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The Influence of United States Public Opinion on National Debates on the 2011 Libyan
Intervention

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Abstract

What role, if any, does the American public play in the decision to become involved in a humanitarian intervention mandated by a multilateral organization such as the United Nations? This article examines the influence of public opinion in the United States on Congressional debates in the case of the United States participation in the 2011 Libyan intervention. This study will apply the argument that the public influence Congress through their electoral power, the alignment of public opinion with individual members' beliefs and the necessity of public support for the success of foreign policy. Relational content analysis will be applied to Congressional records. This will lead this study to argue that overall, public opinion had little effect on national debates in the case of Libya, but that the limited positive data does suggest that electoral concerns should not be discounted as an explanatory factor. Ultimately, this study argues for further research on this topic to adopt a mixed method, comparative approach to assess the value of public opinion on intervention debates, with particular attention paid to the influence of partisanship.

Introduction

On June 3rd 2011 the United States House of Representatives rebuked the Obama administration for failing to secure the support of Congress for the continued military action in Libya (Steinhauer, 2011, para. 1). The accompanying resolution demanded that the administration provide information about the cost, nature, and reasons why permission from Congress was not sought for the intervention (Steinhauer, 2011, para. 6). This contemporary criticism of the unilateral approach taken by the administration was later supported by criticism following the end of the intervention in October 2011. Both raised questions about the power and influence of Congress, and by extension the American people (Böller and Muller, 2018, p. 651).

The influence of public opinion on high profile military interventions has been a consistent subject of critical attention, scholars having sought to explain the effect of public opinion on use-of-force decisions as far back as 1870 (Fordham, 2002, p. 574). Public opinion was initially dismissed as irrelevant to the foreign policy process, several scholars arguing for the dominance of elite views in the face of evidence suggesting that public opinion was volatile and lacking in coherence (Lippman, as cited in Holsti, 1992, p. 439). This argument became known as the Almond-Lippman consensus and came to dominate debates of the 1960s and 1970s (Holsti, 1992, p. 439). However, following the Vietnam War, scholars began to depart from this consensus, the war highlighting the new ways in which the public could impact foreign policy (Jentleson, 1992). The extent to which the public became involved in the debate surrounding the involvement in the war thus led to their characterization as ‘pretty prudent’, a direct contradiction of the Almond-Lippman consensus (Jentleson, 1992, p. 261).

The involvement of the United States in humanitarian interventions mandated by the United Nations has similarly been investigated by scholars, with particular attention paid to the question of why the United States continues to become involved in interventions that regularly pose little threat to national security interests. Much humanitarian intervention now takes place within the context of the United Nations, as the organization has validated their increased military involvement since the 1990s, through Security Council Resolutions (Lillich, 1995, p. 7); the intervention in Libya coming to be seen as one of the latest episodes in ‘post-Cold War practice of United Nation humanitarian intervention’ (Binder, 2017, p. 2).

There is, however, an inherent contradiction in the involvement of the United States in the organization and interventions of the United Nations, and its requirements as a representative democracy, to represent and consider the opinions of its citizens in the policy making process (Page and Shapiro, 1992, p. 1). A central tenet of democratic theory is that public policy preferences should form the basis of government decisions (Page and Shapiro, 1992, p. 1). However, decisions taken in multilateral organisations such as the United Nations do not involve democratically elected representatives and thus by definition contradict representative democracy. Previous research has gone far in arguing for and explaining the behavior of collective opinion in reaction to military crises and United Nations supported measures (Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm & Pevehouse, 2013, p. 243). However, there is not yet a consensus on how public opinion itself influences foreign policy decision making on a national level. Public opinion is thus a particularly relevant topic for study in the context of multilateral interventions for a number of reasons: the model of representative democracy adopted in the United States, the citizen involvement in interventions through the military, and the ongoing debate in international relations theory questioning why states engage in multilateral missions.

The conventional wisdom suggests that Americans have little tolerance for humanitarian interventions, such as the Libyan intervention of 2011, due to the unnecessary risks involved in interventions that are not specifically tied to national security interests (Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm & Pevehouse, 2013, p. 253). Scholars have also looked beyond broad interpretations of public opinion on humanitarian interventions, to identify and examine specific mechanisms which account for the effect of public opinion on Congress, including re-election, the contingency of a policy's success on public support, alignment of public opinion with a Congressman's personal beliefs and the shaping of media discourse. This study seeks to build on previous approaches by applying content analysis to Congressional debates to test existing theoretical approaches. The framework to be employed suggests that public opinion influences Congressional debates in three ways; through the electoral incentive Congress members have to represent their constituents, the incentive to act on personal beliefs when aligned with public opinion, and the consideration of the necessity of public support for the success of a policy.

