern remained more or less constant until August, when popular sources gained entry into the debate (90 popular source expressions in August, compared to 159 governmental elite expressions and 142

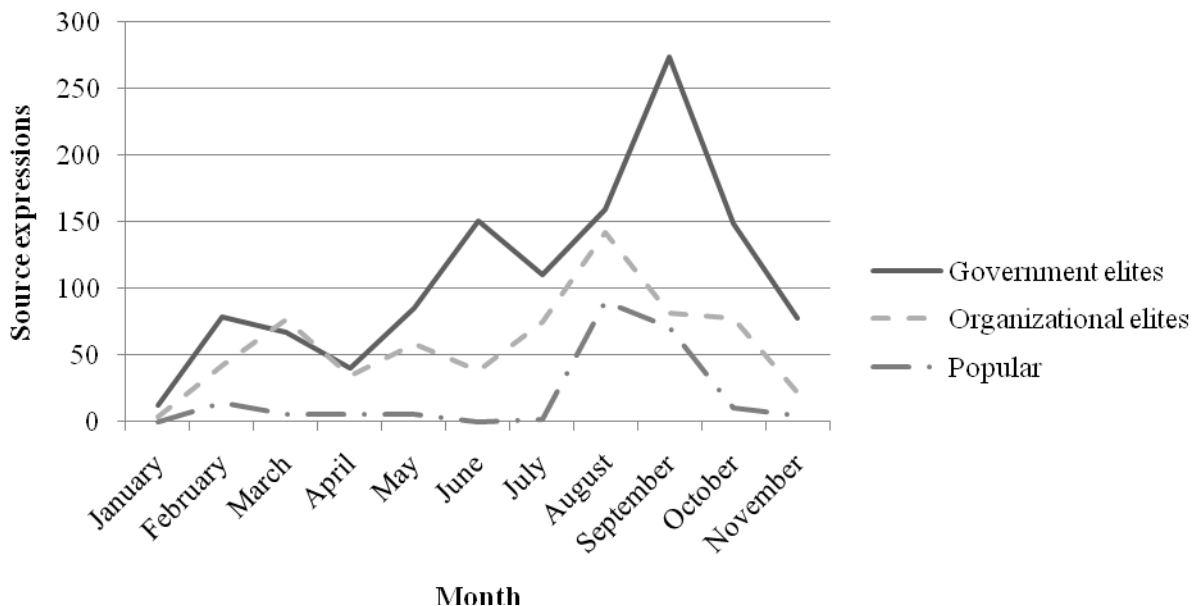


Figure 1. Types of news sources in newspaper coverage of the health care debate over time.

organizational elite expressions). While popular source expressions were used less than governmental elite or organizational elite expressions, the jump in the use of popular source expressions cannot be understated (1 source expression in July, 90 in August). In September, journalists turned to governmental elites slightly more than usual, at the expense of organizational elites (274 governmental elite, 81 organizational elite, and 71 popular). By October, the use of popular sources had declined dramatically (149 governmental, 77 organizational, 10 popular) suggesting that popular sources were included for a brief period of time, and then marginalized as the debate went on. In terms of source party (see Figure 2), the major metro press focused mainly on Democrat source expressions throughout, including Republican source expressions most frequently in September (119 to 158 for the Democrats) and November (38 to 39 for the Republicans) which suggests that journalists did give Republicans more attention in the lead up to a major vote in Congress (HR 3292 in September, the Baucus

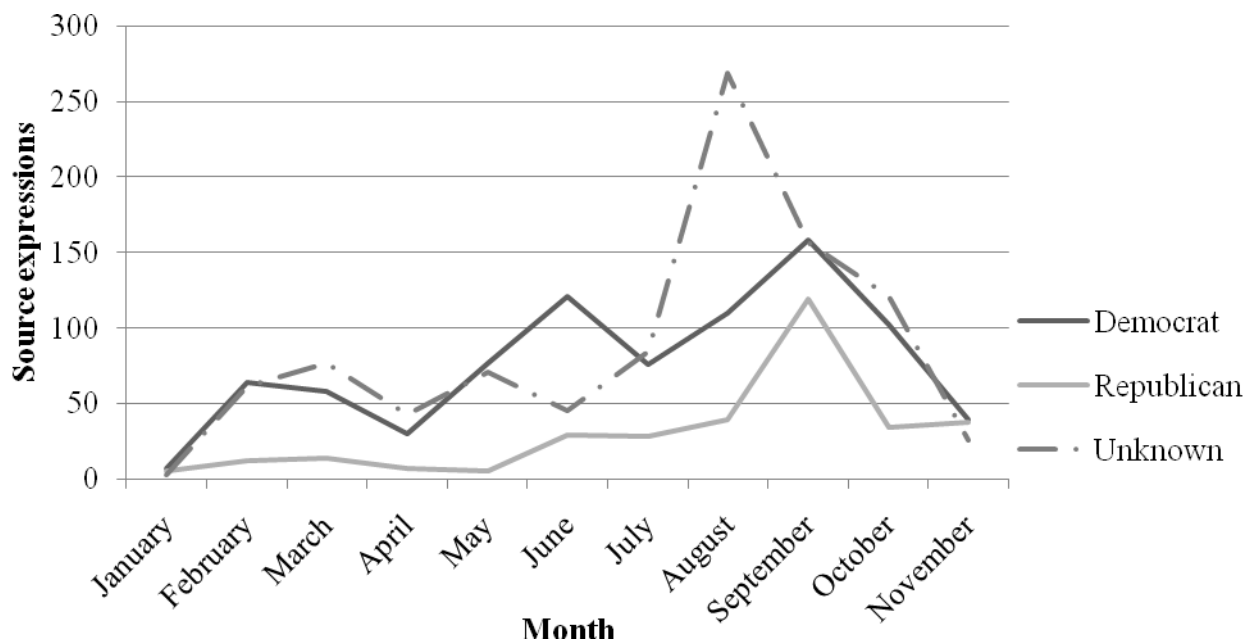


Figure 2. Source party in newspaper coverage of the health care debate over time.

bill in November). Unknown party sources were most frequently used in August and September. Within organizational elite source expressions, spokespersons were used with more frequency earlier in the year than other types of organizational elite sources (see Figure 3). A dramatic rise in the use of spokesperson source expressions occurred in August (78, compared to 39 in July and 18 in June). In September, the number of spokesperson expressions decreased dramatically (16). The number of expert expressions also increased dramatically in August (46, compared to 9 in July). While expert expressions decreased in September (32), it was the most frequent type of organizational elite expression in that month. In October, organizational elite sourcing returned to pre-August patterns (27 experts, 34 spokespersons). Business leaders, for their part, were used with less frequency than experts or spokespersons. They were used most frequently from July through September (21 in July, 15 in August, 27 in September). Pundits, for the most part, were not sourced frequently, especially before August. They were used sparingly starting in August

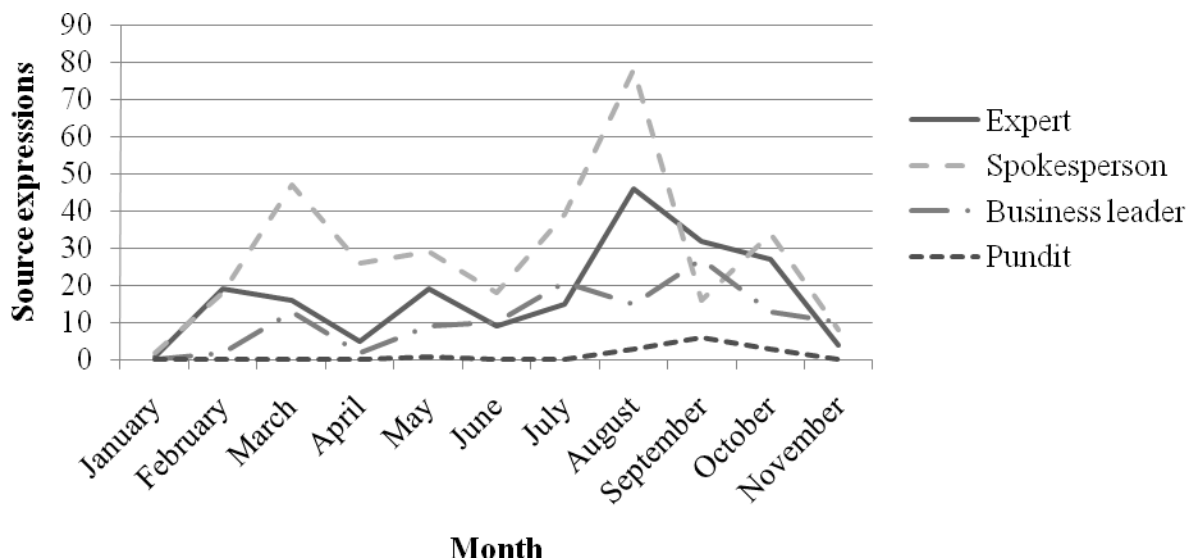


Figure 3. Organizational elite sources in newspaper coverage of the health care debate over time.

(3) and used most frequently in September (6). In terms of valence (see Figure 4), the debate in newspaper coverage started as more positive toward the Democrats' agenda, became more balanced beginning in August, remained more balanced through October, and turned negative in November (47 negative expressions to 31 positive). In general, it seems that journalists included more source expressions from different types of sources, different parties, and with differing tones starting in August and continuing, to a certain extent, into the fall.

