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Author(s): William D. Baker and John R. ONeal

Source: *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 5 (Oct., 2001), pp. 661-687

Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176318>

Accessed: 06-05-2016 17:03 UTC

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Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?

THE NATURE AND ORIGINS OF THE “RALLY ’ROUND THE FLAG” EFFECT

WILLIAM D. BAKER

Arkansas School for Mathematics and Sciences

JOHN R. ONEAL

*Department of Political Science
University of Alabama*

In this study, the “rally effect”—the propensity for the American public to put aside political differences and support the president during international crises—is measured by considering the changes in presidential popularity following all 193 Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) between 1933 and 1992 as identified by the Correlates of War project. Summary analyses find minor, statistically insignificant rallies associated with uses of force, although sizable rallies are associated with particular subcategories of military crises. However, larger rallies are associated with the United States as both revisionist and originator of the dispute, with the initiation of a full interstate war, and with prominent headline placement in the *New York Times*. Regression analyses indicate that rallies are more likely when they are associated with White House statements and bipartisan support for the administration’s policies. Findings suggest that the size and appearance of a rally depends primarily on how the crisis is presented to the public in terms of media coverage, bipartisan support, and White House spin.

That a president can elicit a surge of patriotism and public approval for his administration and its policies during an international crisis is one of the most deeply held tenets in American politics. This is the “rally ’round the flag” effect (Mueller 1970), and, for a number of years, the anecdotal evidence for such a phenomenon was supported by the prevailing empirical research (Kernell 1978; Mueller 1970, 1973). More recent studies (Brody 1991; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995; James and Rioux 1998), however, have cast doubt on the rally effect.

Although public support for the president does increase during many crises, this increase is often small, by no means certain, and appears to be contingent on a number of contextual factors. The relationship between presidential uses of force and presi-

AUTHORS’ NOTE: The authors would like to thank Ronald Keith Gaddie of the University of Oklahoma; Michael Kelley of the University of Central Arkansas; Stephen Borrelli, Carol Cassel, Patrick Cotter, and James Stovall of the University of Alabama; and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. Versions of this article were presented at the annual meeting of the Arkansas Political Science Association, Little Rock, Arkansas, February 18-19, 2000; and the annual meeting of the Southwestern Political Science Association, Galveston, Texas, March 15-18, 2000. All data employed in this research may be obtained by e-mailing the first author at bakerw@asms1x.dsc.k12.ar.us.

JOURNAL OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION, Vol. 45 No. 5, October 2001 661-687
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dential popularity is more complex than conventional wisdom or the early systematic investigations would have us believe.

To refine our theory and understanding about how the American public reacts during dramatic international events, we reexamine the rally effect using the Correlates of War's Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID) data set, the first time that this standard collection of international events has been used to assess this phenomenon. Furthermore, whereas previous studies have focused on the 1950s through the 1980s, we extend the analysis back into the 1930s and forward into the 1990s to include 10 presidencies, the Franklin Roosevelt through the George H. W. Bush administrations. We address the following questions: Is there a consistent rally 'round the flag effect associated with U.S. presidents' use of force in militarized disputes? Why do some presidential uses of force boost the popularity of the chief executive, others go unnoticed, and many result in a loss of public support? What factors associated with presidential uses of force—prior presidential popularity, bipartisan support, media coverage, the proximity of elections, the state of the economy—influence the size of the rally, or whether a rally occurs at all? And, finally, when the public rallies, to what is it responding?

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

The importance of public approval and support to presidential success is well documented. Both Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde (1987) and Fiorina (1981) noted that voting behavior in presidential and congressional elections is influenced by the popularity of the White House incumbent, whereas Marra and Ostrom (1989) demonstrated that the president's public approval ratings play a role in the distribution of congressional seats. Presidential popularity has also been linked to presidential success in congressional roll call votes (Edwards 1980), the success of presidential policy initiatives (Rivers and Rose 1985), and congressional reactions to presidential vetoes (Rohde and Simon 1985).

Popular presidents have more leverage in persuading other political actors to adopt administration priorities and policies as their own (Neustadt 1960) and are more likely to present bold and ambitious legislative packages to Congress (Light 1982). Although not binding, Crespi (1980, 42) has observed that "presidential approval ratings have created a pseudo-parliamentary situation, whereby the President faces a monthly vote of confidence from the total electorate . . . this vote of confidence is accepted by both politicians and political analysts as an indicator of the President's political clout and, therefore, of his ability to govern effectively." Quite simply, presidents who enjoy substantial popularity and public support have more options and resources available to them and fewer concerns about congressional resistance to their policies, whereas unpopular presidents may be more vulnerable to congressional recalcitrance and investigations.

Presidential popularity is not a constant, however, and every president in the era of modern public opinion polling has seen his approval ratings wax and wane, sometimes

considerably, for reasons that are often unclear. Marra, Ostrom, and Simon (1990) noted that there are three basic, although not mutually exclusive, schools of thought about what types of dynamics influence presidential popularity. One school of thought begins with the observation that, for most incumbents, public approval “moves ineluctably downward from the first day in office” (MacKuen 1983, 178). Advocates of this perspective (Cronin 1980; MacKuen 1983; Mueller 1970, 1973; Stimson 1976) maintain that presidential approval is characterized by a gradual and steady erosion over the course of a presidential term. They claim that although events and developments may temporarily delay or even reverse this decline over the short term, it cannot be forestalled indefinitely.

A second school of thought emphasizes the domestic and international contexts in which the president operates and to which presidential popularity responds. According to this approach, presidents are continually assessed based on their abilities to satisfy the expectations and desires of the electorate. Public approval rises and falls in response to such stimuli as the rates of unemployment and inflation, levels of international tension, battle deaths during periods of war, and the success of the president’s legislative agenda (Hibbs 1982; Kernell 1978; MacKuen 1983; Ostrom and Simon 1985).

The third school of thought accepts this relationship between public approval and environmental stimuli but emphasizes instead the symbolic nature of the presidency and the potential for ameliorating the negative impact of events in the domestic and international arenas through political drama and effective public relations strategies. Faced with the inevitable loss of such an important political asset, presidents might be expected to do whatever is in their power in attempting to minimize or even reverse this seemingly inexorable decline in public approval (Brace and Hinckley 1991, 1993; Brody and Page 1975; Haight and Brody 1977; Kernell 1986; Lee 1977; Neustadt 1960; Ragsdale 1984, 1987). Kernell (1986) and Brace and Hinckley (1993) even posited the development of a “public relations presidency” in the postwar era in which incumbents strategically or reactively “act in deliberate ways to achieve heightened popularity in the polls and in elections” (Brace and Hinckley 1993, 382-84). The savvy timing of “going public” through presidential speeches (Edwards 1983; Kernell 1986; Lowi 1985), press conferences (Lammers 1981), media relations (Grossman and Kumar 1981; Kernell 1984; Ragsdale 1984; Simon and Ostrom 1989), foreign travel (Lammers 1982), and other presidentially relevant events may, for a time, forestall the inexorable decline in popularity that seems to occur naturally over the course of a term. Foreign and military initiatives designed to bolster public approval ratings would obviously be included in this final category and will be considered in the next section.