Drawing from previous debates, several questions appear relevant to this study. In terms of its multilateral engagement via international organisations, how responsive is Congress to the true interests of its citizens? Do trends in public opinion translate into national debates of the Congressional level and what does this tell us about the influence of domestic level factors on multilaterally mandated interventions? These questions feed into the main research question to be addressed by this study: *How has popular opinion in the United States shaped national debates surrounding their involvement in United Nations humanitarian intervention in Libya (2011)?*

In this study, a review of this existing scholarly debate will first be made, identifying how scholars have theorized the influence of public opinion on Congress in the Libyan and other humanitarian interventions. The theoretical argument that electoral incentives, alignment of public

opinion with an individual Congress member's belief and the necessity of public support for the success of policy, will then be applied to the case of the 2011 Libyan intervention. Content analysis of Congressional debate records will be employed to apply the theoretical argument to the chosen case study. This approach will allow for existing theories of how public opinion accounts for Congressional behavior to be tested. It will also allow for future comparison to be made between previously studied military interventions, the goal being to clarify the significance of this relationship in the context of multilateral foreign policy.

Theoretical Framework

The main concepts of this study, namely public opinion, and involvement in the United Nations' humanitarian intervention, will be defined before the existing theoretical debates are discussed, to frame the subsequent research and demonstrate the study's theoretical relevance.

Conceptualization

There is no set definition of public opinion and it is often defined in line with the research objective of a study. Manza and Cook define public opinion as referring to the aggregated responses of individuals as reflected in opinions, though the 'aggregated responses' must be defined as a synthesis of many different and even opposing views (2002, p. 631-2). To achieve such a synthesis of different views, opinion polls are to be used as the measure of public opinion. Opinion polls have developed significantly since their widespread use from the end of World War Two and are an accessible, reliable, and informative method for discerning collective public opinion in a specified period (Manza and Cook, 2002, p. 631). As much of the existing literature which this study hopes to engage with and contribute to use public opinion polls as their measure of public opinion, this study will also use this measure. The availability of public opinion data through polls is also best suited to the resource and time parameters of this study.

Binder has argued that whilst humanitarian interventions are a contested concept, recent definitions have converged to provide a broad definition applicable to United Nation action (2017, p. 10). This definition includes the trans-border use of force by a group of states with the purpose

to address abuses of human rights violations, without the consent of the state targeted by the intervention (Binder, 2017, p. 10). The centrality of the United Nations and its Charter to the understanding of humanitarian interventions is highlighted by Roberts, who argues that the United Nations has been at the heart of such policy debates since 1990 (Roberts, 2003, p. 75). Intervention in response to a humanitarian threat is covered in Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which implicitly allows for the use of force if there are breaches of the peace or acts of aggression (United Nations). However, humanitarian interventions must receive a United Nations mandate to provide legality, emphasizing the centrality of the organization to the definition. The principle of the Responsibility to Protect also helps to define humanitarian interventions. The principle is defined by the United Nations as ‘a political commitment to end the worst forms of violence and persecution’ and entered circulation following the atrocities in the Balkans and Rwanda in the 1990s (United Nations). It is similarly in line with Chapter VII of the Charter and is used to identify the conditions under which humanitarian intervention is justified (United Nations).

These conceptualizations are central to understanding how the Libyan intervention was presented, argued for, and interpreted by the American public, Congress, and the administration. Having defined the main concepts, the causal mechanisms identified in the existing literature will be examined to form the basis of the theoretical framework to be employed in this study.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Prior to the 1990s, scholars consistently debated what, if any, effect public opinion had on foreign policy in the United States. However, few now question the fact that it does affect foreign policy decision making (Powlick & Katz, 1998, p. 30). Claims made by scholars including

Lippmann and Almond that public opinion was volatile, incoherent and had little impact on foreign policy (Holsti, 1992, p. 439), were challenged by subsequent scholars who argued in the 1990s that the value of public opinion was not defined by the public's level of knowledge (Page and Shapiro, 1992, p. 172). The influence of public opinion on national, particularly Congressional, support for humanitarian interventions, has also been examined in the recent literature, and several causal mechanisms linking public opinion to foreign policy debates have been identified. Congress' role in providing the administration with insight into the likely public response, is similarly addressed in the literature. Howell and Pevehouse find that early Congressional discussions about future military action are considered valuable indicators to policymakers about the level of expected domestic support for an intervention (Howell & Pevehouse, 2007, p. 21, as cited in Recchia, 2016, p. 82). They identify Congress as the actor responsible for translating public opinion into national action and highlight the importance of Congress in representing the public's interests (Howell & Pevehouse, 2007, p. 21, as cited in Recchia, 2016, p. 82). These debates and causal mechanisms will contribute to the formulation of a theoretical framework to be employed in this study. The main connections which the literature suggests exist between public opinion and Congressional behavior are defined in four causal mechanisms; re-election, the necessity of public support for the success of a policy, alignment of public opinion with Congress members beliefs and finally public shaping of media discourse.

