



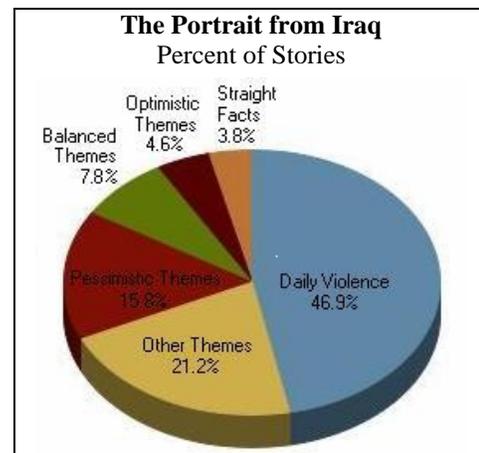
# PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

## The Portrait from Iraq: How the Press Has Covered Events on the Ground

Through the first 10 months of the year, the portrait of Iraq that Americans have received from the news media has in considerable measure been a grim one. Roughly half of the reporting has consisted of accounts of daily violence. And stories that explicitly assessed the direction of the war have tended toward pessimism, according to a new study of press coverage of events on the ground in Iraq from January through October of 2007.

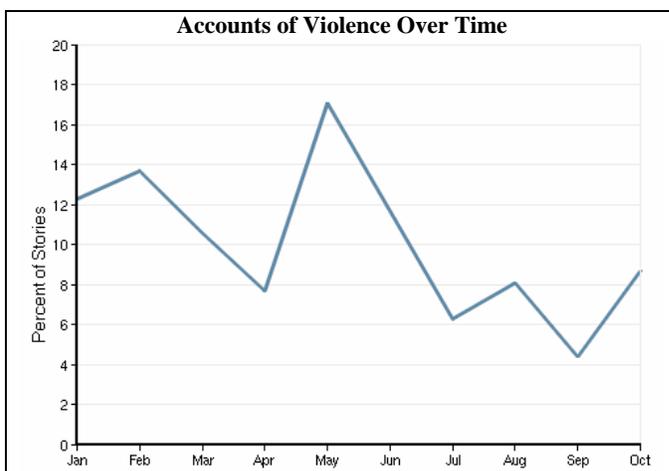
In what Defense Department statistics show to be the deadliest year so far for U.S. forces in Iraq, journalists have responded to the challenge of covering the continuing violence by keeping many of the accounts of these attacks brief and limiting the interpretation they contain.

And as the year went on, the narrative from Iraq in some ways brightened. The drumbeat of reports about daily attacks declined in late summer and fall, and with that came a decline in the amount of coverage from Iraq overall.



This shift in coverage beginning in June, in turn, coincided with a rising sense among the American public that military efforts in Iraq were going “very” or “fairly well.”

These are some of the findings of a study of more than 1,100 stories from January through October from 40 different news outlets conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, a research institute that examines the press.



The findings suggest, among other things, that the bigger question may be not how the press interprets events but what kinds of events get covered, especially by a press corps whose movements are severely restricted in Iraq by the threat of attack and who are most mobile

when embedded with U.S. troops.

The results of the study of the content of Iraq coverage also correlate to a great extent with attitudes expressed by journalists working in Iraq themselves. In a survey released by the Project in November, most journalists said they felt that the operations of the military were thoroughly covered, but they viewed the lives of ordinary Iraqis and the sense of daily life as the most “undercovered” subject. The findings here about what topics were covered tend to confirm the assessment of the journalists on the ground.

Among the study’s findings:

- Daily accounts of violence made up 47% of all stories studied during the first 10 months of 2007. But because many of these stories were short, that represented a 27% of the time and space—or newshole—of the coverage studied.
- Through June, more than half of all stories studied were about violent incidents, but that number fell to roughly one third in September and October.
- Just more than half (56%) of the stories that offered a clear assessment of where things in Iraq were headed were pessimistic, but that coverage was more skeptical of the Iraqi government and the stability of the country than it was of U.S. policy.
- Stories assessing the effectiveness of U.S. policy—including the surge—more often than not were neither distinctly positive nor negative in the message they conveyed. Four in ten offered a mixed assessment, while a third were pessimistic and a quarter saw things as improving.
- A separate analysis of coverage in November, beyond the time frame of the main study, indicates that during that month positive assessments of the surge began to rise.
- The coverage overall was U.S. centric in subject matter. About half of all the coverage from Iraq was about American military and U.S. officials. Roughly another 10% was about private contractors, mostly Blackwater.
- Coverage of Iraqi civilians, by contrast, made up far less, 3% of stories and 5% of overall newshole.
- Despite enormous difficulty in getting access to sources, Americans did get a wide range of perspectives. Fully 40% of stories (representing 61% of the newshole) carried the views of multiple of types of stakeholders.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism is a non-partisan, non-ideological research institute that studies the press. It is one of eight projects that make up the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C., a “fact tank” funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

## About the Study

The war has many dimensions. There is the debate—mostly in Washington—over U.S. war policy. There is the homefront, which involves the treatment of veterans, the effects on their families and the reception veterans get when they return. And there is the coverage from Iraq itself, the events on the ground.<sup>1</sup>

This report examines that third element—the coverage from Iraq itself—a topic that has filled 6% of the newshole as measured by PEJ’s News Index through October, making it the third-biggest storyline of the year.

What was that coverage from Iraq about? Is it possible to detect how those events were interpreted or put into a broader context? Who were the primary sources? How many points of view did the coverage provide? How did the coverage change over time?

To answer these questions the Project embarked on a two-part study. The first, a survey of journalists reporting from the war-torn country, was released mid-November.

In this second phase, the Project studied the content of the ground war coverage from January 1 through October 31, 2007. We began by identifying all stories from 40 of the 48 outlets in PEJ’s New Coverage Index (talk radio and radio headlines were excluded) that were coded as being about events on the ground in Iraq. From there, we selected one-third of the stories—a total of 1,109 stories—for additional analysis.

We then analyzed those stories by general topic, by underlying message, by the number of stakeholders represented, and by looking at what sources tended to dominate.

## A Picture of Violence and Chaos

With the war hovering over the American conversation and upcoming elections, what was the portrait from Iraq? How much of it depicted the surge and U.S. policy generally as not working? How did it assess the Iraqi government’s future? Or the stability of the country more generally? What about U.S. troop morale or the Iraqi view of U.S. troops?