Marra, Ostrom, and Simon (1990) attempted to incorporate all three perspectives in their presidential popularity model while isolating the impacts of foreign and domestic influences, the rate of inevitable decline, environmental factors, and episodes of political drama. The authors observed that a president typically begins his term in office with a surge of popularity—almost 20 percentage points, according to Marra, Ostrom, and Simon—that steadily dissipates over the course of his term, although the effects of this decline are less significant after the first year in office. On the whole, environmental and political drama variables were found to be more significant than the inevitable

decline variable, and foreign environmental factors were deemed of greater importance than domestic factors in the final analysis. In fact, Marra, Ostrom, and Simon noted that “a president can expect to increase his popularity in the foreign policy realm fourfold as compared to the domestic policy arena” and that “reliance on foreign policy actions does appear to be a feasible, short-term strategy for influencing the pattern of public support” (pp. 618-19).

Foreign policy actions may have political impacts beyond public approval, however. Just as voting behavior may be influenced by party identification, incumbency performance, or the state of the economy, so also may voters be affected by the impacts of wars and other military actions in making their voting decisions. Voters dissatisfied with the performance and policies of the incumbents of one party may be inclined to vote for the opposition party (Kramer 1971), whereas better qualified candidates may be more inclined to run against incumbents when the performance of the party in power is in question (Jacobson and Kernell 1981). Rosenstone (1983) demonstrated that the electoral performances of Democratic candidates suffered due to public perceptions of Democratic mismanagement of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, whereas Ostrom and Simon (1985) concluded that presidential administrations that inherit unpopular wars—specifically, the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations—do not suffer so much as those associated with the initiation of U.S. involvement in these conflicts. Rivers and Rose (1985) found that congressional approval of the president’s legislative agenda increases in tandem with his public approval numbers, whereas Lewis-Beck and Rice (1982) found that public opinion survey results on presidential approval within periods of “relative political calm” prior to an election are powerful predictors of the general election vote.

THE RALLY 'ROUND THE FLAG EFFECT

The rally effect has long been recognized in the literature on presidential popularity (Mueller 1970, 1973; Lee 1977; Kernell 1978; Erikson, Luttbeg, and Tedin 1980; Sigelman and Conover 1981; MacKuen 1983; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Marra, Ostrom, and Simon 1990; Russett 1990a; DeRouen 1995, 2000; Holsti 1996; James and Rioux 1998). It is commonly believed that in times of major international events or crises, the American public sets aside its disagreements with the incumbent president’s policies or performance in office to present a united front to the international community. Although earlier work by Kenneth Waltz (1967) and Richard Neustadt (1960) had noted the apparent relationship between presidential popularity and international events, John Mueller (1970, 1973) was the first to operationalize the concept in his model of presidential popularity. He proposed that an international incident must satisfy three criteria to qualify as a rally event: (1) it must be international in nature; (2) it must involve the United States and the president directly; and (3) it must be specific, dramatic, and sharply focused. Mueller theorized that the public will support the president because they fear hurting the nation’s chances of success by opposing him, and that at such times the president has an opportunity to look masterful and evoke patriotic reactions among the populace. For Mueller, only international events were capable of uniting the nation as a whole and generating a

rally effect; domestic crises were at least as likely to exacerbate divisions as to ameliorate them.

Virtually all of the relevant research that followed Mueller (Lee 1977; Kernell 1978; MacKuen 1983; Wittkopf and DeHaven 1987; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Marra, Ostrom, and Simon 1990, among others) found that "specific, dramatic, and sharply focused international events directly involving the United States do indeed redound to the benefit, albeit short-lived, of an incumbent president's public approval rating" (Mueller 1973, 21). However, subsequent research (Blechman and Kaplan 1978; Brody and Shapiro 1989; Edwards 1990; Hugick and Gallup 1991; James and Oneal 1991; Brody 1991; Lian and Oneal 1993; DeRouen 1995; Oneal and Bryan 1995; James and Rioux 1998) has cast doubt on the importance of the rally effect in explaining substantial variations in presidential popularity.

Unlike Mueller (1973), Kernell (1978) excluded presidential inaugurations from his collection of rally events, ensuring that only the influence of foreign events on public perceptions of the president would be measured. Kernell again found significant correlations between rally events and presidential approval, although the strengths of these relationships varied greatly depending on the incumbent's previous popularity and the perceived political importance of the rally event in question. The impact of Kernell's rally variable was found to be particularly important in explaining public opinion shifts during the Truman, Kennedy, and Nixon administrations, with each president's approval ratings increasing by an average of 5 to 7 points in the month immediately following a rally point; weaker, yet still positively correlated effects were noted for the Johnson and Eisenhower administrations.

In considering the impact of 85 "unanticipated outcomes" between 1953 and 1980, Ostrom and Simon (1985) found that the level of conflict or cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union affected the public's assessment of the president. Although the negative implications of a cooperative attitude toward the Soviets appear to have been muted, suggesting that the president engages in such initiatives only when the public's attention is focused on domestic matters (p. 351), in those instances in which the president adopted an aggressive, conflictual stance toward the Soviets, his approval could be expected to increase by as much as 4 percentage points, suggesting that the American public, at least through 1980, reacted most favorably to confrontational policies toward the Soviet Union. Ostrom and Simon also found that the president's approval ratings increased by more than 5 percentage points on average following uses of force that were prominently reported on the front page of the *New York Times*. Based on these findings, Ostrom and Simon concluded that "a president can influence his standing to the extent he is able to affect the salient environmental events and conditions. As such, these events and conditions constitute levers which, if pulled at the appropriate time, can influence popular support" (p. 335).

Subsequent studies on presidential uses of force and the rally effect have focused on the president's propensity to "rattle the saber" to bolster his standing in the polls and improve his party's electoral prospects.¹ MacKuen (1983) and Wittkopf and DeHaven

1. For a more thorough treatment of the diversionary theory of war, see Levy (1989b), Smith (1996), Leeds and Davis (1997), Gowa (1999), and others.

(1987) reiterated the conventional wisdom that direct, forceful action on the part of the president in international affairs can positively affect public approval, although other studies (Blechman and Kaplan 1978; Brody and Shapiro 1989; Edwards 1990; Hugick and Gallup 1991) found only minimal rallies and emphasized the short-term nature of the political benefits associated with presidential uses of force. Similarly, Brody and Shapiro (1989) found that of 45 situations expected to produce a rally effect, 20% actually led to a drop in presidential popularity, and on average, the gain in the opinion polls was less than 3%, whereas Blechman and Kaplan (1978) found that presidential popularity increased in only 7 of the 20 cases they randomly selected for analysis.

Edwards (1990) adopted a broader definition of rally events than Mueller and found that, from 1953 through 1988, most uses of force resulted in little or no consistent rally effect at all, whereas most of those rallies that did occur boosted presidential approval by fewer than 7 points and were frequently short-lived. In only 24 of the 85 events identified by Edwards did approval ratings increase by 5 or more percentage points, whereas in 11 of the cases, approval fell by 5 or more percentage points.