Firstly, scholars have noted that the reliance of Congress members on frequent re-election gives them a clear incentive to represent the interests of their constituents in all legislative matters, including foreign policy. The basis of the arguments made in the literature can be understood through the median voter theory and thinking from democratic peace research (Jacobs and Page, 2005, p. 109). Median voter theory predicts that electoral competition causes elected officials to

reduce the distance between their policy positions and the preferences of voters, achieving this by responding strongly to public preferences (Downs, 1957, as cited in Jacobs and Page, 2005, p. 109). This aligns closely with democratic peace research which suggests that competitive elections makes elected politicians more sensitive to public opinion because they act either in anticipation of electoral punishment, or are actually defeated for being unresponsive (Peterson, 1995, 10-11, as cited in Jacobs and Page, 2005, 109). Baum argues that public attentiveness is a potential constraining factor on an elected President, suggesting that when the strategic stakes in foreign involvement are 'modest', they are likely to weigh the potential political risks associated more heavily, as evidenced in the Somalia intervention (Baum, 2004, 189). This too has implications when understood in the context of elected Congressional representatives. Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm & Pevehouse (2013, p. 250) similarly argue that the public are more likely to punish legislative representatives for the failures of humanitarian interventions through elections, given that they are unnecessary risks to life. In their study, they identify the means through which legislators gauge their constituents' interests, noting that popular support for the President, rates of active service personnel and the health of the economy, are all used as measures for public opinion (Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm & Pevehouse, 2013, p. 249). They also successfully demonstrate the link between public support for a humanitarian intervention and increases in Congressional legislative support for interventions, finding that legislative support for an intervention in Congress is more likely when the public favors an intervention (Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm & Pevehouse, 2013, p. 243-245).

Such findings contradict previous research by Jacobs and Page, which found that the public had notably less effect on foreign policy, the only effect being evident across different institutional

settings including the House, Senate and executive branch (Jacobs and Page, 2005, p. 107). They do, however, find some evidence suggesting that the House of Representatives, the so called ‘people’s house’, was more responsive to public opinion as a secondary influence (Jacobs and Page, 2005, p. 109). This provides nuance to the existing arguments and directs attention to the House of Representatives. It does still remain difficult to conclusively explain the influence of public opinion on Congress due to the fact that there are a number of alternative causal mechanisms that more transparently explain Congressional behavior; Jacobs and Page citing the establishment of causality as ‘daunting’ (2005, p. 112). This is also highlighted by Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm and Pevehouse who acknowledge that partisanship and ideology still have the strongest influence on Congress members voting behavior, despite their evidence presented from four humanitarian interventions since 1990 (2013, p. 245). In testing their theory, Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm and Pevehouse identify a number of constituency level factors, including percentage of active military personnel, cosmopolitanism and support for the President, and hypothesize the degree of influence they are likely to have on Congressional voting behavior (Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm & Pevehouse, 2013, p. 257-258). Under this theory, we would expect to see that Congress members facing a contested re-election in November 2011, would either not feature in debates or actively advocate for the majority public position. Similarly, it would fit the theoretical model that those Congress members who were not up for re-election in the immediate cycle, particularly incumbents who were new into their multiple term, did not so prominently champion public opinion in their arguments.

Linked to the mechanism of re-election is the influence of public support for the position or figure of the President, on Congressional behavior. Meernik and Oldmixon argue that Presidential approval has the strongest effect on Congressional support for internationalism and

that support for the President in their constituencies must be taken into account by Congress (Meernik and Oldmixon, 2004, as cited in Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm & Pevehouse, 2013, p. 251-253). Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm and Pevehouse support this argument by suggesting that the support for a President contributes positively to the likelihood of support for intervention by a Congressman (2013, p. 253). They suggest that a Congressman would have to explain to their constituents why they did not support the position of the President, when the majority of their district did, something which could damage their electoral chances (Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm & Pevehouse, 2013, p. 253). Jacobson cites this as the reason why votes were cast in favor of military action in the Persian Gulf, attributing the support of Bush's position to how well he ran in certain Congressional districts (Jacobson, 1993, as cited in Powlick and Katz, 1998, p. 48). Therefore, if public support for the President influenced Congressional support for a policy, it can be expected that Congress members would reference the President in their arguments, depending on whether their districts supported or opposed them in the 2008 election. Given the next Presidential election was upcoming in November 2011, if significant, this factor should be clear.

The second mechanism which is identified in the literature and provides further color to the scholarly debate, is the success of a policy being contingent on public support. Scholars including Powlick, have argued that decision makers are more inclined to align with public opinion on a particular foreign policy if they think the policy's success is contingent on public support (Powlick, 1991, as cited in Foyle, 1997, p. 144). Graham characterizes this explanation of the influence of public opinion as 'conditional', explaining that factors such as elite awareness of the dimensions of public opinion were necessary in determining the extent to which it was instrumental in the decision-making process (Graham, 1994 as cited in Foyle, 1997, p. 143). In studying the theme of conditionality, Foyle looks to measure the practical beliefs, that being the