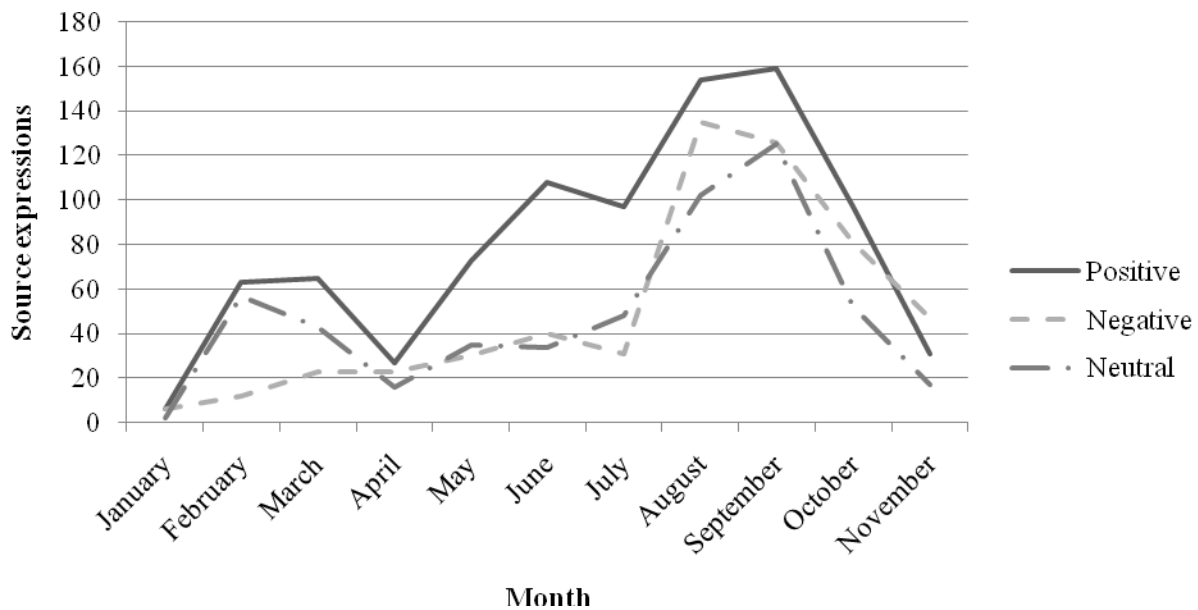


Figure 4. Valence of expressions in newspaper coverage of the health care debate over time.

Research question 1a asks whether journalists use the expressions from the various types of sources with differing frequency. In the sample, journalists used 56.3% governmental elite sources, 30.3% organizational elites, and only 9.6% popular sources. Polls accounted for 1% of sources, and documents accounted for 2.7%. Dummy variables were created for each of the three major source types, and one sample t-tests compared the means of each variable to hypothesized mean of 33% (see Table 1). Statistically significant results were found for all three tests

Table 1

Differing frequencies in use of the various types of sources

Source type 1 vs. source type 2	Source type 1 mean (st. dev.)	Source type 2 mean (st. dev.)	Mean difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Governmental elites vs. hypothesized third	.5627 (.4961)	.3333 (.0000)	.2294*	21.368	2135
Organizational elites vs. hypothesized third	.3034 (.4598)	.3333 (.0000)	-.0299*	-3.012	2135
Popular sources vs. hypothesized third	.0960 (.2946)	0.3333 (.0000)	-.2373*	-37.23	2135
Governmental elites vs. organizational elites	.5627 (.4961)	.3034 (.4598)	.2597*	24.194	2135
Governmental elites vs. popular sources	.5627 (.4961)	.0960 (.2946)	.4667*	43.475	2135
Organizational elites vs. popular sources	.3034 (.4598)	.0960 (.4961)	.2073*	20.843	2135

\* $p < .001$ 

when measured against the hypothesized level of 33%.<sup>1</sup> For governmental elites a mean difference of .2294 was observed ( $M = .5627$ ,  $SD = .4961$ ),  $t(2135) = 21.368$ ,  $p < .001$ . For

<sup>1</sup>There are two possible ways, with these data, to test for significant difference of means. The first is to test against a hypothesized level. In this scenario, 33% makes sense because there are three categories. This methodology contains obvious theoretical assumptions, but provides valuable data, nonetheless. The second method is to test the groups against one another. This study performs both methods, for the sake of thoroughness.



organizational elites a difference of -.0299 was observed ( $M = .3034$ ,  $SD = .4598$ )  $t(2135) = -3.012$ ,  $p = .003$ . For popular sources a difference of -.2373 was observed, ( $M = .0960$ ,  $SD = .2946$ )  $t(2135) = -37.234$ ,  $p < .001$ . These results indicate that, when measured against a hypothesized equilibrium between the three major categories of sources, journalists relied significantly more on governmental elites (with about one and half more expressions per article more than the hypothesized mean) than on organizational elites (who were right at or just below the mean) or popular sources (with about one and a half fewer expressions per article than the mean). The means of the various categories were also compared to one another. Again, significant results were found in all tests. When governmental elite sources were compared to organizational elites, a mean difference of .2597 was observed,  $t(2135) = 24.194$ ,  $p < .001$ , meaning governmental elite sources were used, on average, in about two more expressions per article than organizational elites. This result indicates governmental elites were used significantly more than organizational elites. When governmental elites were compared to popular sources, a mean difference of .4667 was observed,  $t(2135) = 43.475$ ,  $p < .001$ , which is a difference of 3.6 expressions per article. This result means that governmental elites were used significantly more than popular sources. Not only that, but this result indicates that the difference between governmental elites and popular sources is far greater than that between governmental elites and organizational elites. When organizational elites were compared to popular sources a difference of .2073 was observed,  $t(2135) = 20.843$ ,  $p < .001$ , which a difference of 1.6 expressions per article. This result means that journalists use organizational elite sources significantly more than popular sources. This finding is consistent with the above finding that the gap between governmental elites and popular sources is far greater than the gap between governmental elites and organizational sources. These findings indicate a three-tiered distribution of source

expressions in the 2009 health care debate, with journalists relying first and foremost upon governmental elite sources, secondarily upon organizational sources, and, relative to the other types, largely ignoring popular sources.

Research question 1b asks whether journalists use governmental elite source expressions from one party more frequently than from the other. Of the expressions from governmental elites, 68.9% came from Democrats while only 27% came from Republicans. A small number came from sources whose party it was impossible to determine (3.6%), and a negligible amount came from Independents (.4%) or other parties (.2%). It is important to note that these figures are overall statistics, unlike the statistics per month presented in Figure 2. These overall statistics indicate that journalists overwhelmingly used sources from the two major parties. Governmental elite source expressions were isolated, and dummy variables were created for each of the two major parties. Each mean was tested against a hypothesized level of 50%, and also against one another (see Table 2). When the use of Democrat expressions ( $M = .6889$ ,  $SD = .4631$ ) was compared against the hypothesized mean of 50%, the test showed journalists used Democratic source expressions significantly more than half the time, observing a difference of .1888,  $t(1201) = 14.137$ ,  $p < .001$ . Conversely, when Republican expressions ( $M = .2696$ ,  $SD = .4439$ ) were compared against the hypothesized mean, the test showed that they were used significantly less than 50% of the time, observing a difference of -.2304,  $t(1201) = -17.998$ ,  $p < .001$ . Finally, when the expressions from the two parties were compared to one another, the test found that Democrat expressions were used significantly more than Republican expressions, with a mean difference of .4188,  $t(1201) = 31.353$ ,  $p < .001$ , which is 3.2 more expressions per article. These results, therefore, indicate that in the coverage of the 2009 health care debate, journalists relied on Democrat sources significantly more than Republican sources.

Table 2

Differing frequencies in use of governmental elite sources from the two major parties

Type 1 vs. type 2	Type 1	Type 2	Mean difference	<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>
Democrat vs. hypothesized half	.6889 (.4631)	.5000 (.0000)	.1888*	14.137	1201
Republican vs. hypothesized half	.2696 (.4439)	.5000 .0000	-.2304*	-17.998	1201
Democrat vs. Republican	.6889 (.4631)	.2696 (.4439)	.4188*	31.353	1201

 $p < .001$ 

Research question 1c asks whether journalists use some categories of organizational elite sources more frequently than others. Among organizational elite expressions, 29.9% were from experts, 48.8% were from spokespersons, 18.9% were from business leaders, and 2% were from pundits. Organizational elite sources were isolated and dummy variables were created for each of the four types. The means were compared to one another (see Table 3). When comparing experts ( $M = .3002$ ,  $SD = .4586$ ) to spokespersons ( $M = .4899$ ,  $SD = .5002$ ), a difference of -.1878 (1.4 expressions per article) was observed,  $t(642) = -10.385$ ,  $p < .001$ . This result indicates journalists use expressions from spokespersons significantly more than expressions from experts. When comparing experts to business leaders ( $M = .1897$ ,  $SD = .3924$ ), a difference of .1111 (or .84 expressions per article) was observed,  $t(642) = 6.145$ ,  $p < .001$ . This finding indicates journalists used experts significantly more than they use business leaders. The tests found that journalists also use experts significantly more than pundits ( $M = .0202$ ,  $SD = .1408$ ), observing a difference of .1908 (1.4 expressions per article),  $t(642) = 9.675$ ,  $p < .001$ . When spokespersons were

Table 3

Differing frequencies in use of organizational elite sources

Type 1 vs. type 2	Type 1	Type 2	Mean difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Expert vs. spokesperson	0.3002 0.4586	0.4899 0.5002	-0.1878*	-10.385	642
Expert vs. business leader	0.3002 0.4586	0.1897 0.3924	0.1116*	6.145	642
Expert vs. Pundit	0.3002 0.4586	0.0202 0.1408	0.2801*	15.488	642
Spokesperson vs. business leader	0.4899 0.5002	0.1897 0.3924	0.3008*	15.251	642
Spokesperson vs. pundit	0.4899 0.5002	0.0202 0.1408	0.4698*	23.817	642
Business leader vs. pundit	0.1897 0.3924	0.0202 0.1408	0.1697*	10.969	642

 $p < .001$ 

compared to business leaders, the test found that expressions from spokespersons were used significantly more, with a difference of .3008 (2.3 expressions per article),  $t(642) = 15.251$ ,  $p < .001$ . Similarly, spokespersons were used significantly more than pundits, with a mean difference of .4698 (3.6 expressions per article),  $t(642) = 23.817$ ,  $p < .001$ . Finally, when business leaders were compared to pundits, the test showed expressions from business leaders were used significantly more than expressions from pundits, with a difference of .1697,  $t(642) = 10.969$ ,  $p < .001$ . These results mean that journalists do use organizational elite source expressions with differing frequency. In coverage of the 2009 health care debate, journalists use spokespersons the

most, followed by experts, and then business leaders. Pundits do not comprise a large portion of the organizational elite source expressions.