Marra, Ostrom and Simon (1990), meanwhile, found that major uses of force in regions of considerable geopolitical interest to the United States—Europe, the Caribbean Basin, and the Middle East—tended to elicit larger rallies than those in other regions. Nincic (1997), Jentleson (1992), and Jentleson and Britton (1998) found the same. Similarly, Parker's (1995) analysis of the rally effects during the Persian Gulf War discovered significant changes in the public's evaluations of President Bush and Congress, trust in government, assessment of personal finances, and expectations for the economy in response to the conflict. In their analysis of the rally effect during the Carter administration, Callaghan and Virtanen (1993) found that the president enjoyed larger and longer lasting gains in popularity among political independents than among Republicans or Democrats, perhaps suggesting that independents turn their attention toward presidential matters only during crises.

The efficacy of forceful actions during significant international events in garnering support for presidential initiatives has continued to be the focus of considerable interest since the 1980s (Ostrom and Job 1986; Stoll 1987; Simon and Ostrom 1989; Russett 1990a; Brody 1991; James and Oneal 1991; Morgan and Bickers 1992; Fearon 1994), suggesting that presidents might be tempted to bolster their domestic popularity through international adventurism. In an attempt to corroborate this assumption and reassess the efficacy of the rally effect, Lian and Oneal (1993) employed Blechman and Kaplan's (1978) complete list of 102 major uses of force by the United States between 1950 and 1984, then calculated the accompanying rally effects. Surprisingly, they found no consistent rally effects following the use of military force, even among members of the president's own party. Regression analyses determined that rally effects were more likely when the United States was involved in a major crisis, when the president's actions were prominently reported, when the president's initial popularity was relatively low, and when there was bipartisan support for the use of force in question.

Oneal and Bryan (1995) calculated the rally effect for the 41 U.S. foreign policy crises occurring between 1950 and 1985 identified by Wilkenfeld, Brecher, and Moser's (1988) International Crisis Behavior (ICB) project and found once again that the

effects on the president's popularity were minimal, just 1.4% on average. The most significant influences on the size of rallies were whether the United States was involved in a war at the time of the crisis and whether the incident was prominently reported in the *New York Times*. In turn, *New York Times* coverage of a foreign policy crisis was discovered to be influenced by the manner in which the White House publicized the crisis, the involvement of the Soviet Union, the region in which the crisis occurred, and whether bipartisan support of the administration's policies was forthcoming. Interestingly, Oneal and Bryan found that the severity of a crisis had no impact on presidential popularity following a use of force, casting doubt on the widespread assumption that rallies occur when the public responds to dangerous events affecting the nation.

DeRouen (1995) found that uses of force resulted in rally effects of less than 3 percentage points on average, but neither international factors such as the strategic balance or levels of international tension nor the position on the electoral calendar revealed any significant impact on the propensity to employ the military in a crisis. Although Ostrom and Job (1986) found that uses of force were associated with higher levels of public approval, DeRouen discovered that higher presidential popularity levels were in fact associated with lower levels of force applied in international crises.

James and Rioux (1998) assessed the influence of uses of force on presidential popularity using ICB data for the period from 1953 through 1994, a longer time span than has been used in most previous research. Controlling for economic conditions, the authors found small and short-lived rallies of between 3% and 4% on average when a president responded vigorously in an international crisis, although the rally effect disappeared when the response level escalated into a use of force and when the Soviet Union was not involved. Furthermore, James and Rioux discovered that different sectors of the electorate responded differently to uses of force, with independents and members of the president's "ruling coalition" more likely to rally and opposition party voters less likely.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE RALLY EFFECT

One important question yet to be fully addressed concerns the nature and origin of rallies, when they occur and for what reasons. Mueller (1970, 1973) offered one account of the phenomenon—what Brody (1991) referred to as the "patriotism" explanation. In times of foreign policy crisis, when important political, economic, or strategic interests of the nation are at stake, the public will focus uncritically on and unite behind the commander-in-chief in a show of patriotic support. Moreover, the public may fear endangering the nation's chances of success if they publicly oppose the president. The favorable response of the public, according to this interpretation, is therefore essentially a reflex, unrelated to any particular characteristics of the conflict in question or to any substantive approval or "mood change" on the part of the public for the administration or its policies.

Another interpretation for the rally phenomenon—what Brody (1991) and Zaller (1992) refer to as the "opinion leadership" explanation—assumes that rally events are essentially no different from other political phenomena. The public, when given the opportunity, will form an opinion of the administration's policies based on preexisting

dispositions and the availability of new information. Despite a long-standing presumption that the public is generally uninterested in foreign policy, public opinion researchers from Campbell et al. (1960) through Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida (1989); Nincic and Hinckley (1991); Jentleson (1992); Zaller (1992); Jentleson and Britton (1998); and Baker (2000) have consistently found that the public is capable of recognizing and acting on differences in the foreign policy platforms proffered by political candidates when presented with sufficient information. What makes a rally event distinct from a domestic political issue is that the unique political environment in which international crises develop often ensures that the public is unable to access traditional sources of information, available during normal periods, to make political judgments.

During international crises involving the United States, the president enjoys access to strategic, political, and military information that his political opponents—congressional leaders, presidential challengers, key congressional committee members, and so on—are denied. Faced with a rapidly unfolding crisis, those who might otherwise criticize White House policy—and who might still do so once sufficient information becomes available—are often inclined to say nothing or even to offer guarded support for the president's policies for fear of looking foolish or unpatriotic.

In such an atmosphere, the media, traditionally predisposed to presenting a balanced perspective, find themselves unable to procure comments on the administration's policies from the sources that heretofore could be counted on to offer criticism. Furthermore, the media open themselves to charges of bias if, in attempting to present an evenhanded account, they depend on less than credible sources for comments critical of the White House's handling of a conflict. Finally, international crises are sufficiently exciting and compelling that they do not require any manufactured drama on the part of the media to attract viewers and readers. The media are therefore likely to report rally events in a more one-sided fashion, one more favorable to the president, than would be the case on issues of domestic policy or routine international events.

Given these contextual factors, then—a political opposition unwilling or unable to offer criticism of the president's policies and a media without the resources to present opposing interpretations of the crisis—the public is largely cut off from the cues it traditionally employs to develop an opinion and form judgments on political phenomena. Without easily accessible cues presented through the media from those with whom they identify politically or ideologically, the public is led to assume that there is a consensus among political leaders on the issue and to support the president, even if they would otherwise be inclined to oppose him. In the statistical and regression analyses that follow, we assess these competing explanations. Does patriotism or opinion leadership best account for the public's reaction to rally events?