necessity of public support of a foreign policy for it to be successful (1997, p. 145). Whilst Foyle measures the implications of his theory by looking at administration figures, specifically Eisenhower and Dulles, during the Chinese offshore island crisis of 1954, his theory has interesting potential applications in looking at Congressional figures (2013, p. 145). As is indicated by Hartley and Russett's (1992, p. 907) study, the necessity of public support for a policy may be most prominent where there is a clear, contentious foreign policy issue, such as the arms race that took place between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. They find strong evidence to suggest that public preferences for changes in military spending did precede government decisions to change military spending and were thus influential on government policy over a number of years (Hartley and Russett, 1992, p. 907). Powlick and Katz also highlight that future public opinion is similarly considered by Congress, analogizing the public as a dog that could bark and arguing that decision makers remain aware of public opinion even if it is currently inactive (Powlick and Katz, 1998, p. 31). To support this explanation, the chosen case would have to demonstrate that Congress members argued for the need for public support before a policy was enacted, which would suggest, as Foyle identified, that Congress were pragmatic in their beliefs (Foyle, 1997, p. 145).

Thirdly, the success of public opinion in influencing decision makers has been identified in the literature as being contingent on whether opinion fits the deeply held individual beliefs of these legislators and decision makers. Voss and Dorsey suggest that the linkage process might be influenced by the deeply held beliefs of the decision makers, due to the fact that such beliefs affect how individuals interpret and respond to the political environment (Voss and Dorsey, 1992, as cited in Foyle, 1997, p. 144). This argument is further nuanced by Foyle who examines the normative beliefs of decision makers to find that these beliefs have some influence on their

consideration of public opinion (1997, p. 145). However, the explanatory power of this factor is often still less than the influence of a decision maker's practical beliefs (Foyle, 1997, p. 145). If this mechanism were present, we would expect to see reference made to both the personal beliefs of Congress members and public opinion, or alternatively arguments made referencing public opinion that fit with their personal beliefs on humanitarian interventions.

Finally, the potential for public opinion to shape media discourse is similarly recognized in the literature, contributing to a broader understanding of the means through which Congress members come to understand public perceptions and are influenced in their positions. Scholars had previously reduced the role of the media to that of a 'conveyor belt' which brought elite views to the public (Brody, 1991, as cited in Baum and Potter, 2008, p. 40). However, Baum and Potter recognize the mass media as an actor alongside the public and national leaders, emphasizing the circular relationship between the three actors (2008, p. 42). They argue that the media are still beholden to the public's interests, which can act to shape the discourse surrounding foreign policy (Baum and Potter, 2008, p. 56). Robinson similarly argues that the emergence of the 24-hour news cycle pressurizes decision makers to react more quickly to events to appear responsive to the public, supporting this implication (Robinson, 2001, as cited in Baum and Potter, 2008, p. 52). However, the fact that many media outlets are dependent on elites for information, means that it is not obvious where public opinion has shaped the discourse (Baum and Potter, 2008, p. 55). The influence of the media is also discussed by the literature within the scope of general foreign policy, therefore not explicitly identifying it as a factor in interventions. It is also not feasible within the remit of this study to assess whether the media as a factor is at play, due to the complexity involved in teasing out the directionality of influence where a third party is involved. It may be possible to identify where Congress members refer to the media and public opinion simultaneously suggesting

a link between the two, however as this is not well established in the literature, it will not be included in the framework.

There are three hypotheses relating to the three causal mechanisms that feature in the theoretical framework. Firstly, if Congress members are influenced by public opinion due to electoral considerations then public opinion will feature in the arguments of members in vulnerable electoral positions more than others. Similarly, Republican Congress members in such positions would criticize President Obama more frequently than Democratic members. Secondly, if public support were necessary for passing policy on the intervention, this would be reflected in the arguments made by Congress members when the public is referred to in policy debates. Thirdly, if public opinion influences Congress members through their personal beliefs, arguments that feature strong personal beliefs will align with and reference public opinion.

Methodology

Research Design

This theoretical framework will be examined through a single ‘pathway’ case study (Gerring, 2008, p. 648). As highlighted in the literature, there are several causal mechanisms which have been identified to account for the influence of public opinion on foreign policy decision making in the context of international interventions. These include the electoral reliance of Congress members on the public, the role of the media and the reliance on public support for the success of a policy. Building on this previous cross-case analysis, a pathway case is both practical and desirable for hypothesis testing of the individual causal mechanism, hypothesized in the theoretical framework (Gerring, 2008, p. 664). As Gerring notes, the causal mechanism identified for study in a pathway case must be sufficient, though not necessary, to account for a particular outcome or phenomenon (Gerring, 2008, p. 664). Of the mechanisms identified by previous cross-case analyses, it is apparent that the electoral reliance of Congress members on the public does not necessarily account for their reference to public opinion in their arguments. However, as it is a sufficient cause in certain cases, a single case study tracing this mechanism was judged to be useful in testing an existing hypothesis (Gerring, 2008, p. 665).