On balance, the picture Americans received was one of instability and attacks. But much of that came not from how the stories were portrayed but from the events themselves that made it into the news.

The largest share of stories, nearly half (47%) of all the stories studied, focused on violence or violent incidents, but did not offer any larger analysis about what those events imply about U.S. policy, the stability of the country or any other larger metric of the war.

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<sup>1</sup> Thus far in 2007, PEJ’s News Coverage Index has found that the policy debate, a story covered largely from Washington rather than Iraq, has made up the majority of Iraq war coverage. From Jan. 1 – Oct. 31, Iraq policy filled 9% of the overall newshole as measured in PEJ’s News Index during that time. The story of the homefront was the smallest part of the war coverage, 2% of the newshole and the 6<sup>th</sup> biggest topic in the media during those ten months.

Another 16% of all stories studied offered explicit assessments of the war that were pessimistic.

Eight percent of the stories were balanced in their assessment, while 5% were optimistic. Thus, of all the stories that offered a clear assessment, just over half (56%) were pessimistic.

And about one in five stories, 21%, conveyed a host of other messages that were not directly assessing the direction of the war. The bulk of these stories were about three concerns: the conduct of private contractors, the daily lives of U.S. soldiers, and Iraqi internal affairs such as waste and abuse in the reconstruction of the country. Finally, 4% were just-the-facts accounts of daily events that were non-violent.

### **Continuing Violence**

When it came to this largest group of stories—the 47% about violence that did not offer explicit assessments of the war—what messages did the stories carry? In general, thanks to the subject matter alone, they tended to convey a sense of continuing peril and alarm.

Half these accounts of violence were straight ahead recitations of just the facts. A story on NBC's Today Show from August 16 is typical. "Today in Iraq a car bombing killed at least 9 people and set a building on fire in Central Baghdad, and the search continues in northwestern Iraq where bombings this week killed at least 250 people," it began.

An almost equal number of these violence stories did contain suggestions of growing chaos but came up short of offering any larger analysis about what the events might mean. In one such report on the March 19 edition of MSNBC's Tucker, for example, concluded, "Up and down the country scores more Iraqis dead in a series of drive-by shootings, plain old-fashioned murders and bomb blasts from around Baghdad right into the north. So really nothing special in Iraq today to make the four year anniversary, just violence as usual."

Many of these accounts of violence, moreover, were short. Half of them were TV stories lasting 30 seconds or less. Indeed, if measured by the amount of time or space these stories made up of the coverage—newshole rather than stories—the number drops to 27% of the total.

This question of violent incidents represents the challenge to journalists covering what in effect is a state of demi-war, the period of nation building and potential civil war. Such daily acts of violence may require, not just deserve, coverage but they are by nature bleak. Yet if journalists do not report them, are they abdicating their responsibility?

In our survey of journalists in Iraq, some even worried about the fact that so many of the stories from Iraq depict a continuing litany of terror. "The daily attacks now seem to be

covered pretty well but generally lack the sort of context that puts them in perspective for readers,” one print reporter working in Iraq wrote in an open ended response. “The greatest tragedy of the war has been how the media has in some way bored its audience with the violence.”

### Themes About Where the Country Was Headed

What about the stories that did try to assess the general direction of the war?

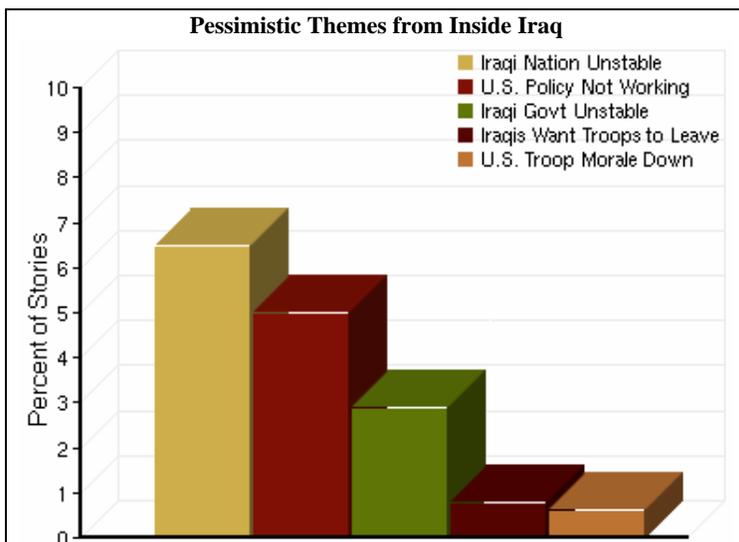
The study identified five major narrative threads that related to the conditions in the country or the impact of U.S. policy there: the effectiveness of U.S. policy in action (including the surge); troop morale; the stability of the Iraqi government; the stability of Iraq as a nation; the Iraqi people’s views of the U.S. presence. For each of these, the study also determined whether these stories offered mixed assessments, optimistic or pessimistic.

The thread that generated the most coverage (14% of the all the stories studied) assessed the effectiveness of U.S. policy, and these stories tended to be neither distinctly positive nor negative in their evaluation. Four in ten were mixed or balanced, a third were pessimistic and a quarter were optimistic. This was the only one of the themes where mixed assessments outweighed dour.



Many of the stories assessing U.S. policy were also longer, more detailed accounts. Indeed, they represented 23% of the overall newshole studied, a much larger percentage than the number of stories they accounted for. This was the only one of the threads where the accounting by newshole differed noticeably from measuring it by story.