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

THE MILITARIZED INTERSTATE DISPUTE DATA

Mueller's (1970, 1973) initial study of the rally phenomenon has been criticized for not employing an independently selected set of events that might elicit a rally (Lian

and Oneal 1993) and for including among his cases such noninternational events as presidential inaugurations (Kernell 1978). Although much of the subsequent rally research has corrected these problems, none of the data sets that have been used has been as comprehensive as the Correlates of War's MID data set. The Correlates of War project defines a MID as "a set of interactions between or among states involving threats to use military force, displays of military force or actual uses of military force. To be included, these acts must be explicit, nonaccidental, and government sanctioned" (Gochman and Maoz 1984, 587).

The MID data encompass the years from 1816 to 1992 and provide detailed information on the more than 2,000 militarized disputes in which one or more states threatened, displayed, or used force against one or more other states. By extending our analyses to disputes that did not escalate to actual uses of force, we may determine whether the public responds differently to such rally events. Furthermore, modern public opinion polling on presidential approval did not begin until the middle of the 1930s and, even then, polls were conducted only sporadically. Our research, therefore, focuses on the 193 MIDs in which the United States was involved between 1933 and 1992. This period encompasses the administrations of Franklin Roosevelt through George H. W. Bush.

Many of the starting dates in the MID data set have been recoded for the purposes of this research. In a number of cases, a MID might have involved one or more threats, displays, or uses of force before escalating into a war, suggesting the presence of multiple rally events in some MIDs. However, given the abbreviated time frames involved and the frequency of public opinion polls, to treat each rally event as a separate case would be prohibitive and impractical. Obviously, for those disputes that were relatively brief or that began suddenly, the original MID's starting date was used. However, for those disputes in which U.S. participation developed gradually, the MID's starting point was recoded to reflect the point at which the conflict crossed the threshold from threat and display of force to the actual use of force, consistent with Mueller's (1970, 1973) criteria for a rally event.

For example, the Persian Gulf War, originally coded in the MID data set as beginning in July 1990 with a series of Iraqi threats toward Kuwait, has been recoded to coincide with the initiation of the American air war against Iraq in January 1991. Other disputes not only developed gradually over several months but also failed to escalate into overt uses of force on the part of the United States. Examples of these types of disputes include the 1958-59 Berlin deadline, the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, and the Nicaraguan civil war of the 1980s. Starting dates for these disputes were recoded to reflect either the points at which the highest hostility level of a militarized dispute was realized, again consistent with Mueller's (1970, 1973) definition of a rally, or the point at which the media's coverage of a dispute became prominent, as indicated by the *New York Times*.

PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

For the purposes of this study, the dependent variable, presidential popularity, was determined based on polling by the Gallup organization (Gallup 1972; Edwards 1990;

TABLE 1
Rally Effects, 1933 to 1992

	n	M (%)	SD (%)	Minimum (%)	Maximum (%)
All	167	0.10	4.58	-16	18
Roosevelt	5	2.40	5.81	-3	12
Truman	4	3.50	7.14	-6	9
Eisenhower	31	-1.10	3.88	-11	7
Kennedy	18	1.00	4.96	-6	13
Johnson	21	-0.62	3.63	-7	6
Nixon	15	-1.93	3.92	-8	3
Ford	7	-1.14	7.86	-16	11
Carter	14	0.07	3.83	-6	7
Reagan	41	0.37	3.18	-9	6
Bush	11	3.64	7.20	-7	18

Saad 1993). The rally for each of the events identified in the MID data set was calculated by subtracting the incumbent president's approval rating in the Gallup poll immediately preceding the beginning of the militarized dispute from his approval rating in the poll immediately following the beginning of the dispute. However, although their methodologies were generally sound, the Gallup organization's measurements of presidential popularity were sporadic during the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. During the Roosevelt presidency, Gallup asked only four presidential approval questions in 1943 and none in 1944, perhaps out of concern that any evidence of public dissatisfaction with the chief executive might hinder the war effort. Furthermore, as late as the 1970s, the presidential approval question was omitted from surveys in the months preceding presidential elections, presumably to avoid influencing the electoral outcome. To ensure that any rally associated with a presidential use of force was not contaminated or influenced by other contemporaneous events, cases in which the public's approval was measured more than 6 weeks prior to or following the start of a dispute were omitted. For this reason, data are available for only 167 of the 193 U.S. interstate disputes between 1933 and 1993. Nevertheless, this sample is still larger than those utilized in all previous research on the rally effect.²

First, we report in Table 1 the mean rally effect and standard deviations for the entire period, then for each individual presidential administration. As indicated, the mean rally associated with presidential militarized disputes over the 60-year period is negligible, with an increase of just 0.1% on average, a statistically insignificant result given that Gallup does not measure public opinion to such a degree of accuracy. These results are consistent with Lian and Oneal (1993) and Oneal and Bryan (1995).

2. The public opinion polls in the 1930s and 1940s were scientifically sound methodologically, albeit infrequent. However, to ascertain whether our results were affected by variations in polling techniques, the data were analyzed using militarized disputes from the 1950s onward. The results were virtually identical to those of the period from 1933 to 1993, with no significant differences in the sizes of average rallies in response to militarized disputes.

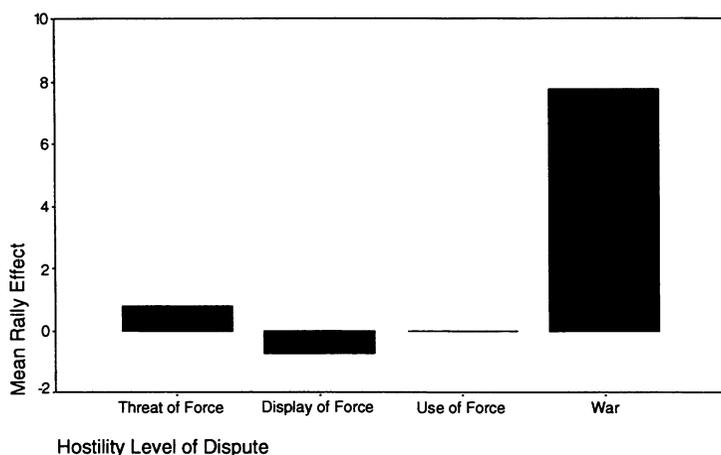


Figure 1: Rally Effects and Hostility Levels

Moreover, rallies in response to military crises are by no means certain; public approval increased in just 65 of the 167 rally points for which public approval data exists. When examined by administration, every president except Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford experienced positive rallies on average, with especially large average rally effects associated with the Roosevelt, Truman, and Bush administrations.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES OF USES OF FORCE AND RALLIES

Next, we conduct tests to ascertain the characteristics of the militarized disputes and the rallies, if any, with which they are associated. Statistical information was compiled on the severity of the crises and the levels of hostility realized in the dispute, public perceptions of business conditions, the proximity of elections, and media coverage of the action.

Context of Dispute

Hostility levels. The public may be expected to respond differently to militarized disputes of different intensity. Clearly some international crises—the Cuban missile crisis, the Persian Gulf War, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor—are more threatening to the United States and U.S. interests than others. On the other hand, international disputes that are tangential to U.S. strategic and economic interests—African border disputes, Ecuadorian seizures of U.S. fishing vessels, and ethnic genocide in the former Yugoslavia, for example—would not be expected consistently to yield rallies.