The case selection progressed in two main stages. Firstly, an initial universe of cases was created, to include all United Nations mandated humanitarian interventions after 1990. The amount of missions mandated by international organisations such as the United Nations skyrocketed in the 1990s, a trend that continued into the 21st century, leading the United States to face a huge number of decisions relating to their intervention involvement (Drezner, 2002, p. 108). Similarly, this recognizes the post-Cold War context of the international environment in which numbers of

external military interventions were justified on humanitarian grounds and the United States' position changed (Roberts, 2003, p. 71). This universe included interventions in Iraq (1991, 1992, 2002, 2007), Bosnia (1993), Somalia (1993), Rwanda (1993), Haiti (1994), Albania (1997), Sierra Leone (1999), Kosovo (1999), East Timor (1999), Cote d'Ivoire (2004), Afghanistan (2009), Libya (2011), and Syria (2012). The interventions in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Syria are still ongoing, so were immediately dismissed on this basis. Similarly, the multiple episodes in Iraq would have to be taken in context of each other, therefore extending beyond the remit of a single case study. These cases were dismissed along with the interventions in Albania and Cote d'Ivoire which did not involve the United States, and Sierra Leone where the United States only had minor involvement through the supply of police personnel. The Rwandan and East Timor interventions were also discounted as they did not register within American politics because of the existing consensus on Rwanda, and the low profile of East Timor.

The remaining interventions in Bosnia, Somalia and Haiti have received more scholarly attention compared with Libya, and the studies that do analyse public opinion and Congressional behavior in the case of Libya have employed quantitative methods. Whilst useful for identifying correlations between variables, this approach does not focus on causation. In choosing to study Libya, this study will tease out the causal mechanisms that existing studies presume, to contribute to understandings of the influence of public opinion. The proximity of the Libyan intervention to the 2012 Presidential and Congressional election year also contributed to this choice, as this was important for the causal mechanisms identified.

The scope of the study will be from 19 March to 24 June 2011 as this period covers the most relevant debates which took place on Libya (Table 1), as well as the major opinion poll studies undertaken by Gallup.

Date	Congressional Record	Chamber
14-03-2011	Submission of Resolution on Situation in Libya	Senate
28-03-2011	Military Action in Libya	Senate
29-03-2011	Libya	Senate
29-03-2011	Mr. President, America Needs Answers Concerns About Libya	House
30-03-2011	Libya: There Should Have Been A Vote Foreign Policy and Constitutional Crisis What's So Special About Libya	House
31-03-2011	Libya	Senate
04-04-2011	A Country Where We Must Bring Democracy Extension of Remarks: Protecting National Security by Cutting the Military Budget Conflict in Libya: Morning Hour Debate	House
05-04-2011	War Powers Act	Senate
13-04-2011	Libya and the War Powers Resolution	House
02-06-2011	Americans Have Spending Fatigue	House
03-06-2011	Providing for Consideration of H. Res. 292, Regarding Deployment of United States Armed Forces in Libya and Providing for Consideration of H. Con. Res. 51, Libya War Powers Resolution Libya War Powers Resolution	House

24-06-2011	Providing for Consideration of H. J. Res. 68, Authorizing Limited Use of Armed Forces in Libya; and Providing for Consideration of H. R. 2278, Limiting Use of Funds for Armed Forces in Libya Authorizing Limited Use of Armed Forces in Libya Limiting Use of Funds for Armed Forces in Libya	House
08-07-2011	War and War Powers	House
14-07-2011	The Massive Transfer of Wealth from the Many to the Hands of a Few	House
20-07-2011	Cut, Cap and Continue Wars	House

Table 1

Data collection

The data used to operationalize national debates are Congressional transcripts of statements and debates in both the House and Senate. These are collected from the Congressional Record, an online database digitizing public transcripts of Congressional business (<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record>). Relevant documents were selected by filtering the Congressional Records by date and keyword searches and then selecting documents that included extended remarks or debate and were relevant to Libya. The keywords used for the initial search was ‘Libya 2011’ which produced a body of records that could be narrowed further by date and record type. The documents were then scanned preliminarily to establish their reference and relevance to the debate on the decision to intervene in Libya.

Existing opinion poll data from Gallup will be used to provide the context for understanding public opinion on the intervention. This database was chosen due to the inclusion

of polls conducted before and during the intervention, directly after President Obama's public Presidential address and before the identified Congressional debates (Gallup).