Often these assessments could be quite layered and come from multiple sources. A Los Angeles Times story from August 22, for example, noted that “With the district locked

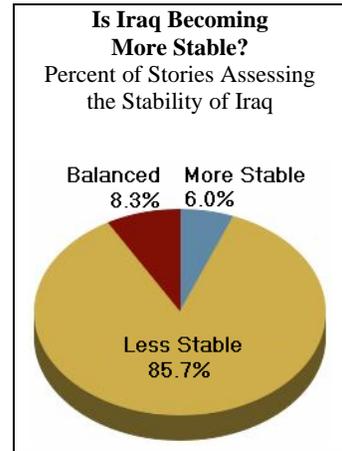


down, life has started to return to the streets.” Yet a few sentences later, the piece added,

“But U.S. soldiers say they fear progress could quickly be reversed if their numbers are reduced.” And a few paragraphs following, an Iraqi seemed far less sanguine. “He invited journalists into his bullet-pocked home on condition that his name not be published ... ‘The Americans are trying, but sometimes they

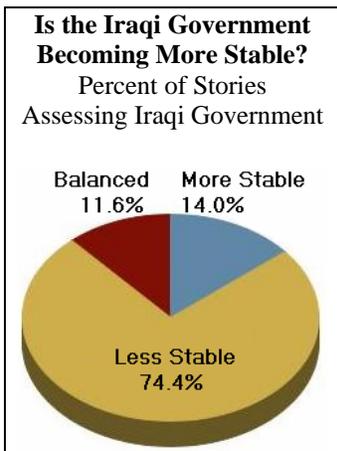
are not here,' he said. 'It is hopeless.'”

The next biggest group (8% of stories studied or 84 stories in all) assessed the stability of the country generally, and most of them were pessimistic. Nearly nine out of ten of them (86%) conveyed a dour message about the country’s direction. “I’d never go back ... It is a city of ghosts. The only people left there are terrorists,” a 26-year-old refugee told the New York Times in an August 24 account. Just five of these 84 stories suggested any movement toward stability, and seven of them offered a mixed assessment.



Often these evaluations about the Iraqi national stability came from officials or experts that journalists consulted to put things into context. “Things keep getting worse: you have 4,000 to 5,000 Iraq civilians a month getting killed,” Brookings Institution analyst Michael O’Hanlon, who was doing statistical analysis of the violence, told NPR’s Morning Edition in February.

And Iraqi citizens were another source for the sense that the country was unstable. After a cafeteria in the Iraqi Parliament was bombed, for example, CNN video correspondent



Arwa Damon reported that, “Iraqis we spoke to following these attacks simply said that they were frustrated and saddened—one woman saying that this was proof that no one was safe and a clear indication that a government that is powerless to save itself is powerless to save its’ people.”

And 4% of the stories studied (43 in all) related to the stability of the Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. These tended to be negative as well. About three-quarters of these accounts (32 stories) described an unstable, incapable government while just six of these 43 stories suggested growing stability and five offered a mixed assessment.

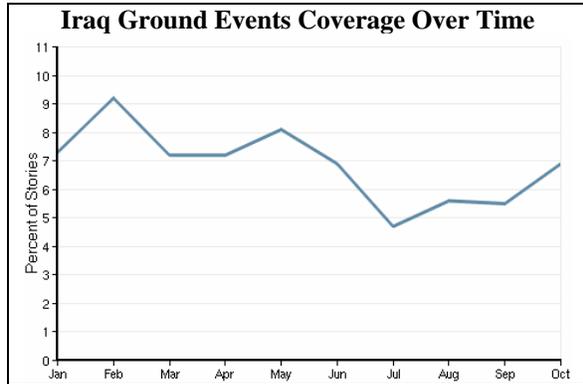
The last two threads, U.S. troop morale and the Iraqi view of the U.S. presence, each accounted for about 1% of all stories studied. (14 stories on each.) Coverage for both tended to be pessimistic, but the numbers here are too small to reveal much.

### Coverage over Time

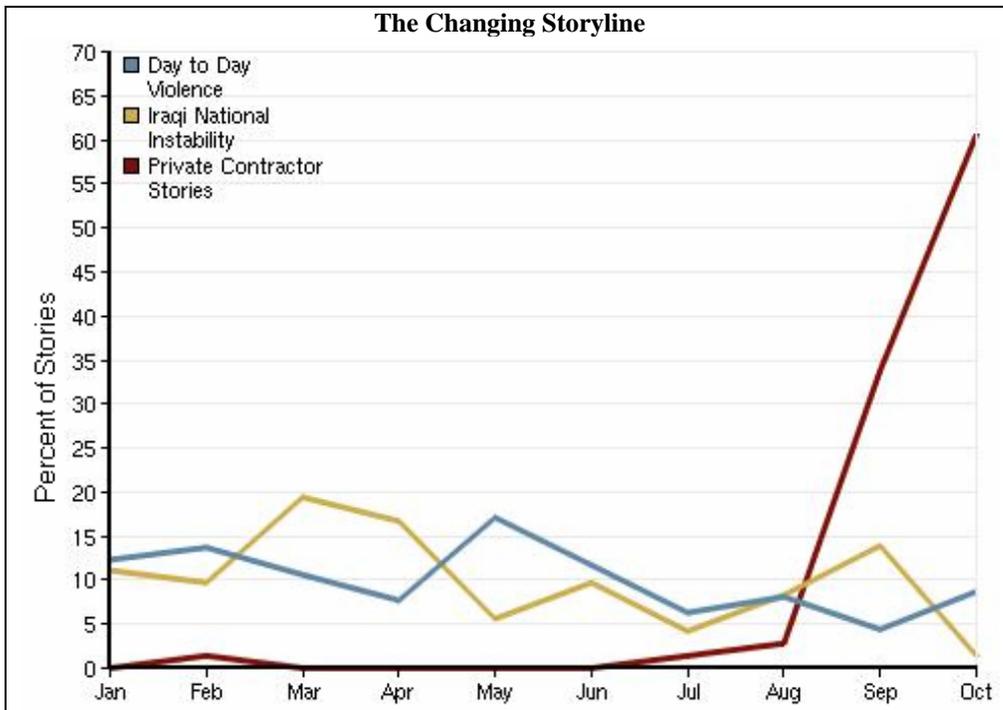
The coverage of the war from Iraq also changed measurably over the 10 months studied here.

To begin with, the amount of coverage of events on the ground in Iraq overall declined in late summer and early fall. From January through June, coverage from Iraq made up 8% of all the stories (and 7% of the newshole) in the Project’s ongoing index of news coverage.<sup>2</sup> From July through September, coverage from Iraq made up 5% of the stories (representing 5% of the newshole). The numbers spiked back up in October to 7% of all stories.

The coverage was highest in February and then again in May. It was lowest during these 10 months in July at 5%. Ground event stories picked up again in October, much of which focused on the controversy involving the role of the private contracting firm Blackwater in the shooting the Iraqi civilians.<sup>3</sup>



A major factor in that drop was a decline in the amount of coverage of daily violence. Through June, 51% of all the stories focused on the issue of continuing violence. From July through October, that number fell to 38%.