Figure 1 illustrates the rallies associated with threat of force, display of force, use of force, and actual war. As indicated, only those rare instances—just 2% of the cases—in which the president leads the nation into a full-scale war consistently resulted in sizable rallies. Although the average rally associated with U.S. entry into war averages

TABLE 2
Rally Effect and Front Page Coverage by the *New York Times*

	n	Rally (%)
Front page	110	0.64
Headline	73	1.19
Front page, no headline	37	-0.44
Not front page	83	-0.60

almost 8 percentage points, only five disputes meet this criterion. However, the political significance of the sizable rally from an entry into war must be considered in light of the fact that prolonged wars tend to be unpopular with the public (Mueller 1970, 1973; Ostrom and Job 1986; Cotton 1987) and may cause leaders, especially in democracies, to lose office (Bueno de Mesquita, Siverson and Woller 1992; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995).

Media Coverage

Past research has suggested that coverage in the *New York Times* is an important indicator of an event's coverage in other national, regional, and local newspapers as well as in the broadcast media (Mueller 1970, 1973; Ostrom and Simon 1985). To assess the impact of the media on the public's response to the president's involvement in militarized disputes, data were gathered on the coverage of each dispute by the *New York Times*. As noted above, the initiation date of a number of the disputes was recoded to coincide with the point at which the conflict crossed the threshold from threats and displays of force to the actual use of force. Data were also collected on the placement of the incident on the front page and whether the initial public statement regarding the militarized dispute came from the president himself or from some other administration official.

As shown in Table 2, more than half of the MID disputes (110 of 193) were reported on the front page of the *New York Times*. There is only a modest difference in the rally effect associated with disputes that were reported on the front page and those that were not; the average rally effects for disputes reported on the front page was 0.64, whereas the average effect was -0.60 for those that were not. A *t*-test indicates that the difference between these means is statistically significant at the .08 level.

Of the 167 rally events for which presidential approval data are available, 63 were reported in a *New York Times* headline; presumably these were the most important stories of their day. Stories were considered headline stories if they were lead stories, were reported in one or more columns just below the *New York Times* flag, or appeared beneath accompanying photographs at the top of the front page. As indicated in Table 2, headline stories generated greater rallies on average than did those that appeared elsewhere on the front page, and this difference is statistically significant ($p < .025$).

Economic Conditions

The state of the economy has long been recognized as an important influence on presidential popularity (Kernell 1978; Ward and Widmaier 1982; MacKuen 1983; Ostrom and Simon 1985; Norpoth 1987; Lewis-Beck 1988; Marra, Ostrom, and Simon 1990; Brace and Hinckley 1992; Wittkopf 1994; Miller 1995, 1999; Smith 1996, 1998), and several studies have found that lackluster economies increase the likelihood of presidential uses of force in at least some circumstances (Ostrom, Simon, and Job 1986; Russett 1987, 1990a, 1990b; Levy 1988, 1989a; James and Oneal 1991; Brace and Hinckley 1992; Richards et al. 1993; Downes and Rocke 1994; James and Hristoulas 1994; Hess and Orphanides 1995; Wang 1996; Fordham 1998a, 1998b; Heldt 1999; Bennett and Nordstrom 2000; DeRouen 2000). The economic data employed are based on components of the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center's Index of Consumer Sentiment. Michigan's data on consumer expectations of business conditions over the next 12 months best capture the attitudes of the public, are naturally influenced by public perceptions of unemployment and inflation, and are therefore more accurate measures of the public's sense of the state of the economy than the more traditional "misery index." For the purposes of this research, the most recent consumer sentiment survey prior to a militarized dispute was employed. Cases in which consumer confidence measures were more than 3 months prior to the militarized dispute are omitted.

Crisis Severity

Militarized disputes involving the United States that occur during periods of international tension and instability may be expected to garner greater media coverage and hence prove more likely to elicit a rally. To gauge the systemic instability inherent in a crisis, Brecher and James (1986) developed an index of severity, a function of six constituent variables: number of crisis actors, great powers' level of involvement, geostrategic importance of the site of the crisis, the range of issues under dispute, the level of violence employed in the crisis, and the heterogeneity of the participants as measured in terms of military capability, economic development, political regime, and culture. Brecher, Wilkenfeld, and Moser (1988, 128-33) calculated the severity index for those international crises occurring between 1928 and 1979, whereas Lian and Oneal (1993) extended the severity index through 1984 and converted the continuous ICB severity index to an ordinal variable. We have replicated and extended Lian and Oneal's variable through 1992. All noncrisis situations were coded 0; all crises with a severity value of less than or equal to 5.5 were coded 1, and all crises with a severity value of more than 5.5 were coded 2. Because crisis severity levels measure the level of international systemic instability and not necessarily the militarized dispute itself, there is no reason to exclude U.S. actions from the crisis severity measures.

The rallies, prior presidential popularity levels, and consumer confidence data associated with the varying crisis levels are reported in Table 3. As indicated, crisis severity does seem to have an effect on the size of the rallies elicited by a militarized dispute. Although crisis severity levels of 1 are associated with only minor, statisti-

TABLE 3
Rally Effect and Crisis Severity Level

	n	Rally (%)
0	148	-0.54
1	26	1.32
2	19	3.69

cally insignificant rallies, more severe crises of level 2 produce rallies of almost four percentage points on average. Prior popularity and economic conditions also seem to vary appreciably by crisis severity level. Not surprisingly, crisis severity is strongly correlated with *New York Times* coverage; this relationship is significant at the .01 confidence level.

More important, comparing the average rally for militarized disputes during noncrisis situations (0) and those occurring during periods of international crisis (1 or 2) are quite different, -0.54 versus 2.32, respectively ($p < .009$). The null hypothesis, that there is no difference between rallies occurring during periods of international crisis and those occurring in the absence of such crises, can therefore be safely rejected. The American public is more likely to rally behind the president when the United States becomes involved in a militarized interstate dispute during a period of international crisis. It is important to emphasize, however, that there is little political significance to a 3.5 percentage point increase in popularity.

These findings suggest that a number of factors are important in determining whether a president is likely to enjoy a rally in response to a militarized dispute. When a conflict escalates to an actual use of force or war, receives prominent coverage in *The New York Times*, or occurs during an international crisis, the size of the rally in the public's support for the president increases. Even when all these conditions are present, however, the effect is small—less than a 4 percentage point gain—and it is exceeded by its standard deviation (Table 4).

Table 4 also indicates that there is a modest rally, 1.20% on average, in the president's standing during conflicts that escalate into a use of force or war in which the United States was both an originator and a revisionist. However, a more significant effect of 3.56% on average is associated with prominently reported, serious conflicts in which the United States was an initiator and in which the incident took place during a period of systemic instability and crisis. Similarly, the rally increases when the use of force is prominently reported in the *New York Times*, the United States was an initiator, and higher levels of hostility were realized; under these conditions, the gain for the president is just under 4 percentage points on average.