Methodology

The methodology to be employed in this study will be qualitative content analysis. Content analysis as a research technique has been employed by scholars in both quantitative and qualitative settings and across several disciplines. Krippendorff has defined it in its most basic form as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use' (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 24). Providing a similarly broad definition, Bos and Tarnai define it as 'a means of analyzing texts' (1999, p. 660). Whilst suggestive of the utility of the method in a broad range of research settings, content analysis is arguably better understood through the process itself. The research was first made operational at the theoretical level through the development of a research question, literature review and theoretical framework, to understand what material would be needed (Bos and Tarnai, 1999, p. 667). Secondly, the different themes of argumentation were identified, to act as the 'pretest' included in Bos and Tarnai's framework, highlighting where public opinion was mentioned (1999, p. 667). This involved manually working through the transcripts and annotating what arguments were made by each Congress member who spoke in a debate. Congress members who mentioned the public were identified and the suspected causal mechanism named. On this basis the election records and tenure of Congress members, party affiliation or position as a veteran or particular interest in the military were examined, and the arguments considered in this context (<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/IG0UN2>). The

results were also considered in the context of the opinion polls and then presented in a narrative format.

This qualitative approach is appropriate for the research question as Congressional debates are characterized as an exchange of arguments between individual Congress members, something not necessarily reflected in summaries of voting records. Similarly, the data lends itself to presentation in narrative form, again because of the qualitative character of the approach and absence of coding. Unlike previous studies, this study will not focus on Congressional votes as this alone does not assist with the identification of casual mechanisms. This study will allow for judgement on the presence of the causal mechanism through the following approach. For the re-election argument, the proximity of the previous and upcoming election, number of terms and whether the seat was contested or not was considered for each Congressman making arguments involving public opinion. This then enabled potential patterns of correlation to be identified. Secondly, for the necessity of the public to policy success argument, evidence of this consideration by legislators was sought in their arguments. Finally, to consider the argument regarding the personal beliefs of Congress members, this study looked for examples of strong personal opinions made with simultaneous reference to public opinion. It also involved looking at the military history of those members as a potential source for personal beliefs.

Analysis

On March 17th 2011, United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1973, demanding an immediate Libyan ceasefire, approving the establishment of a no-fly zone and authorizing member states “to take all necessary measures”, with the exception of occupation by force, to “protect civilians” (Binder, 2017, p. 209). This followed Resolution 1970, which had previously condemned the violence in Libya and imposed sanctions on the Gaddafi regime, and resulted in the United States assuming joint leadership of a multilateral coalition which began operations on March 19th 2011 (Binder, 2017, p. 210). Four days after the United States voted with nine other United Nations Security Council members for Resolution 1973, and two days after the intervention began, President Obama sent a letter to the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate, to inform them of the commencement of the multinational operations (Blanchard, 2011, p. 9). This was followed one week later on March 28th, 2011 by the President addressing the American people outlining the motivation for and the scope of the intervention in Libya (Blanchard, 2011, p. 9). Obama’s letter to Congress on March 21st was the first time Congress was engaged directly on the issue of Libya (Blanchard, 2011, p. 9). No chamber or committee in Congress was given the opportunity to vote on or even debate the decision for the United States to become involved in the multilateral humanitarian intervention (Blanchard, 2011, p. 9). However, the President cited his “constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations... as Commander in Chief”, justifying his lack of consultation with Congress by arguing that his actions were consistent with the War Powers Resolution, having kept Congress informed (Blanchard, 2011, p. 9). By contrast, the administration considered the opinions of other international bodies in the decision on Libya, most notably the Arab League, which was widely criticized by Congress in the days and months after the intervention began (Blanchard, 2011, p. 14).

In a poll conducted on March 21st, 2011, 47% of the population approved of the current United States military actions against Libya, 37% disapproved and 16% had no opinion (Gallup, 2011). When asked about their desires for the military campaign, 45% preferred for the enforcement of a no-fly zone and weakened military to be the goal whereas 44% preferred for an extended goal of removing Gadhafi from power (Gallup, 2011). This was conducted between the 25th and 27th of March and shows that among those asked, opinion was split on what the aim should be. However, what was clearer from the poll was that the majority of the public preferred for the United States to take a minor role in Libya or withdraw completely. Only 10% supported the United States taking a leading role, 29% supporting a major role, whilst 36% supported a minor role and 22% a complete withdrawal (Gallup, 2011). It is evident that whilst the public generally supported involvement in Libya, they preferred for the United States not to take a major role in the intervention. The main purpose of this analysis is to consider the extent to which the causal mechanisms appear to be at play in this case. The analysis will therefore be structured to address each mechanism and the appropriate findings; firstly comparing the electoral position of the Congress members who refer to public opinion in their arguments to those who do not; secondly considering the arguments made in reference to policy outcome and thirdly examining where public and personal opinions are used in the same argument. The arguments made by Congress members in the House and Senate provides some evidence of the influence and importance of this public opinion. However, what is apparent is the fact that public opinion appears to matter only slightly in the context of Congressional debates. Whilst the case can be made for the way in which public opinion can influence debates on humanitarian interventions, the evidence is by no means overwhelming.