<sup>2</sup> Talk radio and brief radio headlines normally included in PEJ’s News Coverage Index were not part of this study.

<sup>3</sup> Data from the full NCI show a similar decline. The Iraq ground war averaged 7% of the entire newshole from January through June. It then fell to an average of 5% for July through September and climbed back up to 7% in October.

Still, as accounts of continuing violence decreased, at least one other theme that suggested problems gained some greater prominence. In September and beyond, for instance, the controversy over the private security firm Blackwater and its involvement in the shooting death of Iraqi civilians became a major subject of the coverage.

The theme of Iraq’s instability bounced up and down over the ten months. It made up more of the coverage in March and April, declined in the summer, and rose again in August and September as violence decreased. Finally, it all but disappeared in the stories sampled in October.

What about assessments of the U.S. policy? The tenor of the stories examined also fluctuated. The coverage began the year mostly mixed, became more pessimistic in April through June, more positive in July and August, and then dipped again in September.

### Changing Public Opinion

To what extent has public opinion risen or fallen with changes in the news? At least since June, there seems to be a connection between events on the ground, press coverage and public opinion.

Military effort is going...	Feb %	Jun %	Sep %	Nov %	Feb-Nov Change
Very/Fairly well	30	34	41	48	+18
Not too/At all well	67	61	54	48	
Don't know	3	5	5	4	
Total	100	100	100	100	

According to survey data from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, there has been a steady increase since June in positive views about how the U.S. military effort is going. In June, only a third (34%) of the public

believed the U.S. military effort was going “very” or “fairly well.” But since July, there has been a steady up-tick in that number, reaching roughly half the public (48%) in November.

This change in public opinion coincides closely with the decrease in press coverage of daily violence. As reported above, stories about daily incidents of violence dropped off in July, and remained low through October.

	Feb %	Jun %	Sep %	Nov %	Feb-Nov Change
<b>Defeating the insurgents</b>	%	%	%	%	
Making progress	30	32	37	43	+13
Losing ground	55	50	44	44	
Don't know	15	18	19	13	
Total	100	100	100	100	
<b>U.S. effort in Iraq...</b>	%	%	%	%	
Will succeed	47	43*	42	48	+1
Will fail	46	49	47	46	
Don't know	7	8	11	6	
Total	100	100	100	100	

\*Figures from July 2007

The public opinion also mirrors the nuances in the situation reflected in the reporting. First, the public appears to have taken note of the decline in daily casualties. The percentage of those saying the U.S is making progress in

reducing the number of civilian casualties more than doubled from June to November (21% versus 43% in November). The public also sees more progress in defeating the insurgents, rising from 32% in June to 43% in November.

And just as the Project's content research finds other messages of instability and chaos increasing as daily violence decreased, the public, too, has maintained bleak views about other areas of the war. There has been no real increase in those who sense progress in establishing democracy there (39% in June and September and 43% in November). And, when asked the broadest question about whether the U.S. effort in Iraq will ultimately succeed, the public has remained split with roughly half saying it will succeed and half expecting failure.

### **November: A Surge for the Surge?**

What happened in the coverage in November, when public opinion continued to improve but beyond the scope of our main study? A supplemental analysis of the coverage suggests a shift in tenor, to one of more promise than peril.

Examining data gathered on a daily basis for the New Coverage Index, there are signs that November represented something of a turning point in coverage from Iraq. Whether it proves to be a temporary one will depend on the course of events. But there were two substantial changes in coverage from October to November.

First, the U.S. surge was a big topic during the month. Of all the coverage from inside Iraq, roughly 12% was directly about the surge policy—about four times the amount the subject received in the previous three months. And reading those stories in a qualitative way, the messages of success appeared roughly three times as often as they had a month earlier.

The second shift was a falling back in the overall number of stories about events from Iraq. The main study finds an initial decline in July, which then bumped back up again in October—largely due to intense coverage of the Blackwater controversy. This additional analysis suggests that coverage dipped back down again in November, validation, perhaps, of the old adage that no news is good news.

### **The Question of Bias**

One of the persistent criticisms of the coverage from Iraq is there has been too much focus on negative events and not enough on the positive things that were happening.

This has been a running theme from the Administration. "For every act of violence there is encouraging progress in Iraq that's hard to capture on the evening news," President Bush told a press conference in 2006.

Laura Bush hit the same point again during a February 26, 2007, appearance on Larry King Live. “[M]any parts of Iraq are stable now. But, of course, what we see on television is the one bombing a day that discourages everybody.”

What do the content findings suggest about this issue?

The question is unlikely to be resolved, no matter what an analysis of the coverage reveals.

What is clear is that a recitation of violence and instability in Iraq permeates the reporting. Most of that came from what was defined as news—daily violence—not how that news was covered.

Does this constitute some unusual slant? Coverage of civil unrest, violence and crime are staples in the general grammar of what constitutes news. It would be natural for journalists to wonder how they could forgo covering such things in Iraq. The findings suggest that journalists were conscious of this. They chose most often to cover the violence in brief. Frequently they did it without trying to draw broad conclusions.

Should the level of coverage from Iraq have decreased as the violence did?

That question may be more difficult to answer. On the one hand, airplane crashes are news, while airplanes landings are not. On the other hand, in the context of the civil strife in Iraq, any change is important, and a decline in violence is change. The survey data suggest that on some level, the public has understood what is occurring from the coverage. As the level of news about violence decreased, the public’s sense of the situation became more positive.

This entire discussion also must take into account the enormous difficulties of trying to cover anything in Iraq beyond parts of Baghdad and a limited number of other locations. One of the clearest findings in our survey of journalists covering the war in Iraq is that the ability of reporters to move around the country freely to get a larger sense of the state of the country is severely limited.