REGRESSION ANALYSES

Our results thus far suggest that rallies are associated with prominent media coverage, higher levels of economic confidence among the electorate, and the escalation of a

TABLE 4
Rally Effect, Media Coverage, United States As Initiator, and Level of Hostilities

	n	M (%)	SD (%)	Minimum (%)	Maximum (%)
Use of force or war, United States as originator and revisionist	30	1.20	5.20	-16	11
Use of force or war, United States as side A and originator, front page of the <i>New York Times</i> (NYT)	22	0.86	4.64	-8	11
Use of force or war, United States as side A and originator, front page of NYT, ORDSEVER = 2	16	3.56	7.25	-8	18
Use of force or war, United States as side A and revisionist, front page of NYT	10	3.50	4.62	-4	11
Use of force or war, United States as Originator and revisionist, front page of NYT	15	3.67	4.29	-4	11

NOTE: For definition of ORDSEVER, see the Regression Analyses section.

dispute from lower levels of conflict to actual uses of force including war. In this section, we consider the independent effect of these variables and others by conducting a series of regression analyses.

Rallies are presumably associated with prominent coverage in the *New York Times* because those international crises that most clearly affect the well-being and interests of the nation as a whole—those crises most likely to elicit a rally, in other words—are also most likely to receive heightened coverage by the nation's media. In addition, the *New York Times* is more likely to feature prominently a militarized dispute when alerted to do so by the White House through presidential statements, press releases, televised addresses from the Oval Office, and other means by which administrations may garner publicity. Previous research (Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995) indicates that prominent coverage in and of itself adds to the size of the rally effect, even holding constant the severity of the international situation and the level of attention drawn to unfolding events by the administration and the political opposition. To assess the importance of the media's coverage, we created the variable NYT, with a value of 1 if a dispute was covered on the front page of the *New York Times* and 0 if it was not.

If prominent media coverage of a militarized dispute is associated with greater rally effects, an administration might attempt to influence the media by drawing attention to its actions at these times through statements by White House or administration officials or even the president himself (Brody 1984; Brody and Shapiro 1989; Russett 1990a; Van Belle 1992; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995). To capture this phenomenon, the variable STATEMNT was created, taking a value of 2 if the president himself made a statement that was reported on the front page of the *New York Times* regarding a militarized use of force, 1 if a White House or administration official made such a statement, and 0 if no such statement was prominently reported.

According to Brody (1984, 1991) and others (Brody and Shapiro 1989; Russett 1990a; Van Belle 1992; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995), public support for the president in response to rally events should be more likely when the president's political opponents express support for the administration during a crisis. Because foreign crises often develop quickly and the White House has greater access to relevant information, prominent members of the party opposing the president may be unwilling to express displeasure with the president's actions for fear of appearing ill-informed or unpatriotic. Given such constraints, the president's political opponents may be more likely to remain silent or even make statements supporting the administration's policies. Rallies would be more likely in such cases, because those citizens with a predisposition to oppose the president would receive from political elites with whom they identify implicit or explicit cues supportive of the administration during a militarized dispute (Brody and Shapiro 1989; Brody 1991, 66-67; Jordan and Page 1992; Zaller 1992). When political elites oppose the president, however, the public receives conflicting messages and alternative interpretations of the situation and may feel free to withhold support, thereby dampening any potential rally.

Considerable research has recognized the influence that bipartisan support for the president during an international dispute may have on the size of any resultant rally. To reassess this influence, the variable BIPART was created; it takes a value of 1 when the party in opposition made supportive statements regarding the president and his actions and these were reported on the front page of the *New York Times*, -1 when the opposition was critical, and 0 when its support was mixed or when no such statements were reported. Of the 193 MIDs considered, the opposition party took a public and supportive stance in 13% of the cases (25) and a public and critical stance in only 4.7% of the cases (9). In 82.4% of the cases considered, the reactions of the opposition to the president's actions were either mixed or not reported.³

Mueller (1970), Ostrom and Job (1986), Brody (1991), and Wittkopf (1994) have each noted that the public is less supportive of presidents and uses of force that occur when the United States is already engaged in a major war, perhaps because the costs of such conflicts are more evident or out of a concern that the nation might overextend itself. We capture the effects of ongoing wars and postwar disillusionment with an indicator variable. WAR takes a value of 1 if force was used during World War II (December 1941 to August 1945), the Korean War (June 1950 to July 1953), the Vietnam War (August 1964 to December 1972), or the Persian Gulf War (January 1991 to March 1991).⁴ In the absence of such a major conflict, WAR takes a value of 0.

3. Mueller (1970) and Jentleson (1992) found that the public tends to be disillusioned and more wary of foreign military action for a period of time following major wars. We initially included in our analyses a variable designed to capture this effect. It took a value of 1 for a period of time following a war equal to the length of the war itself (Ostrom and Job 1986), but it did not prove statistically significant. In short, we found little evidence of the so-called Vietnam syndrome.

4. For our purposes, World War II is considered to have begun for the United States with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and to have ended following the surrender of Japan in August 1945. The Korean War began in June 1950 and ended with the armistice of July 1953. As noted previously, for our purposes the Vietnam War is considered to have begun with the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August 1964 and to have ended in December 1972, the date used by Lian and Oneal (1993). The Persian Gulf War lasted just 42 days, beginning with the initiation of the air war against Iraq in January 1991 and ending in March 1991.

Edwards (1990) noted that the effect of a use of force on presidential popularity is likely to be inversely related to the incumbent's prevailing public approval levels. Relatively popular presidents do not have the same opportunities for improvement as do unpopular presidents, whereas unpopular presidents do not have as far to fall in terms of public approval. Based on this assumption, a control variable for prior approval levels (PRIORPOP) is introduced, taking a value equal to the president's approval level prior to the militarized dispute, measured in percentages.

The prevailing scholarly evidence on the public's response to the economy suggests that individuals attribute their personal economic success and failure to their own initiative while holding the president responsible for the overall health of the economy (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979). Therefore, BUSCON12, consumer expectations as to business conditions over the 12 months to come, was chosen to indicate this influence in our regression analyses. It captures most accurately those aspects of the economy that the public considers the responsibility of the president.

Some research has suggested that presidents are more likely to become involved in militarized interstate disputes as a means of influencing impending elections (Ostrom and Job 1986; James and Oneal 1991; Hess and Orphanides 1995; Schultz 1995; Wang 1996), whereas others have not found such a relationship (Stoll 1984; Gaubatz 1991, 1999; Meernik 1994; Meernik and Waterman 1996; Leeds and Davis 1997; Gelpi 1997; Yoon 1997; Gowa 1998, 1999; DeRouen 2000). The variable NEXTELEC was employed to assess the influence of the electoral calendar on the rally effect, equal to the number of months from a rally event to the next presidential election. Elections in which the president is not running for reelection are included, based on the assumption that the incumbent would have an interest in seeing that the nominee of his political party would win the election.