When considering the influence of public opinion through re-election, it firstly needs to be established whether public opinion is mentioned in Congressional debates, before identifying the electoral position of those making the arguments to identify potential patterns. The argument made by Representative McGovern in the June 3rd debate is an illuminating attitude towards public opinion that can be interpreted to suggest that public opinion influences Congress members through elections. He argued that House Resolution 292 was merely a way for Republican legislators to show their constituents that they had acted on Libya (112 Cong. Rec. H3992). However, this criticism could be accounted for as being part of his broader argument against the handling of American involvement in Libya, later arguing that the resolution ‘doesn’t mean a thing’ apart from sounding good (112 Cong. Rec. H3992). It is certainly inconsistent with his later argument that the President does not actually need public support through Congress to go to war (112 Cong. Rec. H3992).

The positions of Representatives Woodall and Kucinich in the June 24th debate do however provide more concrete evidence of Congress members being influenced by electoral considerations. It is notable that the only two Representatives who made direct and substantial reference to their constituents, and the measured public opinion, were members who had recently been elected (Woodall) or faced a contested upcoming election (Kucinich) (112 Cong. Rec. H4534, 2011). This is also significant as the Representatives were members of different parties, removing the possibility that it could be accounted for by partisanship. Representative Woodall addressed the House on three separate occasions during the debate on Joint Resolution 68; on two of these occasions referring to the ‘911,000 people’ that he represents ‘back home’ (112 Cong. Rec. H4534, 2011). Woodall also argues that as a Congressman, it is not about his voice but rather ‘the people’s voice’, emphasizing the fact that there was no room for partisanship in the

Congressional debate on Libya (112 Cong. Rec. H4534, 2011). Kucinich similarly refers to the bipartisan opposition to Libya, citing a CBS poll recording that six in ten Americans did not think that the United States should be involved in Libya (112 Cong. Rec. H4540, 2011). He also recounts his conversations with people ‘all over’ the country and argued that not a ‘single person’ had approached him to express a belief that the United States should become involved in more wars (112 Cong. Rec. H4540, 2011).

What is not surprising, but certainly notable from the data is the difference between the apparent influence of public opinion on Congress members depending on party affiliation. This suggests that partisanship as an influencing factor is likely more important than public opinion, even where public opinion is referenced in Congress members’ arguments. In a March 25th to 27th poll, 63% of Americans who aligned themselves with the Republican Party disapproved of President Obama’s handling of the situation in Libya whilst only 26% approved, clearly indicating that the majority of Republicans were critical of Obama’s handling of Libya (Gallup, 2011). Taken in the context of an earlier March 21st poll which reported that 57% of Republicans approved of US military action against Libya and 31% disapproved, this suggests that Republicans were more concerned about the conduct of the President in his handling of the conflict, rather than the actual fact of the country’s involvement in Libya itself (Gallup, 2011).

In the three days succeeding the publication of the March 27th poll, many of the statements presented by Republican Congress members in the Senate and the House featured arguments where criticism of Obama’s conduct was the main theme. The Republican Leader in the Senate, McConnell, addressed the issue of military action in Libya in a session on March 28th, referring directly to the lack of clarity provided by President Obama to the American people and the failure of the President to adequately consult Congress or the American people before authorizing the

intervention (112 Cong. Rec. S1880). His argument highlights the fact that Obama was only coming to address the Nation which he sent to war, 9 days after the intervention began, characterizing this act as ‘overdue’ (112 Cong. Rec. S1880). The statement given by Representative Burgess to the House on March 29th, one day after Obama addressed the nation about Libya, is likewise reflective of this theme (112 Cong. Rec. H1992). Burgess criticizes President Obama for both failing to address the American people in a timely manner, and for failing to provide them with appropriate clarity on the intervention (112 Cong. Rec. H1992). He employs strong rhetoric, highlighting the missing transparency of the goals of the intervention (112 Cong. Rec. H1992).

Further arguments by Republican Congress members are also reflective of this theme. Speaking in the Senate on March 31st, Senator Sessions criticized the ‘unacceptable’ consultative process on Libya, comparing it to previous Presidential conduct in the case of the Iraq war (112 Cong. Rec. S2010). On April 5th, Senators Paul and Lee, both of whom had won elections in November 2010, also criticize the fact that the President did not engage the ‘people’s house’ in the debate on Libya (112 Cong. Rec. S2110). Of the Republican Congress members who criticize Libya on the basis of Obama’s conduct, around a third of them had either recently won an election or were facing elections in November 2012; Burgess and Rooney as Representatives in the House and Lee as a Senator elected for the first time in November 2010.

In contrast to these arguments, fewer Democratic Congress members are vocally critical in the debates, the exception being Woodall and Kucinich who as discussed above seem to be most responsive to public opinion. As expected under the explanation of partisanship, criticism of President Obama’s conduct on Libya was a much less prominent feature of arguments made by Democrats. The only clear criticism of the President’s conduct comes from Representative Kaptur,

who accused him of ‘silencing’ Congress by launching attacks during the members’ week return to their districts (112 Cong. Rec. H2043). Her position as a 14 term Representative may fit with the theoretical argument about re-election, but is however by no measure sufficiently explanatory.