Research question 2a asks whether a relationship exists between the various types of sources and the expressions they make. A chi-square test shows that there is a significant relationship between source type and expression type ( $\chi^2 = 357.918$ ,  $df = 30$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Governmental sources tend to focus on strategy or process, as well as on issues. Organizational elite sources, tended to focus primarily on issues. Finally, popular sources tended to make ideological statements (see Table 4). Research question 2b asks whether an interactive effect exists between the type of source and the source's political party on the types of expressions the source makes. A general linear model univariate analysis of variance was used, and showed there was an overall effect of source level and source party on expression type,  $F(1) = 116.036$ ,  $p < .001$ , and an effect on expression type by source level  $F(5) = 4.636$ ,  $p < .001$ . The test found no significant effect on expression type by source party, however, and no interactive effect between source party and source type on expression type. These results show that party and source type generally do not combine to produce a more significant relationship with expression type, and that source type is the key variable when observing effects on expression type. Research question 2c asks whether, within organizational elite expressions, a relationship exists between the type of organizational elite source and their expressions. Organizational elite sources were isolated and a chi-square test was performed, which found a statistically significant relationship between organizational elite source type and expression type ( $\chi^2 = 51.962$ ,  $df = 24$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Experts and business leaders tended to focus primarily on issues, whereas organizational spokespersons focus on issues and strategy (see Table 5).

Table 4

Cross-tabulations of source type by expression variables

	Source type			$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>
	Gov. elites	Org. elites	Popular		
Expression type	1202	648	205	357.918***	30
Bill	143	48	2		
Issue	324	312	38		
Ideological	190	38	111		
Strategy	229	8	19		
Process	169	17	12		
Ad hominem	26	2	5		
Valence	1202	648	205	389.850***	15
Positive	573	210	85		
Negative	280	183	76		
Neutral	301	183	34		
Bill expressions	143	48	1	90.452***	35
Baucus	58	14	0		
HR 3200	11	4	0		
SB 1679	0	1	0		
HR 676	0	0	0		
Rep. bills	1	0	0		
HR 3962	18	3	0		
Unspecified	34	14	1		
Issue expressions	324	312	38	137.641***	35
Gov. provision	106	54	11		
Taxation	37	28	6		
Reg. industry	57	82	4		
Reg. individual	57	49	10		
Existing progs.	48	54	1		
Other	16	45	3		

\*  $p = .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 4 continued

	Source type			$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>
	Gov. elites	Org. elites	Popular		
Gov. provision	115	54	12	27.114**	9
Single-payer	3	6	2		
Public option	100	30	9		
Co-op	11	18	1		
Taxation	37	28	6	21.482*	9
Increase	26	20	5		
Decrease	1	2	0		
No change	8	3	0		
Industry regulation	58	83	4	2.899	9
Increase	49	67	4		
Decrease	2	4	0		
No change	4	9	0		
Individual regulation	57	49	10	3.165	10
Increase	50	45	10		
Decrease	1	0	0		
No change	6	4	0		
Existing programs	49	54	0	47.300***	16
Expand	6	16	0		
Reduce	13	17	0		
Reform	28	16	0		
Ideological	190	87	111	18.81	15
Liberal	147	67	74		
Centrist	13	5	3		
Conservative	26	12	33		
Ad hominem	26	9	5	30.988***	8
Praise	22	7	3		
Attack	3	2	2		

\*  $p = .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Research questions 3a-3c are similar to questions 2a-2c, except they examine valence rather than expression type. A chi-square shows a significant relationship between source type and the valence of expressions ( $\chi^2 = 389.850$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Overall, governmental elites were largely positive. This finding makes sense considering the finding that journalists use Democrat source expressions more than they use Republican source expressions. Popular sources were either positive or negative, but rarely neutral. Organizational elite sources, on the other hand, exhibited a greater degree of balance in the valence of their expressions. As with expression type, a univariate analysis of variance showed no interactive effects between source type and source party on valence. Neither did I find a significant effect for source party, indicating, once again, that the key variable is source type and not source party when observing effects on valence. I did observe an overall effect,  $F(1) = 132.925$ ,  $p < .001$ , which comes from source type,  $F(5) = 19.144$ ,  $p < .001$ . Finally, a chi-square test reveals a significant relationship between organizational elite source type and expression valence ( $\chi^2 = 48.466$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Spokespersons tended to be either positive or negative, whereas experts tended to be positive or neutral, and business leaders were more balanced.

Research questions 4a-4c, once again, are similar to the second and third sets of questions, this time examining prominence rather than valence or expression type. A chi-square test shows a significant relationship between source level and expression prominence ( $\chi^2 = 20.454$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Expressions from organizational elites and business leaders were significantly less prominent than governmental elite expressions. The univariate analysis of variance reveals no significant interactive effects of source type and source party on expression



Table 5

Cross tabulations of organizational elites by expression variables

	Organizational elite type				$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>
	Expert	Spokesperson	Business leader	Pundit		
Expression type	193	315	122	13	51.962**	24
Bill	7	33	8	0		
Issue	101	134	73	1		
Ideological	27	37	18	4		
Strategy	35	68	10	6		
Process	13	25	11	1		
Ad hom.	5	3	0	1		
Valence	193	315	122	13	48.466***	12
Positive	71	94	38	5		
Negative	29	118	28	8		
Neutral	64	77	41	0		
Prominence	193	315	122	13	5.123	4
High	73	102	39	7		
Low	120	213	83	6		

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

prominence. Finally, within organizational elite sources, a chi-square test reveals no significant relationship between source type and expression prominence.

Research question 5 asks whether relationships exist between publication and expression type and valence, respectively. A chi-square test shows a significant relationship between publication and expression type ( $\chi^2 = 152.161$ ,  $df = 30$ ,  $p < .001$ ). *The New York Times* and *The Pioneer Press* (St. Paul) focused mainly on issues, while the *Washington Post* had a more even distribution between issue, ideology, and strategy expressions. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* focused on ideology, and secondarily on issues, strategy, and process expressions. *The Denver*

*Post* focused on issue and ideology expressions. *The Oregonian* (Portland) was perhaps the most unique paper, focusing primarily on issues, but also on bills and ideology. *The Oregonian* did not tend to focus on strategy or process statements. A second chi-square shows a significant relationship between publication and valence ( $\chi^2 = 55.512$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *The Oregonian* tended to be more positive than negative or neutral. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *The Denver Post* provided more balance between positive, negative, and neutral statements. *The Pioneer Press* (St. Paul) tended to be either positive or negative, but not neutral.

Beyond the research questions, the coding scheme allowed me to gather detailed information about expression type. It was able to capture what bills, issues, and ideologies received attention from different types of sources. First, statements about bills in Congress were examined. A dummy variable was created for bill expressions, recoding all bill statements as “1” and all non-bill statements as “0.” The non-bill expressions were then filtered out. Of the bill expressions, most focused either on the Baucus bill (34.6%) or else did not specify which bill to which they referred (only used if it was not possible to determine from the article which bill was under discussion). Two other bills received a relatively high level of attention: HR 3200 (11.1%) and HR 3962 (10.1%), which can be viewed as the same bill if one considers that HR 3962 grew out of debate on HR 3200. Three bills in Congress, however, received little or no attention: SB 1679 (1% - the “other” Senate bill), the Patient’s Choice Act or other Republican bills (.5%), and HR 676 (0% - the single payer bill). These results suggest that the major metro newspapers only gave attention to those bills they thought had a chance of passing, and gave very little attention to any bill on the fringe of what journalists see as the mainstream debate. Another 12.5% of bill expressions referred to some other health care bill (most frequently the Children’s Health Care

Bill). A chi-square shows a relationship between source level, or type, and bill expressions ( $\chi^2 = 90.452$ ,  $df = 35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This result seems to be caused by the fact that popular sources virtually never talked about specific bills. Governmental elites and organizational elites, on the other hand, followed similar patterns when it came to bill expressions. Both groups focused on the Baucus bill, or otherwise did not specify the bill. A significant relationship also exists between source party and bill expressions ( $\chi^2 = 37.746$ ,  $df = 21$ ,  $p = .014$ ). Democrats focused on the Baucus bill, whereas Republicans focused on the Baucus bill and HR 3962 and unknown party sources focused on the Baucus bill and HR 3200 (see Table 6). These results indicate that unknown or unaffiliated voices tended to be more present during discussion of HR 3200 in the summer, whereas Republican voices were heard during discussion of HR 3962, the more refined bill which eventually passed in the House, in the fall. A significant relationship was found between valence and bill statements ( $\chi^2 = 45.126$ ,  $df = 21$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Most positive and neutral statements focused on the Baucus bill; whereas negative statements focused both on the Baucus bill and HR 3962 (see Table 7). There were more negative statements about bills than positive statements, even though there were more Democrat bill statements than Republican bill statements. This result indicates that much of the criticism of specific bills was not coming from Republicans, but rather from unknown party sources or from Democrats themselves. These results show that, when it comes to bill expressions, governmental elites and organizational elites largely discuss the same things. Popular sources do not tend to discuss bills.