The variable HOSTLVL, the hostility level to which the dispute escalates, is based on the MID data set and reports the highest action realized by the participants in the dispute. Disputes in which there was no militarized action were coded as 1, threats of force were coded as 2, displays of force were coded as 3, uses of force were coded as 4, and wars were coded as 5.

Additionally, the variable ORDSEVER, an index indicating the systemic instability inherent in the crisis, was introduced. ORDSEVER, as developed by Brecher and James (1986) is a function of five constituent variables inherent in a crisis: number of crisis actors, geostrategic importance of the site of the crisis, heterogeneity of the participants, range of issues under dispute, and level of violence employed in the crisis. As such, ORDSEVER is distinct from HOSTLVL, which measures only the hostility level of the crisis in question, not the potential for systemic instability associated with a crisis. Regressing HOSTLVL on ORDSEVER yields an R^2 of .015, indicating that the two variables are not collinear.

Brecher, Wilkenfeld, and Moser (1988, 128-33) calculated the severity index for those international crises occurring between 1928 and 1979. Lian and Oneal (1993) extended the index through 1984, omitted great power involvement as a criterion, and replaced the ICB severity index with an ordinal variable. All noncrisis situations were coded as 0, all crises with a severity value of less than or equal to 5.5 were coded as 1,

and all crises with a severity value of more than 5.5 were coded as 2. For the purposes of this research, Lian and Oneal's treatment of the severity index variable was replicated and extended through 1992.

Finally, the evidence suggests that the public will respond more favorably to a use of force if the United States is on the side instigating military action, in which case the president will have had an opportunity to prepare the public for this turn of events. Furthermore, it is expected that when the United States has acted as a revisionist to effect some change in the international or regional geopolitical environment, the public will be more likely to rally behind the commander-in-chief, especially if the militarized dispute receives prominent media attention and the White House aggressively "sells" the operation. Because rally effects were found to be strongest for those disputes in which the United States was both an originator and a revisionist, we created the variable REVORG, which takes a value of 1 if the United States is coded as both an originator and a revisionist in the original MID data set.

The following equation can now be estimated:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{RALLY} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{BUSCON12} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{NYT} + \beta_3 \cdot \text{REVORG} + \beta_4 \cdot \text{WAR} + \\ & \beta_5 \cdot \text{ORDSEVER} + \beta_6 \cdot \text{NEXTELEC} + \beta_7 \cdot \text{STATEMENT} + \\ & \beta_8 \cdot \text{PRIORPOP} + \beta_7 \cdot \text{HOSTLVL} + \beta_8 \cdot \text{BIPART}. \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

The results of estimating the coefficients in equation 1 are presented in the first column of Table 5. Most of the variables have the expected sign, with the notable exception of our indicator of the media's coverage (NYT), and most are statistically significant or reasonably close, with the exception of the hostility level of the dispute (HOSTLVL) and the presence of bipartisan support (BIPART). The adjusted R^2 is .260. The negative sign of our indicator of the coverage of events by the *New York Times* is surprising, given past research and our findings in the previous section. Of course, the media's reporting is influenced by the severity of an international situation as well as by the statements of administration officials and the opposition party (Oneal and Bryan 1995). The correlation between the *New York Times*' coverage and the existence of a presidential statement (STATEMNT) alone is .72. The size of a rally is significantly related to the means by which the White House presents and interprets the militarized dispute to the media and the public.⁵

Given the collinearity between presidential statements and media coverage, we want to ensure the stability of the other coefficients in our model of the rally by dropping NYT from the equation, yielding equation 2:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{RALLY} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{BUSCON12} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{STATEMNT} + \beta_3 \cdot \text{REVORG} + \beta_4 \cdot \text{WAR} + \\ & \beta_5 \cdot \text{NEXTELEC} + \beta_6 \cdot \text{HOSTLVL} + \beta_7 \cdot \text{PRIORPOP} + \beta_8 \cdot \text{BIPART} + \\ & \beta_9 \cdot \text{ORDSEVER}. \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

5. We also assessed the effect on the rally of the outcome of a militarized dispute, but, like much previous research, we found no significant relation. In any event, more than 88% of the disputes under consideration ended in stalemates, whereas 4 of the 16 cases coded as victories are associated with World War II. Despite its power, unequivocal U.S. victories are not common.

TABLE 5
Regression Coefficients

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Equation 1</i>	<i>Equation 2</i>	<i>Equation 3</i>
BUSCON12			
β	0.074	0.062	
<i>SE B</i>	0.020	0.019	
<i>Sig t</i>	>.000***	.001***	
NYT			
β	-2.391		
<i>SE B</i>	1.057		
<i>Sig t</i>	.025**		
REVORG			
β	1.460	1.536	1.257
<i>SE B</i>	0.787	0.798	0.744
<i>Sig t</i>	0.066*	0.056*	0.093*
WAR			
β	-2.093	-2.718	-0.765
<i>SE B</i>	1.042	1.055	0.826
<i>Sig t</i>	.006***	.011**	.356
ORDSEVER			
β	1.193	0.948	1.201
<i>SE B</i>	0.628	0.628	0.595
<i>Sig t</i>	.060*	.134	.045**
HOSTLVL			
β	0.665	0.825	1.251
<i>SE B</i>	0.644	0.651	0.592
<i>Sig t</i>	.304	.207	.036**
NEXTELEC			
β	0.117	0.099	0.038
<i>SE B</i>	0.036	0.035	0.027
<i>Sig t</i>	.001***	.006***	.168
STATEMNT			
β	2.591	1.428	2.322
<i>SE B</i>	0.759	0.568	0.716
<i>Sig t</i>	>.000***	.013**	.001***
PRIORPOP			
β	-0.247	-0.232	-0.083
<i>SE B</i>	0.053	0.053	0.028
<i>Sig t</i>	>.000***	>.000***	.003***
BIPART			
β	0.988	1.168	1.174
<i>SE B</i>	0.932	0.943	0.882
<i>Sig t</i>	.291	.218	.185
CONSTANT			
β	-0.653	-0.947	-2.244
<i>SE B</i>	2.738	2.779	2.567
<i>Sig t</i>	.812	.734	.383
R^2	.314	.286	.238
Adjusted R^2	.260	.236	.194

NOTE: $N = 167$. For definitions of independent variables, see the Regression Analyses section.

* $p \leq .10$. ** $p \leq .05$. *** $p \leq .01$.

The results of estimating the coefficients of equation 2 are reported in the second column of Table 5. All of the variables are statistically significant except for hostility levels, bipartisan support, and crisis severity, although these, too, are reasonably close. Equation 2 is only slightly less successful in accounting for the variations in presidential approval due to the rally effect, with an adjusted R^2 of .24.