In order to evaluate the potential influence of public opinion by the alignment of opinion with the personal beliefs of Congress members, the same debates were analyzed and examples of Congress members simultaneously mentioning public opinion and a strong aligning personal belief were examined. There was limited evidence of Congress members expressing personal beliefs, providing little support for the argument. However, this conclusion is based on the picture of their beliefs on the subject based on the context of Congress. The only evidence is from Congress members who are veterans or who hold strong views on the military, although the link with public opinion is weak. In the argument made by Congressman Pearce on March 29th, he refers to his opposition to the handling of Libya, being a veteran, linking this also to the lack of public support for the intervention (112 Cong. Rec. H2033, 2011). Congressmen Sherman and Wilson also express strong personal views on the military which they argue align with their constituents’ views. Sherman refers to his record of pro-military views and Congress’ wider ‘constituents’ in his argument that Libya was not properly considered in the context of the serving military (112 Cong. Rec. H4017). Wilson refers to his district, ‘the First District of South Carolina’ and their strong military support, as well as his background which taught him the ‘value of a strong military’ (112 Cong. Rec. H3990). He uses both facts in his June 3rd argument emphasizing that military force should only be used in the defense of national interests, unlike in Libya (112 Cong. Rec. H3990). Other phrases including ‘like most Americans’, used by Congressman Woolsey, also hint to an alignment of personal and public views (112. Cong. Rec. H4534). However, due to the lack of

evidence and difficulty involved in identifying the personal beliefs of Congress members, other factors should be considered instead.

Congress woman Jackson-Lee highlights the fact that there has long been controversy over whether the President is constitutionally authorized to send forces into action abroad without congressional authority (112 Cong. Rec. H3992, 2011). Whilst this is a prominent theme in the debates on Libya, there is little to no mention of the necessity of public support for policy on the intervention. President Obama authorized the intervention in Libya without public knowledge or approval through Congress, immediately suggesting that there was little consideration given to public opinion. The only tenuous reference made to the need for support is evident in the debate over whether Congressional approval is necessary, specifically whether as elected representatives of the people, they should have been consulted. This is evident in a large number of opinions across the debates; Burton argued on June 3rd that the intervention ‘was not approved by Congress, by the people’ and that Congress must stop the President from taking decisions the American people do not support (112 Cong. Rec. H3990, 2011). Democratic Congressman Slaughter also argued on June 24th that the public deserved the legislation on Libya to be given the same treatment as any other, namely committee hearings and debates (112 Cong. Rec. H4534, 2011). This theme was included by both Republican and Democratic Congress members; however it was more concentrated with Republican Congress members in the House, thus emphasizing the likely influence of partisanship. Similarly, it is more clearly a debate on the War Powers Act and an opportunity for the Republican controlled House to assert its regulatory authority over the President.

Conclusion

As has been presented in this study, the influence of public opinion on Congressional debates appears to be limited in the case of the Libyan intervention. The literature supposed that the public affected Congressional behavior through electoral accountability, pragmatic alignment of beliefs and necessity of public support for policy success. However, in contrast to this the debates on Libya demonstrate only a slight linear correlation between opinion and behavior on account of the re-election explanation. The two Congress members Kucinich and Woodall provide the most notable examples of public opinion having an influence on Congressional debates, due to their electoral positions and arguments made in alignment with public opinion. Nonetheless, there are other examples of Congress members referring to their positions as publicly elected officials, supporting the conclusion that the re-election argument has most explanatory power. This is evident in the comment of Dreier who emphasized that Congress' response to the Iraq War influenced the 2006 election outcome and warned that Libya may have the same effect (112 Cong. Rec. H4537, 2011). Overall however, the data suggests that public opinion was given little consideration by Congress members as it did not feature as a prominent, consistent theme in the debates. What is also clear from the results of this study is that determining the causality of individual Congress members' behavior is especially difficult on the basis of a single qualitative case study.

Returning to the research question outlined at the beginning of this study, it can be concluded that whilst the public are referenced in debates, either directly or indirectly, there is only limited evidence to suggest that they are significant influences and influence Congress through electoral accountability. This suggests that other factors, particularly partisanship, need

to be taken into consideration alongside public opinion. These findings do not suggest that future research on the topic would be futile. One of the significant limitations of this study is the single methodological approach taken, especially given the complexity of establishing causality. What future research would therefore benefit from is a mixed method, scaled up approach which incorporates initial quantitative analysis of Congressional behavior including resolution votes, as well as more extensive content analysis of committee and administration records and accompanying interviews. Additionally this study only considered public opinion as a motivating factor and could have benefitted from undertaking more complex research that considered the influence of public opinion weighted against other variables including partisanship and ideology to draw more considered correlations and conclusions. Finally, a comparative case study would have allowed this study to consider whether these results were individual to the Libyan intervention, or whether the theoretical argument needs to be refined. These considerations offer potential avenues for further research, which would contribute to an greater understanding of the role of public opinion in decisions relating to multilateral interventions on a national level.

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