A similar dummy variable was created for issue statements, and non-issue statements were filtered. Of these expressions, 25.1% focused on government provision of health care or health care insurance, 21.1% focused on regulation of the health care or health care insurance industry, 17.5% focused on regulation of businesses or individuals, 15.1% focused on existing

Table 6

Cross-tabulation of source party by expression variables

Expression type	Source party			$\chi^2$	<i>Df</i>
	Democrat	Republican	Unknown		
Bill expressions	88	42	75	37.746*	21
Baucus	38	12	20		
HR 3200	9	2	12		
SB 1679	0	0	0		
HR 676	0	0	0		
Rep. bills	0	1	0		
HR 3962	8	9	0		
Unspecified	20	12	22		
Issue expressions	238	74	389	46.771***	14
Gov. prov.	86	19	71		
Taxation	29	5	38		
Reg. industry	38	18	92		
Reg. individual	39	17	67		
Exist. prog.	35	11	60		
Gov. Provision	92	21	73	25.607***	6
Single-payer	4	1	6		
Public option	82	19	43		
Co-op	6	1	23		
Taxation	29	5	38	7.546	6
Increase	18	5	28		
Decrease	1	0	3		
No change	8	0	3		
Reg. Industry	38	18	93	7.154	9
Increase	35	12	76		
Decrease	1	1	4		
No change	1	3	10		

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 6 continued

Expression type	Source party			$\chi^2$	<i>Df</i>
	Democrat	Republican	Unknown		
Reg. Individual	39	17	67	10.304*	4
Increase	33	15	64		
Decrease	0	1	0		
No change	6	1	3		
Existing Programs	36	11	60	14.315	8
Expand	5	1	16		
Reduce	6	6	19		
Reform	23	4	19		
Ideology Expressions	131	47	219	105.822***	12
Liberal	122	15	160		
Centrist	9	3	1		
Conservative	0	26	46		
Ad Hominem	20	6	17	2.656	4
Praise	17	5	11		
Attack	2	1	4		

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

programs, and 10.3% focused on taxation. Another 9.8% focused on some other issue. These frequencies indicate the issues receiving the most attention were the major items on the Democratic party agenda: government provision of health care or health care insurance and regulation of the health care or health care insurance industry. A chi-square shows a significant relationship between source level and issue expression ( $\chi^2 = 137.641$ ,  $df = 35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As with bill expressions, popular sources did not frequently discuss issues. Governmental elites tended to focus on government provision, while organizational elites tended to focus on all issues in a more balanced way. Therefore, while it seems governmental and organizational elites discussed

Table 7

Cross-tabulation of valence by expression variables

Expression type	Valence			$\chi^2$	<i>Df</i>
	Positive	Negative	Neutral		
Bill expressions	61	80	41	45.126**	21
Baucus	15	29	19		
HR 3200	6	4	5		
SB 1679	1	1	0		
HR 676	0	0	0		
Rep. bills	0	1	0		
HR 3962	3	15	2		
Unspecified	18	15	14		
Issue expressions	284	192	134	116.493***	21
Gov. prov.	92	48	24		
Taxation	20	30	19		
Reg. industry	55	32	39		
Reg. individual	59	38	17		
Exist. prog.	43	36	11		
Gov. Provision	96	53	25	19.596*	9
Single-payer	6	3	1		
Public option	75	41	22		
Co-op	15	9	2		
Taxation	20	30	4	19.295*	9
Increase	14	27	8		
Decrease	1	0	2		
No change	4	2	5		
Reg. Industry	56	32	40	10.910	9
Increase	50	25	31		
Decrease	2	2	2		
No change	1	3	7		

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 7 continued

Expression type	Valence			$\chi^2$	<i>Df</i>
	Positive	Negative	Neutral		
Reg. individual	56	32	40	10.910	9
Increase	50	25	31		
Decrease	2	2	2		
No change	1	3	7		
Existing programs	43	36	11	43.022***	12
Expand	10	5	0		
Reduce	6	22	3		
Reform	23	7	7		
Ideology expressions	264	93	26	317.040***	9
Liberal	254	15	14		
Centrist	6	6	8		
Conservative	1	69	2		
Ad hominem	21	6	15	19.856**	6
Praise	20	1	11		
Attack	0	3	4		

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\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

bills in the same way, they discussed issues differently. Organization elites tended to show a wider range of focus, while governmental elites tended to focus on government provision. There is also a significant relationship between source party and issue expression ( $\chi^2 = 46.771$ ,  $df = 14$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Democrats focused on government provision, while Republicans focused on government provision, regulation of industry, and regulation of individuals. Unknown sources focused on government provision and regulation of industry. This result indicates that the relationship between governmental elites and expressions about government provision is due

mostly to the Democrats. A significant relationship was also found between valence and issue expressions ( $\chi^2 = 116.493$ ,  $df = 21$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Positive and negative expressions focused on government provision, while the most neutral statements focused on regulation of industry. This result suggests that government provision was a highly contentious issue, whereas regulation of industry was relatively less contentious.

Issue statements were analyzed at an even more detailed level. Dummy variables were created for each of the five issues, and then, one issue type at a time, filtered out expressions not about that issue and ran the same tests as explained in the above paragraph. Most government provision statements focused on the public option (77.4%). Health care co-ops received some attention (16.1%), while the single-payer system received very little attention (5.9%). A chi-square shows a significant relationship between source level and government provision expressions ( $\chi^2 = 27.114$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This result seems to be due to the fact that organization elites showed slightly more balance between the public option and co-ops, whereas governmental elites focused almost entirely on the public option. Organizational elites, however, still focused most of their expressions on the public option. Popular sources also focused on the public option. This result shows that most of the discussion of government provision did focus on the public option, and while some organizational elites discussed other options, the various types of sources mostly discussed the same thing. None of the groups focused at all on the single-payer system, indicating this option was marginalized throughout the debate. Similarly, a chi-square shows a significant relationship between source party and government provision expressions ( $\chi^2 = 25.607$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .001$ ), because unknown sources, who are generally organizational elites or popular sources, tended to discuss the co-op option relatively more than the other groups.



Tax expressions focused mostly on tax increase (70.8%). Discussion of tax decrease was rare (5.6%), but there was some discussion of no change in tax levels (15.3%). Because most of the discussion centered on raising taxes, no significant relationships were found when it came to tax expressions. This result makes sense because most of the government's proposals did involve some form of tax increase for some people. Naturally, if the debate is about expanding social programs, which the health care debate was, there will not be much discussion of lowering taxes. Similarly, there were no significant relationships for expressions about regulation of the health care or health care insurance industry. Most of these expressions focused on increasing regulation (82.7%). Only 4% focused on decreasing regulation, while 9.3% advocated for no change in regulation. These results, once again, make sense because the government's proposals from either side of the aisle involve more, not less, regulation of the health care and/or health care insurance industry.

As with government regulation of the health care industry, most discussion of regulation of individual health care choices involved an increase in regulation (91.1%) and not a decrease (.8%) or no change (8.1%). A chi-square does show a significant relationship between source party and individual regulation expressions ( $\chi^2 = 10.304$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .036$ ), which seems to be due to the fact that, on one hand, Democrats tended to assert there would be no change in individual choices, while on the other hand, popular sources never discussed a decrease in regulation of individual choices. A generalized linear model and a univariate analysis of variance shows an interactive effect between source party and source level ( $\chi^2 = 7.854$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .005$ );  $F(1) = 7.279$ ,  $p = .008$ . This result suggests that if source party affects a source's stance on regulation of individual choice, the effect of source level can interact with and enhance that effect (see Table 8). In other words, it appears that governmental elite Republicans and popular unknown party

Table 8

Interactive effects between source level and source party on regulation of individual expressions

Independent variable	Mean square	<i>F</i>	<i>Df</i>
Source level	0.721	2.529*	5
Source party	1.186	4.16	2
Source level*source party	2.075	7.279**	1

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ 

sources tend to focus almost exclusively on an increase in government regulation of individual choice in health care insurance.

Among expressions about existing programs, 43% discussed reforming those programs, 29% discussed reducing those programs, and 20.6% discussed expanding those programs. Typically, one would think Democrats would generally be in favor of expanding existing social programs, while Republicans would be in favor of reducing them. In the health care debate, that assumption proved to be precisely backwards. Democrats wanted to cut what they called “overpayments” in the Medicare system in order to find more funding for new health care programs, while Republicans resisted this cut along with the formation of new programs. Democrats attempted to frame the move as “reform,” while Republicans attempted to counter-frame the same action as “reduction.” A chi-square shows a significant relationship between source level and expressions about existing programs ( $\chi^2 = 47.300$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Governmental elites focused mainly on reform, while organizational elites discussed existing programs equally in terms of expansion, reduction, and reform. Here we see the same pattern observed in the issue-type category: organizational elites tend to show greater balance when it comes to discussion of existing programs, just as they showed greater balance in their choice of

issue topic. As we have seen, however, even though organizational elites show more balance, they most strongly emphasized the same issue that governmental elites did (governmental provision). When the analysis went more in-depth on the issue statements, it found that governmental elites and organizational elites were similar in their treatment of governmental provision, taxation, regulation of the health care and health care industry, and regulation of individual health care choices. Only in discussion of existing programs did governmental elites and organizational elites differ in a meaningful way. Organizational elites, therefore, showed more balance in their choice of topic, and also more balance in their discussion of existing programs. Otherwise, governmental elites and organizational elites discussed issues in the same way. Also, it seems that with respect to the issue of government regulation of individual health care choices, there is an interactive effect between source level and source party. Finally, popular sources do not tend to discuss issues.

Ideological statements were also examined in more detail. Of these expressions, 74.7% were liberal, 18% were conservative, and 5.3% were centrist. No significant relationship was found between source level and ideological expressions ( $\chi^2 = 18.810$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $ns$ ). All three major source types discussed liberal ideology more than conservative or centrist. This result indicates that, when it comes to ideology, there is no significant difference between the various types of sources. A significant relationship was found between source party and ideological expressions ( $\chi^2 = 105.822$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This result is almost intuitive, in a sense, because one would expect Democrats to express more liberal ideas and Republicans to express more conservative ideals, which was the case. Unknown party sources tended to express liberal ideas. A significant relationship was also found between valence and ideology ( $\chi^2 = 317.040$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Conservative ideology was expressed much more negatively than liberal or centrist

ideology. Liberal ideology, on the other hand, was discussed in a very positive light. There are two main findings, therefore, when it comes to ideology. First, liberal ideology dominated the discussion, and second, that there was no significant difference between the various types of sources on ideology.