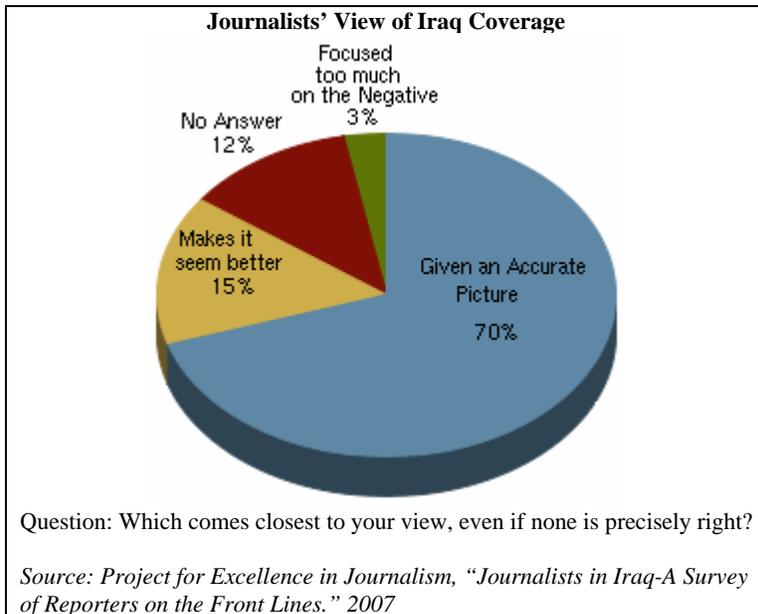
As one broadcast editor put it, “It is dangerous and frustrating. You want to go out and cover stories, but you cannot because of the threat of kidnapping or worse. It’s hard to hear commentators back home say, ‘The media isn’t covering the full story.’ Well, there’s a reason for that, and it’s not bias. And when journalists cannot cover a playground being rebuilt because it’s too dangerous to travel around the city, then that playground is not the primary story.”

Not only are journalists necessarily limited by where they can go and what they can see—what soldiers have often called the fog of war effect—but where matters may be headed, or how to contextualize them, may be even more challenging. If the surge is working, for instance, will that serve the goal of stabilizing the Iraqi government? Or will it have some other effect? For journalists in any setting, elevating daily coverage of

rapidly unfolding events into contemporary history, or even solid trends, can prove elusive.

The majority of journalists surveyed who had been reporting from Iraq did not feel the mix of stories, whatever their shortcomings, had made the situation in that country appear worse than the journalists feel that it has been over time.

When asked about the picture the press has given of Iraq, 70% say it has been accurate.



Another 15% said the press has made the picture look better than it really is, while a 3% said it has focused too much on the negative.

“Overall, the press ... have carried out the classic journalistic mission of bearing witness,” one magazine writer said in the PEJ survey. “This means being in places that few other Western eyes saw, and conveying the experiences of both Iraqis and U.S. troops to a larger public.”

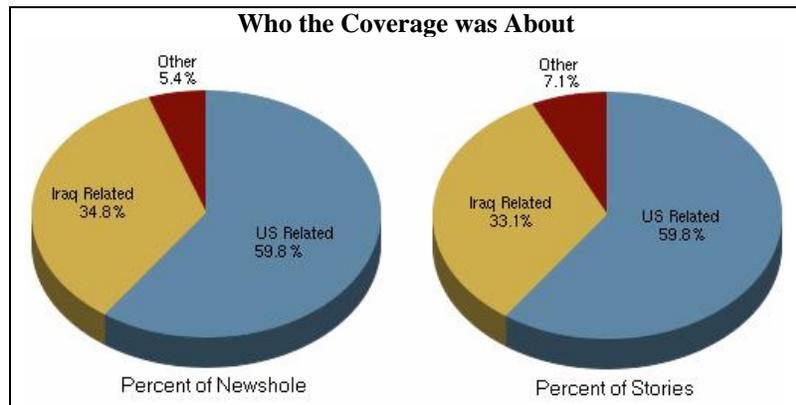
In the end, the findings suggest that the coverage has depicted a harrowing situation in Iraq. That level of terror has eased over time. The prospects for what that implies about the future are less certain. People will doubtless argue over whether that is fair.

### Events Inside Iraq, The News Is Still About Us

If the examination of the theme got at the “message” inside stories, the basic subject matter of stories—what were they generally about—tells us something else. What percentage of stories dealt with American military, vs. Iraqi civilians, insurgents, etc.?

In the content studied here, more than half of the coverage—whether measured in stories (53%) or newshole (51%)—related to U.S. activities. The largest share of this was violence that involved U.S. military, followed by stories involving the military that was non-violent, such as military strategy, and then stories about U.S. soldiers.

This finding also dovetails with the survey of journalists covering the situation in Iraq. The journalists surveyed in Iraq gave high marks to their coverage relating to U.S. troops. Eight in ten rated reporting on that topic as excellence or good. Much of the ability to provide solid reports on these events is likely tied to the active embed program there. As one editor at a broadcast outlet commented, “The press has been well placed and well equipped to cover the war from the point of view of the American military.”



The amount of coverage that was U.S. focused rises to roughly 60% if one adds the reporting about the role of private contractors and security firms in Iraq. That topic made up 9% of the coverage as measured in newshole—or 6% of the stories—most of which involved U.S.-based companies working for the U.S. government.

Violent incidents involving Iraqis only, without any U.S. presence filled 11% of the newshole (and 16% of the stories, a sign that many of these stories were quite short).

And 5% of the coverage (3% of stories) was about the daily life of Iraqi citizens. The difference between stories and newshole suggests that more of these stories were longer.

Topic of Events in Iraq	% of Newshole	% of Stories
U.S. Involved Violence	26.8%	35.9%
U.S. Strategy	17.0	12.3
Iraqi Only Violence	11.5	15.7
Private Contractors	8.9	6.4
Iraqi Civilian Stories	5.5	3.4
Insurgents	5.4	4.1
U.S. Soldiers Other than Combat	4.7	2.4
Reconstruction (and abuses)	3.4	2.7
Iraqi Government	3.2	3.7
Iraqi Internal Affairs Other	2.7	1.9
Mix of Topics	1.8	1.8
U.S. Soldiers Charged with Crimes	1.8	2.3
Iraqi Military and Police	1.7	0.9
Non-U.S. Foreign Military	1.6	2.9
Other	1.6	1.9
Sectarian Tensions in Iraq	1.5	0.7
U.S. Soldiers Helping People	0.6	0.5
Iran's Involvement	0.3	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

This, too, dovetails with the survey of journalists covering the war. The topic area that journalists in our survey gave the lowest marks was coverage of the lives of ordinary citizens. “There are too few reports that include Iraqi citizens—not Green Zone politicians but regular folks,” offered one journalist.

Stories about insurgents made up 5% of the newshole (4% of stories) and stories about reconstruction for the country 3% of the newshole (and 3% of stories).