These results indicate that a president cannot count on a politically significant rally in public opinion in response to a militarized interstate dispute. According to equation 2, if elections (NEXTELEC) are 24 months away, prior popularity (PRIORPOP) and business conditions (BUSCON12) are set at their means (56.5 and 120.5, respectively), and all other variables are set at 0, a president who uses military force (HOSTLVL = 3) can expect to lose 1 to 2 percentage points in terms of public approval [$RALLY = -0.95 + 0.062(120.5) - 0.23(56.5) + 0.82(3) + 24(0.099) = -1.64$]. However, the presence of a number of contextual factors may make the expected rally smaller or greater. When the president personally makes a statement regarding the use of force, the size of the rally increases by 1.4 points; when he receives bipartisan support during a militarized dispute, the size of the rally increases by an additional 1%; and disputes in which the United States plays the role of both originator and revisionist boost rallies by more than 1.5 percentage points. It is not difficult, therefore, to imagine the means by which militarized disputes that take place during international crises elicit rallies: such disputes are often accompanied by presidential statements and bipartisan support (as well as more prominent and favorable media coverage).

The size and significance of the values for presidential statements and bipartisan support suggest that the public's response to a rally event is affected considerably by how political elites present and interpret the incident in the media. The positive coefficients for business conditions and the proximity of elections indicate that the sizes of rallies increase slightly as consumer confidence and the months until the next presidential election increase. Militarized interstate disputes occurring while the United States is involved in a war, on the other hand, lower the expected size of a rally by 2.7 points. Not surprisingly, the size of the rally effect declines as prior presidential popularity increases: popular presidents have much less room for improvement in terms of public approval than do unpopular presidents.

It is important to note that presidential popularity prior to a dispute and the public's assessment of business conditions are positively correlated, and their coefficients in equation 2 have opposite signs. This may overstate the significance of prior popularity in accounting for the size of rallies. As a rule, if public confidence in business conditions declines, presidential approval will drop as well. To ensure the stability of our results, we omit the variable identifying business conditions, assuming that the public's perceptions regarding this important condition are reflected in its overall assessment of the president's performance, producing the following equation:

$$RALLY = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot ORDSEVER + \beta_2 \cdot STATEMNT + \beta_3 \cdot REVORG + \beta_4 \cdot WAR + \beta_5 \cdot NEXTELEC + \beta_6 \cdot HOSTLVL + \beta_7 \cdot PRIORPOP + \beta_8 \cdot BIPART. \quad (3)$$

These results are reported in the third column of Table 5. Removing business conditions from the equation yields a coefficient for prior popularity of $-.083$, a more accu-

rate assessment of the net effect of prior approval on the size of rallies. The other variables in equation 3 change modestly in the absence of BUSCON12, although the negative effect of a war on the size of a rally declines from -2.7 to -0.8 , the effects of presidential statements are greater, and the measure of the hostility level achieves statistical significance.

Again we can use these findings to estimate the rallies that might be expected given particular scenarios. For example, a president with a public approval rating of 50% during a period of high international systemic instability ($ORDSEVER = 2$) in which the United States is not at war ($WAR = 0$) might consider a militarized dispute to bolster his popularity. If the administration originated a militarized dispute with revisionist objectives ($HOSTLVL = 3$, $REVORG = 1$), accompanied by a statement to the media by the president himself ($STATEMNT = 2$), which was opposed by the opposition party suspicious of the president's motives, the president could expect a rally effect of about 5% [$RALLY = -2.24 + 1.26(1) + 0.76(0) + 1.2(2) + 1.25(3) + 0.04(12) + 2.32(2) - 0.08(50) + 1.17(-1) = 4.95$]. The effect would decline slightly as the election approached.

CONCLUSION

The large rally effects found by Mueller (1970, 1973), Lee (1977), Kernell (1978), and other early researchers seem to have been influenced by the methodology used to select the cases studied. In considering only high-profile uses of force prominently reported in the media, it was virtually ensured that sizable rallies would be found. More recent research (Brody 1991; James and Rioux 1998; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995) employing independently selected data sets has found greater variability in the response of the public to the president's handling of important international events. Much of the difference between more recent research and early studies concerns the important role played by presidential statements, bipartisan support, and media coverage. Even under the most favorable circumstances, a president cannot expect a rally greater than 5 percentage points, with considerable uncertainty regarding this figure. Given the risks involved, this seems insufficiently large to motivate presidents to act irresponsibly.⁶

If the patriotism explanation for the rally effect (Brody 1991) is correct, that the nation rallies behind its chief executive during international crises with a reflexive surge of patriotism and support, we ought to find evidence of this whenever the nation becomes embroiled in a militarized interstate dispute. This clearly is not the case. Although there are many examples of rallies in response to individual rally events, a threat, demonstration, or use of force does not routinely result in a boost in the president's popularity. When an independently selected collection of rally events is employed to ensure against selection bias, rallies are minor and within the margin of

6. However, the relatively small size of rallies may, in fact, prove significant in the case of a close presidential election, in which a 5-point boost in the popularity of the incumbent would likely entail a 5-point decline on the part of his challenger. It is notable that in 9 of the 14 elections since 1948, the victor defeated his opponent by less than 10% of the popular vote.

error expected in polling a limited sample of respondents. Clearly, the rally effect is neither as sizable nor as certain as anecdotal accounts would contend; of the 167 rally events for which public opinion data on the president were available, only 65 resulted in increases in the president's approval ratings.

If the public unites behind the president during an international crisis due to a heightened sense of patriotism, it stands to reason that those disputes that most seriously threaten the nation's economic, political, and strategic interests would appeal more strongly to patriotic concerns and therefore be most conducive to the creation of a rally. However, higher levels of hostility have only limited effects on the size of the rally in presidential popularity, although militarized disputes that occur during a time of crisis and international instability do yield rallies of about 3.5 percentage points on average. Similarly, militarized disputes while the United States was involved in an ongoing war resulted in decreases in presidential approval, perhaps indicating war weariness or public fears that the nation might overextend itself. The failure of militarized disputes with cold war rivals to yield significant rallies casts further doubt on the patriotism hypothesis.

Although a president cannot count on a rally following a militarized interstate dispute, our research indicates that he does have a number of tools at his disposal with which to influence the public's response. The public does not appear to automatically respond favorably to presidential uses of force, as the patriotism explanation would maintain, or even to publicity regarding such events. However, when the White House makes an effort to draw attention to a dispute, the likelihood of a rally increases, suggesting that the public is responding to the cues it receives from important political leaders such as the president and prominent members of the opposition party. For example, if the president personally makes a statement regarding the situation—thereby making it more likely that the conflict will be prominently featured on the front page of the *New York Times*—he can expect to increase the rally by about 2%.

Based on these findings, the patriotism explanation for the rally effect does not appear to be well founded. When the public rallies behind the president during militarized disputes, it appears to be responding less out of an automatic sense of patriotism and more in response to the information provided by opinion leaders through the media. Thus, the opinion leadership model of the rally effect (Brody 1991; Zaller 1992) seems to more accurately account for the rally phenomenon. Indeed, what appears to matter most in regard to the size of the rally effect is not the nature of the dispute itself but how effectively the White House manages the presentation of the dispute through presidential statements, prominent media coverage, and the garnering of bipartisan support. The public does not rally in response to crises in and of themselves, but rather to the president's handling and presentation of events, suggesting that public relations skills are increasingly indispensable resources for a successful American president in managing public perceptions of international conflicts involving the United States.

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