As a matter of curiosity, chi-squares were run testing for a relationship between publication and each of the above-described expression type dummy variables for bill, issue, ideology, etc. (see Table 9). A significant relationship was found between publication and bill expressions ( $\chi^2 = 94.210$ ,  $df = 35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The Pioneer-Press* (St. Paul), and *The Oregonian* focused almost exclusively on the Baucus bill. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* focused more on HR 3962, while *The Denver Post* focused on HR 3200. All papers frequently failed to specify which bill was under discussion, with the exception of *The Oregonian*, which only did so once in the sample. A relationship was also found between publication and issue expression ( $\chi^2 = 130.772$ ,  $df = 35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). While all publications focused on government provision, *The New York Times* also focused on regulation of industry and existing programs. *The Pioneer Press* and *The Oregonian* focused equally on government provision and regulation of individual choice. A significant relationship was found between publication and government provision expressions ( $\chi^2 = 33.888$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = .004$ ). This result seems to be caused by *The Denver Post*, which focused equally on the public option and the co-op plan. All other publications focused mostly on the public option. There is also a significant relationship between publication and existing programs expressions ( $\chi^2 = 56.404$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ). First and foremost, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Pioneer Press*, and *The Oregonian* did not have any expressions about existing programs. *The New York Times* portrayed the government's plan for existing programs as a reduction or reform, whereas the *Washington*

Table 9

Cross-tabulation of publication and source type, expression type, and valence

	Publication						$\chi^2$	Df
	NYT	WP	AJC	SPPP	DP	ORE		
Source type	914	699	84	127	237	75	148.981***	25
Gov. elite	525	403	31	39	162	42		
Org. elite	290	197	44	47	53	17		
Popular	71	65	9	32	12	16		
Expression type	914	699	84	127	237	75	152.161***	30
Bill	92	52	8	10	31	15		
Issue	347	203	16	33	79	23		
Ideological	121	145	21	47	46	19		
Strategy	177	120	14	15	41	8		
Process	111	75	14	10	27	5		
Ad hom.	17	9	7	2	6	2		
Valence	914	699	84	127	237	75	55.512***	15
Positive	372	299	32	51	93	33		
Negative	218	153	27	40	96	20		
Neutral	230	190	23	28	42	18		

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ 

*Post* and *The Denver Post*, portrayed it as reform. Finally, there is a significant relationship between publication and ideology ( $\chi^2 = 30.677$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = .010$ ). *The New York Times*, the found between publication and issue expression ( $\chi^2 = 130.772$ ,  $df = 35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). While all publications focused on government provision, *The New York Times* also focused on regulation of industry and existing programs. *The Pioneer Press* and *The Oregonian* focused equally on government provision and regulation of individual choice. A significant relationship was found between publication and government provision expressions ( $\chi^2 = 33.888$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = .004$ ). This

result seems to be caused by *The Denver Post*, which focused equally on the public option and the co-op plan. All other publications focused mostly on the public option. There is also a significant relationship between publication and existing programs expressions ( $\chi^2 = 56.404$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ). First and foremost, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Pioneer Press*, and *The Oregonian* did not have any expressions about existing programs. *The New York Times* portrayed the government's plan for existing programs as a reduction or reform, whereas the *Washington Post* and *The Denver Post*, portrayed it as reform. Finally, there is a significant relationship between publication and ideology ( $\chi^2 = 30.677$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = .010$ ). *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The Pioneer Press*, and *The Oregonian*, tended to be more liberal. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *The Denver Post* tended to be more balanced.

Finally, the independence of my units of analysis, source expressions, was tested. Because source expressions are contained within articles, the possibility exists that the expressions within those articles are more related to one another than they are to the other source expressions across articles. The implications of this possibility are that the relationships observed in this study result from some relationships between articles, instead of independent source expressions. The data was tested with a mixed linear model controlling for article. Source level was first tested against expression type, and then against valence. These results show that the relationships this study observes between these variables and source level do exist across articles, because the effect of source level is still significant even while controlling for article (for expression type,  $F(5) = 3.601$ ,  $p < .001$ ; for valence,  $F(5) = 18.124$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The test also found that the article is significant for expression types ( $F(265) = 6.814$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The same was true when tested valence,  $F(265) = 3.090$ ,  $p < .001$ . These results indicate the article is a significant factor to consider when investigating relationships containing expression type and

valence. The article is important, and investigation into the relationships between the article and expression type and valence is an area for further research. While there may be an issue with non-independence of the units of analysis, these statistics show the primary relationships this study observes are still significant across articles. It was never the contention of this study that the article was not an important factor in studying these relationships, but rather to examine the totality of expressions made in the health care debate.

## **CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION**

To briefly recap the results of the study, the data show that journalists did rely on governmental elites most heavily in the health care debate, but that they also relied on organizational elite sources in a secondary way. Popular sources were largely absent from the debate until August, at which point a dramatic rise in the use of these sources occurred. While these sources were marginalized by October, their presence did have a lasting effect on the valence of the debate, as the tone was more negative after August. There is a significant difference between the various types of sources (governmental elite, organizational elite, and popular) when it comes to expression type and valence. Government elites tended to focus on issues, strategy, and process, whereas organizational elites tended to focus primarily on issues and popular sources tended to focus on ideology. Experts largely account for this difference among organizational elites. Interest group spokespersons, on the other hand, tended to follow the pattern evident among governmental elites. However, there is no significant difference between the ways various types of sources talk about particular issues, so that while experts talked about a wider variety of issues, they tended to talk about them in the same way as the other types of sources, for the most part.

This study has two main conclusions. First, the press made a moderate effort to bring in a variety of non-official voices, but those voices did not necessarily bring in substantially different views. It is important to qualify this conclusion, however, with the assertion that the press did not just bring in any non-official voices. The press represented those voices which represent certain powerful interest groups and institutions in society, like academia or business. The second conclusion of this study is an extension of the first. With the exception of the relatively small



group of experts and sparsely used popular sources, the press did not display a high level of content autonomy in the 2009 health care debate. Experts, for the most part, were used to broaden out the range of issues discussed in the debate. Popular voices were used sparingly and in certain situations, but the large number of these voices in the late summer did affect the overall makeup of the debate. For the most part, however, journalists tended to represent similar views from the vast majority of the sources they approached.

### Variety of Voices

The first set of research questions addresses the traditional indexing topic of frequency of source use. The indexing theory holds that journalists rely most heavily on governmental elites as sources of news. The results of this study show the 2009 health care debate is no exception to this trend. Journalists did rely most heavily on governmental elite sources. This assertion must be qualified, however, because journalists also relied secondarily on organizational elite sources. This basic finding – that journalists tend to include a relatively greater diversity of voices and views in the news in a domestic policy debate – is consistent with other indexing research on domestic news coverage, which has suggested that journalists tend to supply these voices and views in certain conditions and in relatively higher frequency than in foreign news coverage (Bennett & Klockner 1996; Lawrence 2000; Callaghan & Schnell 2001). In particular, these findings are very similar to those of Callaghan and Schnell (2001), who found that journalists relied on interest group spokespersons in the gun control policy debate in the late 1990s. Also, these findings are consistent with Bennett and Klockner's (1996) conclusion that journalists tend to seek out relatively greater numbers of non-governmental sources in pitched domestic policy debates.

Popular viewpoints, however, remained largely marginalized in the health care debate. The use of popular voices was, on the one hand, very low overall, but on the other hand, most concentrated in the contentious months of August and September, during which organized political activism thrust them into the public sphere. One other major use of popular sources exists, the identification of which rests solely on observation during the course of this study, which is the “hardship” story. In this type of story, the journalist tells the tale of some “average” person who is stricken by health care woes. For example, one article told the story of various people hoping to be seen on “lottery day” at the Arlington (Va.) Free Clinic, a day on which the clinic picks several lucky uninsured people to receive free medical care. Another story described the difficulty young international travelers experience in getting health care coverage while they backpack around the globe. Still other articles told the stories of people who had lost their jobs and could not afford insurance. Thus, it appears the use of popular source expressions was confined to stories about particular topics or events, such as political rallies or health care-related hardships. Furthermore, popular sources only found a concentrated voice when organized political activism thrust them into the public eye through events such as “tea parties,” town hall meetings, or protests. Finally, while these sources forced their way into the debate, this entrance was only temporary, as the press marginalized these voices after a period of time. This finding is consistent with other indexing studies, particularly Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston’s 2007 findings on Abu Ghraib and Katrina, which found that “other voices” in the form of counter-frames found their way in the news discourse in the immediate aftermath of these events, but that they were thereafter marginalized in the face of organized governmental management tactics (also see Domke’s 2006 finding that governmental news management quashed oppositional views after the 9/11 attacks). The same appears to be true in the case of the health care debate,

where popular voices entered the debate in the wake of somewhat dramatic (at least, politically dramatic) pseudo-events (see Lawrence 2000), but were quickly marginalized thereafter as the press resumed its normal reporting pattern and refocused concentration on governmental elites. These voices, however, did have a lasting effect on the tone of the health care debate. This interesting finding will be discussed in more depth below.

Among governmental elites, journalists relied most heavily on the Democrats, which makes sense because they were the majority party in both houses of Congress during the 2009 debate. This finding also fits with the indexing hypothesis, which predicts the debate among governmental elites in the news will reflect the actual balance of power in the government (Bennett 1990, Bennett & Manheim 1993). Republicans were not, however, completely absent from the debate, even though they wielded very little actual power within the halls of Congress as minorities in both houses. This finding fits with studies (Entman & Page 1994; Althaus, Edy, Entman, & Phalen 1996) that found journalists do sometimes represent the oppositional party in the news disproportionately to their actual power in Congress.

Among organizational elites, journalists relied most heavily on organizational spokespersons, or rather, interest group spokespersons. Secondly, they relied on experts. Clearly, journalists did not turn to just any non-governmental source. They turned to sources that represent the interest groups they thought might have an effect on the outcome of the debate, and also to sources who they thought possess some expert knowledge about the subject matter at hand. Again, these findings are similar to those of Callaghan and Schnell (2001), which suggest that journalists the type of non-official sources journalists rely most heavily upon is the interest group spokesperson. These findings imply that journalists tend to think of society as a sort of democratic corporation. The idea of democratic corporatism is derived from Hallin and

Mancini's (2004) comparative analysis of western media systems. They use the term to refer to the Germanic media systems, in which various powerful interest groups in society each have their own media outlet. In that way, each sector of society is represented through a head or a mouthpiece, much like the divisions of a corporation. For example, a corporation might have an advertising head, a marketing head, a production head, a shipping head, and so forth. The democratic corporation might feature heads of special interest groups, of issue activist groups, of labor unions, of professional organizations, of universities, and of prominent businesses. This framework is useful for thinking about the way journalists use interest group spokespersons, experts and business leaders. Journalists are likely to approach those sectors of society – represented by spokespersons for powerful lobbies, special interest groups, civic and social groups, CEOs of major corporations, or academic experts – they believe might have a vested interest in the outcome of the debate, or particular knowledge that might help them understand the debate. For example, in the health care debate, in a story about the proposed tax on medical devices, journalists might approach representatives of the device manufacturers, of the hospitals, of the AMA, and of the AARP, each of whom represent a powerful sector of society with a vested interest in the outcome of the debate on the issue. In a story about the restriction of abortion in public health care plans, journalists might approach pro-choice and pro-life activists, church leaders, or constitutional and judicial experts. To be sure, thinking of society in terms of a corporation with divisions whose opinion can be sampled by approaching a representative is motivated by practical restraints in news gathering. It is literally impossible for journalists to gather every single opinion. Gathering the opinions of people who supposedly represent many more people, on the other hand, seems like an easy way to put together a picture of society for the audience. In this way, journalists tend sample the head of the divisions of the democratic

corporation. While classic libertarian American ideals tend to emphasize individualism, the way professional newspaper journalists think of the American public tends to reflect a preference for organized pluralism, in which journalists have relatively easy access to representative sources. It is important to note here that it is not the intention of this thesis to challenge or revise Hallin and Mancini's framework. Indeed, the type of organized pluralism described here is more useful for describing the way journalists think about non-governmental sources rather than for describing the social structure of political communications. Unlike in the Germanic media systems, where each organization has its own media outlet, the mainstream American press still operates as a marketplace of ideas under the classic libertarian conception. The comparison made here, therefore, is to highlight the ways in which the term organized pluralism might apply to the domestic policy coverage in the United States, and not to suggest the U.S. does not operate on a libertarian system.