The coverage of the Iraqi government accounted for 3% of

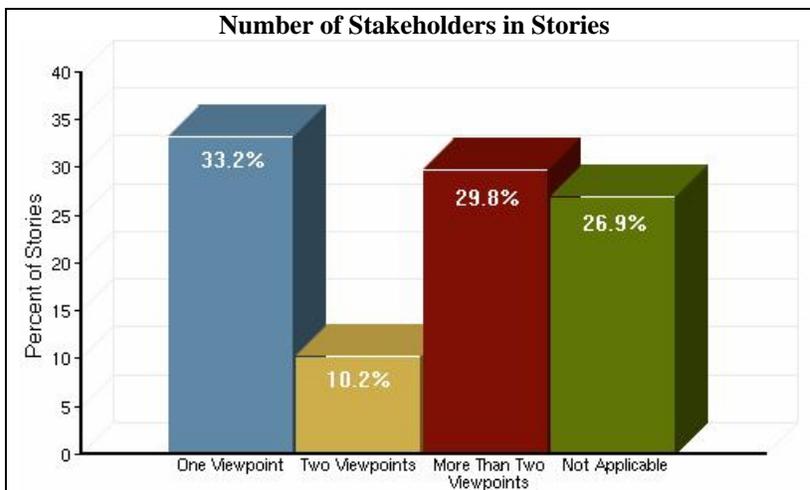
coverage (and 4% of the stories).

One twist in these findings is the fact that stories about private contractors roughly tripled the time or space devoted to the Iraqi government. But the vast majority of that coverage occurred in just two months, September and October, after the controversy over the shooting involving Blackwater.

## A Wide Range of Stakeholders

The study also found that despite the dangers involved in contacting sources, journalists in Iraq managed to bring in multiple voices to their coverage.

Slightly more than a quarter of the stories (27%) were a straight recitation of facts that basically did not call for comment or viewpoint from observers. Stories like the number of deaths that day, the departure of the last British troops from the country, or the announcement of the reburial of Saddam Hussein's sons were all covered in this manner, for example.



Another 40% of stories contained the views of at least two groups of stakeholders. And most of those (30% of all stories) contained the perspective of three or more groups of stakeholders.

A report from April 23 Paul Zahn on CNN about the U.S. Military's plan to build 12-foot security walls is an example. The report talked to an Iraqi man who was among 7,000 Iraqis demonstrating against the wall, a CNN Military Analyst, U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker and Prime Minister Maliki.

That left a third of all the stories examined (33%) that contained only one or mostly one point of view. While that number may strike some as high, it is actually lower than the Project has found in some other studies<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> The level of stories with multiple points of view compares quite competitively with the level of multi-viewpoint reporting found when PEJ examined this issue for various media sectors in PEJ's content analysis in the 2005 State of the News Media annual report, and compares favorably to what we found in cable news.

Looking at the total newshole (time and space as opposed to number of stories), the coverage is even more broadly sourced.

Just 5% of the newshole was straight factual accounts while roughly half (49%) offered views from at least three different stakeholders. Another 13% had two perspectives.

And one-third (33%) of the newshole was made up of stories that were either all or mostly all from one stakeholder group.

Where the range of stakeholders was not consistent was across media genre. Text-based genres of newspapers and websites offered much more depth of views than did the broadcast genres. First, the text-based genres had less straight factual reporting. There were no such stories in newspapers and a mere 3% (5 stories in all) online. Rather, 75% of newspaper stories (77% of newshole) involved stories with more than two viewpoints as did 67% of online coverage (74% of newshole).

Broadcast (network, cable and radio combined) on the other hand, aired more straight, just-the-facts reports. These made up 36% of broadcast stories and 9% of newshole. Just 15% (28% of newshole) contained three or more views and 38% of stories (47% of newshole) offered just one. Some of this difference likely has to do with the natural time limits associated with broadcast news. Producers have told PEJ in the past that because of these limits, they often do not cite all sources contacted for a report.<sup>5</sup>

And when there wasn't a multiplicity of viewpoints, whose views were we hearing?

In the main, we were hearing from American sources. Of the stories with primarily one view or stakeholder, six out of ten of these were American.

More often than not, it was a U.S. military officer. More than a third (35%) of the stories with a single stakeholder relied on a military commander giving an official military view. Another 11% cited a soldier in the field.

After the U.S. military, two other source types dominated these single stakeholder stories: Journalist themselves, primarily correspondents in the field (12%) and someone from the Iraqi government (10%).

Again, these findings support the PEJ survey of journalists in Iraq. These journalists describe U.S military personnel as the easiest sources to get. Nearly nine in ten (86%) considered access to the military officers as easy or doable with some effort.

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<sup>5</sup> "Warp Speed: America in the Age of Mixed Media," Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. New York: Century Foundation Press. 1999. p 27.

**Topline**  
Iraq Ground Events Study  
January 1 – October 31, 2007

**Reporting by Media Sector**

	Frequency	% of Stories
Newspapers	122	11.0%
Online	170	15.3
Network TV	465	41.9
Cable TV	292	26.3
Radio	60	5.4
<b>Total</b>	1109	100%

**Reporting by Month**  
Across All Media Outlets

	Frequency	% of Stories
January	129	11.6%
February	133	12.0
March	116	10.5
April	113	10.2
May	133	12.0
June	119	10.7
July	79	7.1
August	84	7.6
September	81	7.3
October	122	11.0
<b>Total</b>	1109	100%

**Topics**

Across All Media Outlets

	<b>% of Newshole</b>	<b>% of Stories</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
U.S. Involved Violence	26.8%	35.9%	398 stories
U.S. Strategy	17.0	12.3	136
Iraqi Only Violence	11.5	15.7	174
Private Contractors	8.9	6.4	71
Iraqi Civilian Stories	5.5	3.4	38
Insurgents	5.4	4.1	45
U.S. Soldiers Other than Combat	4.7	2.4	27
Reconstruction of Infrastructure	3.4	2.7	30
Iraqi Government	3.2	3.7	41
Iraqi Internal Affairs Other	2.7	1.9	21
Mix of Topics	1.8	1.8	20
U.S. Soldiers Charged with Crimes	1.8	2.3	26
Iraqi Military and Police	1.7	0.9	10
Non-U.S. Foreign Military	1.6	2.9	32
Other	1.6	1.9	21
Sectarian Tensions in Iraq	1.5	0.7	8
U.S. Soldiers Helping People	0.6	0.5	5
Iran's Involvement	0.3	0.5	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1109 stories</b>