These results support the first part of the first main conclusion of this study: that in the 2009 health care debate, journalists made a moderate effort to include non-official voices. They still relied most heavily on governmental elites, but they did bring in a relatively high number of non-governmental sources. However, it is important to emphasize that journalists did not bring in just any non-governmental source, but rather sources who represented powerful social or civic interest groups or institutions.

#### Variety of Views

The second, third, and fourth sets of research questions address the issue of whether different types of sources say substantially different things. These questions are important because they will help determine whether the coverage of the 2009 health care debate was independent in terms of content, and therefore approached the standard of ideal autonomy. While

it is true that approaching different types of sources represents a type of procedural autonomy, if those sources are saying substantially similar things, the narrow content of the debate would render this procedural autonomy less significant in terms of what information citizens receive from the media (unless of course these opinions do actually represent the bulk of public opinion, a proposition which seems unlikely in this case considering the wide variety of competing viewpoints and interests). The findings of this study require a somewhat nuanced answer to the question of whether different types of sources say substantially different things.

In terms of the types of things sources said, the various types of sources did differ slightly. Governmental elites tended to focus on issues and strategy (see Cappella & Jamieson 1997), while organizational elites focused mostly on issues only. Popular sources, of course, were very different. These sources spoke primarily about ideology, and not about bills or issues. Their expressions were phrased in a way that revealed a holistic opposition or support for the idea of universal health care or health care reform. Interestingly, if we take a closer look at the various types of organizational elite sources, it becomes clear that interest group spokespersons also focused on strategy in addition to issues, much like the governmental elites did. These groups of sources therefore followed the same basic pattern, and talked about the same types of things: issues or political strategy.

This finding suggests interconnectivity between organizational elites and interest group spokespersons. As for the nature of this interconnectivity, there are two extreme possibilities. First, as the indexing theory suggests, journalists tie the range of expression the news represents to what governmental elites say, and therefore represent similar opinions from interest group spokespersons. Second, it is possible that politicians and interest group spokespersons are externally tied together, and that the media is not involved with this interconnectivity. Therefore,

it is possible that the similarity in views resulted not from selective gatekeeping on the part of the journalist, but occurred because the types of things these sources say really are the same. Some combination of the two possibilities seems the most likely. After all, research documents journalists tendency to index views based on governmental elite opinion (Bennett 1990; Zaller & Chiu 1996; Entman & Page 1994; Lawrence 2000; Callaghan & Schnell 2001; Domke 2006; Jerit 2006; Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston 2007). On the other hand, both groups have some measure of power: government elites contain legislative or executive power, while interest groups are powerful because they control lobby money and/or a significant voting bloc. It seems logical, therefore, that these groups affect each other externally from the media. It seems reasonable that these two groups might develop similar viewpoints on the same issues because of this external relationship.

The second main conclusion to be drawn from the finding that interest group spokespersons say the same types of things as governmental elites is that the other types of organizational elite sources, especially experts, and to a lesser extent, business leaders, are responsible for the difference between governmental and organizational elites. These sources tend to focus on issues only, whereas interest group spokespersons tended to focus on issues, but also on political strategy. With regard to experts, this finding seems particularly intriguing and potentially very important. The results of the study suggest that experts represent some type of content independence. These sources had a completely different focus and pattern of expression than other types of sources, and that focus tended to be on issues. The discussion about experts will be continued in more depth below, in light of more detailed findings on the way sources talk about particular issues.

This study also dug deeper to examine not only the types of things the sources said, but also the specific bills, issues, and ideologies the sources talked about and the way in which they talked about them. For expressions about issues, a similar trend emerges as observed in the above section examining expression type. Interest group spokespersons followed the same patterns of expression as governmental elites, whereas experts were slightly different.

Specifically, governmental elites and interest group spokespersons tended to talk about the same issues, whereas experts tended to talk about a wider range of issues. Both groups focused on government provision and regulation of the health care industry, which are precisely the issues that represented the primary portion of the Democratic agenda. For example, Democratic governmental elites and interest group spokespersons talked about things like the public option, eliminating pre-existing conditions, or restricting abortion in federal health care plans. Experts and business leaders, on the other hand, tended to focus on a wider variety of issues, including taxation, mandated health insurance coverage, and Medicare reform. Considering that this study also shows that experts focused primarily on issues, it seems journalists approached these types of sources when they wanted to broaden the debate in terms of issue topic, particularly in September during the debate over the Baucus bill. This finding represents a potentially significant addition to the indexing theory, and suggests that experts may be a type of source journalists approach when they want to expand a domestic debate beyond the parameters of governmental elite discourse. Experts, therefore, represent some level of content independence. Just as Callaghan and Schnell (2001) suggest additional attention be given to interest group spokespersons, these results suggest experts are another category of sources researchers need to give additional attention in future research. It should be noted that experts did not account for a large proportion of the total source expressions used, but they did play a significant role. That



role, it seems, was to expand the debate beyond discussing the public option and government regulation of health care reform. For example, journalists approached experts to discuss proposed changes to Medicare or the effects of the employer mandate during the September Senate debate over the Baucus bill.

Again, it could be argued that these sources represent the social institutions of knowledge. Many experts are university professors, while others work for research institutions or think tanks. Also, in the case of health care, many are doctors or other health care professionals not acting in a representative capacity, but rather in an academic or scientific capacity. It is important to reiterate the difference between an expert and a pundit, a line that cable television news has blurred to some extent. Pundits are paid news opinion professionals, whereas experts are approached solely for their topic-specific knowledge. Pundits did not account for a large portion of source expressions in newspaper coverage of the health care debate.

When this study examined the way in which the sources talked about the various issues, it found that, for the most part, governmental elites and organizational elites talked about most issues in the same way. The one exception to this trend was the issue of existing programs, for example, changes to Medicare or Medicaid. In this case, governmental elites, a group dominated by the Democrats, clearly attempted to frame the discourse in terms of “reform,” whereas organizational elites spoke of reform in terms of a “reduction.” For example, in a September *Washington Post* article, one doctor complained of reductions in federal payments to doctors who see Medicare patients. Obama, on the other hand, repeatedly promised to reform the Medicare payment system by eliminating waste and fraud. This example illustrates a basic difference in the way different types of sources talked about this issue.

With regard to the other four major issues, however, the different source levels spoke of them in the same way. To be sure, in two issues (taxation, regulation of industry), the nature of the proposed policies tended to guide the discourse, providing “natural” frames for the debate. For example, every bill, including the Republican bills, called for more government regulation. Speaking of increasing regulation, therefore, would seem natural. With respect to regulation of the individual, however, the results suggest an interactive effect between source party and source level on expressions about this issue. This suggests that popular sources and Republicans were more likely to think that government regulation of the individual was an issue.

Finally, and most importantly, the results concerning government provision of health care or health care insurance show the discourse overwhelmingly focused on the public option and largely ignored other forms of government provision such as the single-payer system or the co-op system. Additionally, between these two types of government provision, the co-op system received some attention, while the single-payer system received virtually no attention. These findings fit with the indexing theory, which holds that the discourse in news will be narrow, excluding the “extreme” positions (in this case, the socialistic single-payer system, as well as the libertarian position of no government provision whatsoever) and focus only on those positions journalists think governmental officials are giving the most attention. It also belies a tendency for the mainstream media to ignore any “socialist” ideas, opting instead to focus on a system that does not threaten or challenge the corporate insurance system.

There was no significant difference between the various types of sources with respect to bills (outside of the fact that popular sources rarely, if ever, talked about bills) and ideologies. All types of sources focused on the Baucus bill, or else the bill was not specified. This finding fits with the indexing theory, which might predict that journalists would focus on those bills they

thought had a chance of “winning.” However, it is interesting that journalists did not give at least as much focus to the various House bills, particularly HR 3200 and its successor, HR 3962.

While journalists did use expressions that focused on these bills in a secondary manner, the indexing theory might suggest that journalists would concentrate on bills in either House with relatively equal intensity. In this particular policy debate, therefore, there was a bias toward the Senate. This is an interesting finding, because the Senate bill was more politically centrist, spurning the public option in favor of the co-op health care plans. The House bills, on the other hand, were more liberal because they provided for a public option. The House bill, therefore, was more extreme in its stance that the government should directly provide public health care plans.

As with bill expressions, there was little difference between the various types of sources with respect to ideological expressions, other than the fact that popular sources tended to focus almost exclusively on ideology while the other types did not. For the most part, liberal ideology dominated the news discourse. One might expect this finding for governmental elites, where Democrats dominated. One might also expect this finding for organizational spokespersons, since that group is interconnected with governmental elites. This finding is surprising, however, with respect to popular sources, because of the large number of oppositional voices present in August. The study shows, therefore, that despite the large amount of oppositional popular views in the news during the contentious months of August and September, those views were balanced by supportive ideological views during the rest of the debate. As we shall see in the section discussing valence, however, the presence of these conservative oppositional ideologies in the late summer and early fall did have a big effect on the debate.

In terms of valence, the study again shows a slight difference between the source levels. Governmental elites were more positive toward the dominant Democratic agenda, which is

consistent with the fact that Democrats dominated this category of sources. Popular sources tended to be either positive or negative, but rarely neutral. Organizational elites exhibited the most balance between positive, negative, and neutral expressions. In this case, organizational spokespersons tended to most closely follow the pattern of popular sources. The data show that the predominance of the positive valence in the governmental elite source level was caused by the fact that there were far more Democrat expressions than Republican expressions, and not that Republicans were positive toward health care reform. Governmental elites, therefore, were either positive or negative, but rarely neutral. Thus, in the case of valence, it seems there is little if any difference between governmental elites, interest group spokespersons, and popular sources. All groups are either positive or negative, but rarely neutral.

This leaves, once again, the experts as the group that provided the most difference in terms of valence. These types of sources provided the most neutral expressions, thereby giving the entire organizational elite source category a balance between positive, negative, and neutral. The implication is that journalists turn to these types of sources when seeking neutrality, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Several possibilities could account for the interconnectivity in valence between governmental elites, interest group spokespersons, and popular sources. On the one hand, a “top down” approach would suggest that governmental elites set the tone of the debate, and that tone cascades down to organizational spokespersons and popular sources. Conversely, a “bottom-up” approach might suggest that popular sources set the tone, and organizational and governmental elites followed suit. Finally, of course, there is the possibility, or rather probability, that a more nuanced, interactive approach is needed.

The above use of the word “cascade” was not accidental, but rather a clear reference to Entman’s cascade model (2004), which was discussed in a previous chapter. In this model, the mechanism for reversing the cascading process of frames is the emergence of counter-frames from alternative or oppositional sources. These frames can halt or, at least, hinder the cascading momentum of the dominant frame, and begin an oppositional process that eventually reaches the top levels of governmental elites. This oppositional process can force political elites to make a calculated alteration or adjustment in their discourse about that topic or, at the extreme, a complete reversal in their positions. The over-time data in this study suggest that Entman’s model fits the health care debate of 2009 in terms of valence. The results show that the debate was mostly positive up until August, when a much higher number of critical or negative views entered the news discourse. This spike in negativity or criticism seems to come from coverage of events, or rather pseudo-events, such as the town hall meetings, the “tea parties,” and other health care-related protests. After August and September, this negativity remained even while the popular and organizational voices that caused the spike in August largely dropped out of the news. This suggests, therefore, that popular and organizational sources forced their way into the debate through organized political activities, which fundamentally altered the tone of the debate. That change in tone then cascaded, in reverse, back up the chain to governmental elites, causing journalists to report this tone more frequently.

It is important to note, however, that some Democrats did begin to criticize the dominant Democratic agenda after it became clear that certain key players who form that agenda had dropped the public option (Obama and Baucus, specifically). Democratic senators such as Robert Menendez from New Jersey and Ron Wyden from Oregon were very critical of this political move to the center, and it therefore seems appropriate to report that this caused some

governmental elite negativity during October and November. Their expressions, however, were limited and likely did not have a major impact on the overall findings in each month with respect to valence.

Equally important to note is the difficulty of determining who originates an idea (or a tone) and when. Indeed, some might suggest this task is impossible. Still others would argue that ideas don't originate with any particular person, and that they exist on some metaphysical plane as memes. That discussion, however, will be left to the philosophers. When speaking about a physical system of institutions such the news media, what is useful is to look for relationships between the various groups and entities, which this study has done. However, this study is limited in that it cannot answer the directional question of who initially promoted the dissemination of the ideas that halted the cascading momentum of the dominant frames, topics of discussion, or tone. An in-depth understanding of the anti-health care movement that coalesced in late summer is required in order to gain more insight into these topics. Perhaps qualitative in-depth interviews with some of the sources who were a part of that movement might shed some light on where they got certain ideas. A structural analysis of the movement would also be helpful in understanding the framework in which meanings were shared and culture was formed. If the key sources were thusly isolated, it might then be possible to perform a quantitative time-series analysis of the source expressions they issued during the debate and test Entman's cascade model more directly.

As for the larger question of whether various types of sources issued substantially different expressions in the news media, the answer is yes, in some ways, but no, in other ways. In the health care debate, journalists made a moderate effort to bring in non-governmental elite sources, but not just any type of non-governmental elites source. Among those they did bring

into the debate in large numbers, many said the same types of things as governmental elites. The exception to this trend seems to be experts. This study indicates, therefore, that further research needs to be conducted on the role of experts in domestic policy debate coverage. Another difference comes from popular sources, but those sources were largely marginalized. Their presence in the debate during the late summer, on the other hand, seems to have changed the overall nature of the debate, making it more hostile toward the dominant Democratic agenda. These findings have led to the conclusion that, despite the fact that journalists made a moderate effort to bring in a variety of non-governmental voices, those voices, for the most part, did not represent substantially different viewpoints. With the exception of the relatively small group of experts and sparsely used popular sources, therefore, the press did not display a high level of content autonomy in the 2009 health care debate.

#### Press Standards

Having supplied a satisfactory answer to the primary question guiding this study, the discussion can now move to the implications of these findings for press standards. The results show the press does not even come close to living up to lofty full news standard, which calls for the full provision of voices and views in society in order to have a full discourse in the representative public sphere of the news media. As these results have shown, the press did not seek out a totality of, or even total representation of, voices and viewpoints available, but rather concentrated on governmental and organizational elites journalists though might have an impact on the debate. For example, popular sources were, for the most part, ignored. The single-payer system was almost completely ignored. It is clear that empirical observations of the press do not resemble the normative progressive ideals of the full news standard.

Neither does the burglar alarm model really fit for the health care debate. The burglar alarm standard calls for the press to alert citizens only when important issues or events arise. In the health care debate, however, newspapers issued a steady stream of hard news coverage about issues and pseudo-events from February through November. In the health care debate, the burglar alarm, as Bennett (2003) appropriately put, never stopped ringing.

Coverage of the health care debate does seem to approach the standards outlined by Porto (2007), which focused on diversity of frames. Porto maintained that this diversity would help citizens interpret politics in a consistent way. While the results of this study don't address frame diversity, they do address diversity of viewpoints. What these concepts share in common is the presentation of a variety of interpretations of political reality. Once again, this study shows that the press did make a moderate effort to bring in a diversity of voices. However, those voices did not necessarily bring in substantially different views. In the health care debate, it seems that a diversity of voices did not lead to a diversity of views. In developing a normative standard of press performance, therefore, one should not assume that providing a diversity of voices necessarily leads to a diversity of views. While the press approached Porto's interpretive diversity in the 2009 health care debate, it did not fully measure up to this standard of press performance.

#### Further Research

This study opens up several areas for further research, not including those areas I have already discussed with regard to the anti-health care movement and the role of experts. Another area for research would be to identify those situations that prompt journalists to bring in oppositional or alternative voices saying substantially different things than other sources. In order to do this, one could develop a typology of article frames, and determine which types of stories tend to promote



the creation of substantially different content. Alternatively, one could examine the type of coverage (e.g. hard news, soft news) and relationships to article content. Also, one could study the effects of content independence, using as treatment articles with differing frequencies of various types and tones of expressions from various types of sources, and using a pre-test/post-test survey design to measure changes in opinion on health care issues. Additionally, one could expand the framework of this study to include different types of media and the differences between them. Finally, one could apply this research design to a different test case, to determine whether the results are similar and whether the conclusions of this study hold true in a different domestic policy debate.

## **CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION**

To summarize the main conclusions of this study, government officials relied most heavily on governmental elite sources. Journalists did, on the other hand, make a moderate effort to include non-governmental sources. These sources were not just any sources, however, but rather represented powerful interest groups or institutions journalists though would have an impact on the outcome of the health care debate. Despite this effort to bring in non-governmental sources, journalists did not, for the most part, present substantially different viewpoints from these different types of voices. Where such a substantial difference exists, it was because of experts or popular sources. Popular sources were used sparingly until August and September. At this point, their inclusion in the discourse heavily impacted the overall tone and makeup of the debate, even though their inclusion was short-lived. Experts, on the other hand, were used to broaden out the debate in terms of issue topic. These sources, therefore, represent some level of content independence in the debate. On the whole, however, journalists did not present a high level of content independence in the 2009 health care debate. The independence that was observed came from experts and popular sources, rather than from interest group spokespersons, who made up the majority of the non-governmental sources journalists approached in the debate.

Turning now to placing the finding within the larger scope of the indexing theory in domestic policy coverage, it is clear from the results of this study that the general pattern of newspaper reporting during the 2009 health care debate fits with the indexing theory. Journalists tied their representation of voices and views to what powerful governmental elites said. Journalists recreate their internal calibration of governmental viewpoints when approaching other types of sources, especially interest group spokespersons. Because these sources make up the majority of the non-governmental elite sources journalists used, the general pattern of reporting

largely resembles the indexing model, which holds that journalists will seek those non-governmental viewpoints that are already emerging in governmental elite circles.

This study, however, points to several potentially important additions to the body of work on the theory, and suggests some slight modification in the way researchers think about the indexing theory in domestic policy coverage. First, the results of this study support the findings of Callaghan and Schnell (2001), but not the conclusion. Journalists do rely on interest group spokesperson in a secondary way. However, much like Bennett (1990) asserted in his original indexing formula, journalists represent those views that are substantially similar to those expressed in governmental elite discourse. This means that while journalists give heavy emphasis to interest group spokespersons, their content is largely redundant, presenting no substantially new or different information. While Callaghan and Schnell's study might present some hope that journalists tend to expand the debate beyond governmental elite parameters through interest group spokespersons, this study shows that the use of these sources may not provide citizens with any new information. One could hardly refer to the use of such sources, therefore, as independent. Rather, those views are dependent upon what governmental elites are already saying. Thus, interest group spokespersons, representatives of the divisions of the great democratic corporation, do not represent some lofty hope for democracy. In the health care debate, at least, they did not present much substantially new information. In terms of the information citizens receive, therefore, the focus on interest group spokespersons does not expand the universe of knowledge or information circulating in the debate. In this case, interest group spokespersons did not expand the marketplace of ideas, but rather stuck to the narrow set of ideas outlined by governmental elites. This could be due to some external connection between political and organizational elites, or it could be that the media only represents similar views, as the indexing theory suggests. It is also possible this connection is context-specific, and that the

same pattern may not exist in a different policy debate. This conclusion is not so much a modification to the indexing theory as it is a qualification of the Callaghan and Schnell's proposed expansion of it. It is, therefore, more of a reaffirmation of the indexing theory, as originally conceived, in the face of their proposal, by tempering the hopes for independence from interest group spokespersons.