**Stories by Narrative Thread**  
Across All Media Outlets

	Frequency	% of Stories
<b>Continued Violence, No Other Themes</b>	520 stories	46.9%
<b>U.S. Policy/ Surge Total</b>	157 stories	14.2%
Will Work/ Is Working	36	3.2
Will Not Work/ Is Not Working	55	5.0
Balanced	66	6.0
<b>Iraqi Nation's Stability Total</b>	84 stories	7.6%
Iraq Moving Towards Stability	5	0.5
Iraq Moving Towards Chaos	72	6.5
Balanced	7	0.6
<b>Iraqi Government Total</b>	43 stories	3.9%
Government is Stable/ Making Progress	6	0.5
Government is Unstable/ Negative Progress	32	2.9
Balanced	5	0.5
<b>Iraqi People's View of U.S. Presence Total</b>	14 stories	1.3%
Want Troops to Stay	1	0.1
Want Troops to Leave	9	0.8
Balanced	4	0.4
<b>Troop Morale Total</b>	14 stories	1.3%
Morale is Up	3	0.3
Morale is Down	7	0.6
Balanced	4	0.4
<b>Other Themes*</b> Total (Stories Did Not Include Evaluations of Above Themes)	235 stories	21.2%
U.S. Military – Other Than Violence	57	5.1
Iraq Internal Affairs	54	4.9
Private Contractors	54	4.9
U.S. Involved Violence	16	1.4
Other	54	4.9
<b>Straight Recitation of Facts (Other Than Violence)</b>	42 stories	3.8%
<b>Total</b>	1109 stories	100%

\*These other themes included subjects such as the role of private contractors, the day to day life of U.S. troops, reconstruction efforts, and other Iraqi internal issues not having to do with incidents of violence.

**Narrative Threads, Pessimistic, Optimistic, Balanced**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>% of Stories</b>
<b>Pessimistic Themes Total</b>	175 stories	15.8 %
Iraqi Nation Moving Towards Chaos	72	6.5
U.S. Policy/Surge Will Not Work/Is Not Working	55	5.0
Iraq Government is Unstable/Negative Progress	32	2.9
Iraqi People Want U.S. Troops to Leave	9	0.8
U.S. Troop Morale is Down	7	0.6
<b>Optimistic Themes Total</b>	51 stories	4.6%
U.S. Policy/Surge Will Work/Is working	36	3.2
Iraqi Government is Stable/Making Progress	6	0.5
Iraqi Nation is Moving Towards Stability	5	0.5
Iraqi Troop Morale is Up	3	0.3
Iraqi People Want U.S. Troops to Stay	1	0.1
<b>Balanced Themes Total</b>	86 stories	7.8%
U.S. Policy/Surge - Balanced	66	6.0
Iraqi Nation – Balanced	7	0.6
Iraqi Government – Balanced	5	0.5
Iraqi People on U.S. Presence – Balanced	4	0.4
U.S. Troop Morale - Balanced	4	0.4

**Number of Stakeholders (All Stories)**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>% of Stories</b>	<b>% of Newshole</b>
Total	1109 stories	100%	100%
All/ Mostly One Viewpoint	368	33.2	33.4
Two Views	113	10.2	12.5
More Than Two	330	29.8	48.9
Not Applicable/ Straight Recitation of Facts	298	26.9	5.2

**Number of Stakeholders (Excluding Those That Straight Recitation of Facts)**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>% of Stories</b>	<b>% of Newshole</b>
Total	811 stories	100%	100%
All/ Mostly One Viewpoint	368	45.4	36.0
Two Views	113	13.9	13.5
More Than Two	330	40.7	50.6

### Dominant Source in Stories with One Stakeholder

	Frequency	% of Stories	% of Newshole
<b>U.S. Government</b>			
White House/ executive	21 stories	5.7%	3.3%
Democratic Lawmakers	2	0.5	0.4
Republican Lawmakers	2	0.5	0.4
U.S. Government Other	19	5.2	3.1
<b>U.S. Diplomats</b>			
	2	0.5	0.3
<b>Anti-War Groups</b>			
	0	0	0
<b>U.S. Military</b>			
Official View	128	34.8	36.0
Soldiers in the Field	40	10.9	18.5
<b>Iraqi</b>			
Iraqi Government	38	10.3	7.5
Iraqi Military	12	3.3	3.5
Sunni Civilians	0	0	0
Shiite Civilians	3	0.8	1.2
Kurdish Civilians	0	0	0
Civilians Other/ Unspecified	15	4.1	4.7
<b>Insurgents</b>			
	8	2.2	1.6
<b>Private Contractors</b>			
	3	0.8	0.6
<b>Non-U.S. Foreign</b>			
Foreign Government	5	1.4	0.5
Foreign Military	2	0.5	0.3
<b>Expert/ Outside Group</b>			
	13	3.5	2.7
<b>Journalist/ Host</b>			
	45	12.2	13.9
<b>Other</b>			
	10	2.7	1.6
<b>Total*</b>	368 Stories	100%	100%

\* Stories that had no Dominant Source were left out of this tally. This table includes 368 out of 1109 total stories.

## **Methodology**

### **Focus of the Study**

This Portrait From Iraq Study is a special report based on additional analysis of content already aggregated in PEJ's weekly News Coverage Index (NCI).

In our weekly analysis of press coverage, PEJ identifies three different storylines of the Iraq war: events on the ground, the policy debate (usually focused in Washington, DC), and the homefront (impact of the war on those in the United States).

For this study, we wanted to closely examine one of the three areas of coverage: namely, coverage of events inside Iraq.

The time period studied was January 1 through October 31, 2007.

### **Sample Design**

For this study of Iraq war coverage, 40 of the 48 outlets included in the weekly NCI reports were studied further. Talk radio programs (Rush Limbaugh, Ed Schultz, Randi Rhodes, Sean Hannity, and Michael Savage) and news radio headlines (ABC News radio and CBS news radio were excluded. See full list of outlets below.)

To create the universe sample, we first identified all stories in those outlets coded as "Iraq war, events on the ground" from January 1 through October 31, 2007.