This study does, however, point to several ways in which the theory might be expanded. Specifically, this study suggests that experts are a potentially important type of source to consider when studying the indexing theory in domestic policy. These sources are used with relative infrequency, but play an important role. That role appears to be to broaden out the debate in terms of issues. They talk about more issues, and in different ways than do governmental elites or interest group spokespersons. Therefore, the use of experts is one way in which journalists attempt to expand the debate beyond the parameters of powerful elite discourse. Experts, thus, represent some level of content independence in domestic policy debates. Clearly, more attention needs to be given to the role of experts in these debates. As it stands right now, this study suggests the use of experts could be a potential qualifier to the indexing theory's main hypothesis that journalists will tie the range of views to governmental elite discourse. Just like with dramatic news events (Lawrence 2000), technology-enabled news coverage (Livingston & Bennett 2003), or press relations "spin," (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston 2007), the use of experts might represent a form of press independence. More research needs to be conducted to determine what conditions prompt journalists to approach experts, and a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between the press and experts is needed in order to fully understand the role of experts.

Popular sources also represent a potential addition to the indexing hypothesis that journalists will tie the range of news discourse to elite debate. Journalists approach popular

sources in certain situations, for example, in a “hardship” story or a protest story. The most concentrated inclusion of these sources, however, occurred during coverage of organized political protests or pseudo-events. This concentration had a lasting effect on the debate. The finding that journalists use these sources most frequently when covering a politically dramatic pseudo-event fits with past indexing research that showed the news became more independent in the wake of dramatic news events like coverage of Hurricane Katrina, or coverage of school shootings (Lawrence 2000; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston 2007). These politically organized pseudo-events, however, are different than the types of events described in those studies. They are not “organic” occurrences, so to speak. They are, rather, pre-planned, orchestrated events designed specifically to get the attention of the media (Boorstin, 1961). It seems these pseudo-events, therefore, were successful in their main goal of getting media attention. This study suggests that, in addition to dramatic news events, politically dramatic pseudo-events like protests or rallies should be considered a circumstance in which the press becomes more independent, at least temporarily. This assertion must be tempered, however, because a deeper understanding of the anti-health care movement is needed in order to gain a clearer picture of the phenomenon that occurred in late summer. It is possible that popular sources do not at all represent content independence, but rather that they merely followed the lead of organizational and governmental elites. Regardless of the origins of their views and opinions, however, these political rallies caused journalists to expand the news discourse beyond its operational parameters. This conclusion suggests that if journalists sense, whether rightly or wrongly, the tide of public opinion might be turning against the dominant governmental elites, they recalibrate their views to include these new opinions from the general public. This readjustment of the range of debate might then affect governmental elites.

The question remains whether or not the use of experts and the use of popular sources during the contentious months of late summer means the press did a good job of reporting on the 2009 health care debate. In both cases, the answer appears to yes, in some ways, but no, in other ways. In the case of experts, journalists clearly used these sources to dig deeper, to explore more issue topics, and to get a variety of educated viewpoints about complex subjects. On the other hand, experts were used with relative infrequency. Also, the use of intellectuals and scholars as the primary way in which to expand the discourse is debatable. On one hand, the news represents more educated opinions because of the use of experts. On the other hand, some anti-academia conservatives might argue that the focus on these opinions is elitist, and that the press uses academia and science to “talk down” to the public, telling them which issues are important and what is or isn’t true. Of course, this scenario does seem more palatable than a media environment that only includes governmental elites and interest group spokesperson, but less palatable than one that represents a diversity of popular views in addition to expert views.

In the case of popular sources, their use in late summer does represent an effort to bring in alternative or oppositional viewpoints. However, these voices only gained access to the debate through organized political pseudo-events. The press only sought out these viewpoints when they could find them through a convenient, organized event for which the journalist had pre-packaged story forms and structures. Furthermore, as argued above, it is possible that these views stemmed not from the popular sources themselves, but rather that those voices were influenced by governmental and political elites. All in all, therefore, it could not be said, definitively, that the press did a good job of covering the health care debate simply because they used experts sparingly and popular sources in August and September.

Returning to Bennett’s (1990) proposition that “other” views emerge in news coverage only once those views have emerged in governmental elite circles, this study largely supports

that proposition. For the most part, different types of sources say the same types of things. While this conclusion obviously does not prove, as Bennett suggests, that these ideas originated in elite circles, it has shown a close similarity between governmental elites and other types of sources. The exceptions to this rule were experts, and at a certain point in time, popular sources. However, while the use of experts and popular sources does make the press more independent in some ways, the coverage of the 2009 health care debate did not exhibit a high level of content independence overall.

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## APPENDIX A

### TIMELINE OF THE 2009 HEALTH CARE DEBATE

20-Jan	President Barack Obama inaugurated
26-Jan	HR 676 - single payer bill re-introduced
9-Feb	Wyden-Bennett (SB 1679) act re-introduced
20-May	Patient's Choice Act (the first Republican bill) introduced
15-Jun	Obama speech to the AMA
14-Jul	HR 3200 introduced
25-Jul	First Obama town hall meeting
1-Aug	Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D.-Texas) mobbed in town hall meeting in Austin, Texas.
2-Aug	Sen. Arlen Specter and Health Secretary Kathleen Sebelius heckled at town hall in Penn
4-Aug	AARP town hall meeting disrupted by protesters
6-Aug	Fight breaks out at town hall in St. Louis, Mo.
7-Aug	Palin's "death panels" comment on Facebook
11-Aug	Obama's town hall tour begins with New Hampshire meeting
14-Aug	Obama Montana town hall
15-Aug	Obama Colorado town hall (where mentions the possibility of not including a public option for the first time)
17-Aug	Armed veterans appear at Obama Phoenix town hall meeting
2-Sep	Man's fingertip bitten off at California health care rally
9-Sep	Obama's plan introduced
12-Sep	Washington health care reform protest
16-Sep	Baucus bill introduced to committee
20-Sep	Obama appears on five television networks to promote health care reform
29-Sep	Baucus, et al. rejects public option
13-Oct	Senate Finance Committee approves Baucus bill
29-Oct	House introduces HR 3962
7-Nov	House passes HR 3962

## **APPENDIX B CODE GUIDE**

1 - Coder number

2 - Source expression number

3 - Article number

4 - Date (e.g. 901)

5 - Publication

- 1 = The New York Times
- 2 = Washington Post
- 3 = Atlanta Journal & Constitution
- 4 = The Denver Post
- 5 = The St. Paul Pioneer Press
- 6 = The Oregonian

6 – Expression prominence

- 1 = high
- 2 = low

7 – Expression valence

- 1 = supportive
- 2 = critical
- 3 = neutral
- 4 = factual

8 - Source name

9 - Source title

10 - Source level

- 1 = government elite
- 2 = organizational elite
- 3 = popular
- 4 = poll
- 5 = document
- 6 = other

if government elite:

- 1 = politician (Executive or legislators – national, state, & local)
- 2 = politician spokesperson or staff member (include family member, i.e., Michelle Obama)
- 3 = national party spokesperson or staff member

- 4 = other politician (e.g. former president)
- 5 = agency spokesperson or staff member
- 6 = other

if organizational elite:

- 1 = expert
- 2 = spokesperson
- 3 = business leader
- 4 = pundit
- 5 = other

if Poll:

- 1 = cited (specifically named)
- 2 = not cited (not specifically named)

11 - Source party

- 1 = Democrat
- 2 = Republican
- 3 = Independent
- 4 = Other
- 5 = None specified

12 - Expression type:

- 1 = bill
- 2 = issue
- 3 = ideological
- 4 = strategy
- 5 = process
- 6 = ad hominem
- 7 = off-topic

if bill:

- 1 = Baucus Bill
- 2 = HR 3200
- 3 = SB 1679
- 4 = HR 676
- 5 = Rep bills
- 6 = HR 3962
- 7 = other
- 8 = none specified

if ideological:

- 1 = liberal
- 2 = centrist
- 3 = conservative
- 4 = other

if issue:



- 1 = government provision of health care or health care insurance
- 2 = government taxation of individuals or corporations to pay for health care insurance plans
- 3 = government regulation of the health care or health care insurance industry
- 4 = government regulation of individual right to health care choices
- 5 = existing government health care programs
- 6 = other

if government provision:

- 1 = single-payer
- 2 = public option
- 3 = co-op/public-private
- 4 = none/no change

if government taxation:

- 1 = increase
- 2 = decrease
- 3 = neutral/other

if regulation of health care or health care insurance:

- 1 = increase
- 2 = decrease
- 3 = neutral/other

if regulation of individuals:

- 1 = more
- 2 = less
- 3 = neutral/other

if existing programs:

- 1 = expand
- 2 = reduce
- 3 = reform
- 4 = none/no change

if ad hominem:

- 1 = praise
- 2 = attack

## VITA

Matthew Holt Barnidge was born in Lafayette, Louisiana, in 1982, but grew up in the Houston, Texas, area. He graduated a year early from Kingwood High School in 1999, and went to community college for one year at Kingwood College (now called Lone Star College – Kingwood). He then moved on to the University of Texas at Austin, where he majored in anthropology and history. After graduating, he traveled extensively in Europe, Canada, and Latin America. In between trips, he worked at two law firms and a legal service company in Austin. Barnidge began his studies at Louisiana State University'sanship School of Mass Communication in the fall of 2008, where he focused in journalism. He wrote for the school's newspaper, *The Daily Reveille*, and worked as an intern for the *Concordia Sentinel* in Ferriday, Louisiana, covering the investigation of unsolved civil rights murders in the Louisiana Delta region. He also participated in several research projects, including an examination of online political talk during the 2008 presidential election, an analysis of news coverage of age, race, and gender in the 2008 presidential election, and a study of news discourse in the Iraq war. Barnidge will pursue a doctorate in mass communication upon completion of his master's degree.