According to the weekly coding from the NCI, between January 1 and October 31, there were 3,477 stories that were primarily about events on the ground in Iraq. Stories are coded as being about events on the ground in Iraq if 50% or more of the story is devoted to that topic.

From there, we selected one third of the 3,477 stories for additional analysis. To identify the stories for additional analysis, we first selected a random set of days for each medium out of the days we had already coded for in the Index (which includes our rotation of outlets). After selecting the days for each outlet, we would then code any stories that were coded as being about events on the ground in Iraq that appeared on those particular days.

To arrive at our days to consider for each outlet, we randomly selected either the first, second, or third day of the year (beginning in January) that we had coded that material. We then proceeded to include every third day of that outlet for the rest of our time sample.

We did this same method for each of the outlets in our sample with the exception of the New York Times. Since the New York Times is the only outlet we code six days a week,

selecting every third day would have meant that we would have only had stories from the Times that appeared on the same days of the week throughout (Sundays and Wednesdays, for example). Instead, we selected two days out of the first week of January that were three days apart, and rotated those days of the week each subsequent week. For example, on the first week we randomly selected Monday and Thursday, and then the next week we rotated and included Tuesday and Friday.

From this random selection of stories, we arrived at a sample size of 1,106 stories. In this selection of stories, there were no stories that had appeared on the O'Reilly Factor on Fox News. According to our overall Index coding, the O'Reilly Factor had only run 3 stories focused on events on the ground in Iraq during the first 30 minutes of the shows we coded in our rotation. Because of the large viewership of the O'Reilly Factor, we decided to include all of these 3 stories into our overall Iraq study sample despite the fact that they did not appear in our randomly selected days. With these O'Reilly stories, the final number of stories in the study was 1,109.

### **Outlets Examined:**

The media outlets examined are as follows:

#### **Newspapers (Twelve)**

NY Times

Washington Post

Los Angeles Times

USA Today

Wall Street Journal

The Boston Globe

Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

Austin American-Statesman

Albuquerque Journal

Star Beacon (Ashtabula, Ohio)

The Chattanooga Times Free Press

The Bakersfield Californian

#### **Web sites (Five)**

CNN.com

Yahoo News

MSNBC.com

Google News

AOL News

## **Network TV (Seven)**

### Morning shows

ABC – Good Morning America

CBS – Early Show

NBC - Today

### Evening news

ABC – World News Tonight

CBS – CBS Evening News

NBC – NBC Nightly News

PBS – Newshour with Jim Lehrer

## **Cable TV (Fifteen)**

### Daytime

CNN

Fox News

MSNBC

\*From Jan. 1 to March 16, we coded from 1-1:30 p.m. EST; from March 19 on, we coded from 2-2:30 p.m. EST

### Nighttime CNN

Lou Dobbs Tonight

Situation Room

Paula Zahn Now

Anderson Cooper 360

### Nighttime Fox News

Special Report w/ Brit Hume

Fox Report w/ Shepard Smith

O'Reilly Factor

Hannity & Colmes

### Nighttime MSNBC

Tucker

Hardball

Countdown w/ Keith Olbermann

Scarborough Country

## **Radio**

NPR Morning Edition every day

From that content, the study included stories devoted primarily to events in Iraq:

- On the front page of newspapers
- In the entirety of commercial network evening newscasts.
- The first 30 minutes of network morning news, the PBS evening news, NPR's Morning Edition, and all cable programs
- The top 5 stories on each website at the time of capture

The basic NCI codebook codes for topic at three different levels, and also includes date coded, Story ID number, story date, source, broadcast start time, broadcast story start timecode, headline, story word count, placement/prominence, story format, story describer, lead newsmaker, and broadcast story ending timecode. The complete methodology for the weekly NCI has further details on the coding system and inter-coder reliability.

### **Coding Design**

In addition to the existing variables in the NCI, the Iraq study included a variety of variables designed to probe about the coverage of the events on the ground. These included dateline, Iraq sub storyline, range of stakeholders, predominant source, and theme.

***Dateline*** designates the province, city, or country that was given as the dateline of the story.

***Iraq sub storyline*** measures the broad Iraq-war related topic, or what the story is about "on its face." The list of topics for this variable was determined through a combination of the questions that appeared in the PEJ survey of journalists who have reported from Iraq and also from observations made by PEJ staff over the past ten months.

***Range of stakeholders*** measures the effort of the news organization to present viewpoints and opinions from varying groups of people involved in the Iraq conflict. Examples of these stakeholders are groups such as Iraqi civilians, members of the U.S. military, representatives from the White House, and members of the Iraqi parliament.

***Dominant source*** identified which group was the predominant source in such stories where the views expressed came primarily from one specific group.

***Theme*** designates the existence of evaluations of five main storylines within any given news story. This variable measured whether a story had any explicit language that indicated a positive or negative development in regard to the following five issues: the success of the U.S. policy in Iraq, troop morale, the stability of the Iraqi government, the views of Iraqis about the presence of U.S. troops, and the stability of the country as a whole. A story did not have to be entirely about these topics to be coded as a theme,

however, if several different evaluations about themes were mentioned, we coded for the theme that was given the most attention in the story. If none of the above storylines were evaluated in the story, this variable was used to determine whether the story was an account of violence that did not address any of the five themes, a straight recitation of facts regarding some topic other than violence, or whether the story evaluated themes other than the five being tracked in this specific study.

### **Coding Team & Process**

Using the existing data in the Index and adding the codes for new variables, the team responsible for performing the content analysis was made up of the four trained coders, a coding administrator, and a senior research methodologist on the PEJ staff.

During coder-training, inter-coder reliability tests were conducted for all variables. For the variables derived from PEJ's weekly Index, the average level agreement was 96%. For the new variables, initial tests found levels of agreement of 80% or greater for all but three variables (Iraq sub storyline, range of stakeholders and theme). For those three variables, clarifications were made to the codebook and additional training implemented. An additional test was conducted and all three variables reached a level above 80% agreement. In total, testing was conducted on 5% of the sample. In addition, the coding administrator monitored coding throughout the process to ensure levels were maintained.

The specific levels of agreement for the variables in this study were as follows:

Dateline: 95%

Lead newsmaker: 87%

Iraq sub storyline: 84%

Range of stakeholders: 87%

Dominant source (when there was agreement on the range of stakeholders): 89%

Theme: 83%