DRONES AND INDEXING: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PRINT MEDIA
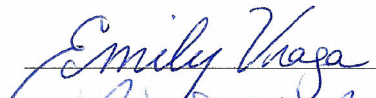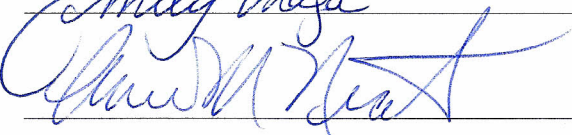COVERAGE OF U.S. DRONE STRIKES

by

Peter A. Susko
A Thesis
Submitted to the
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Committee:

_____  Thesis

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_____

_____  Department Chair

_____  Dean, College of Humanities and Social
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Fairfax, VA

Drones and Indexing: A Content Analysis of Print Media Coverage of U.S. Drone Strikes

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

by

Peter A. Susko
Bachelor of Arts
University of Mary Washington, 2014

Director: Chris Clarke, Professor
Department of Communication for Degree

Summer Semester 2014
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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# ABSTRACT

DRONES AND INDEXING: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PRINT MEDIA
COVERAGE OF U.S. DRONE STRIKES

Peter A. Susko

George Mason University, 2014

Thesis Director: Dr. Chris Clarke

This study conducted a content analysis of print media coverage to explore what sources
journalist cited on articles pertaining to U.S. drone strikes. Drone strikes have increased
rapidly during the Obama administration and public opinion polls indicate a lack of
opposition to this trend. The goal of this study was to explore pro/con frames and explain
for the lack of a con frame in the status quo. The content analysis looked at what sources
journalists would use in articles on drones. The indexing model, which predicts
journalists will give elite officials a privileged voice when there is elite consensus, was
the guiding theory of this study. The content analysis looked at both conservative and
liberal newspapers, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. Results
from both newspapers showed journalists quoted Obama administration and government
officials the majority of the time. The vast majority of articles included the benefits of
drone strikes and ignored con frames, such as the deaths of innocent people. This study

provided a new and relevant application of indexing. Furthermore, this study looked at

whether conservative or liberal newspapers had a noticeable effect on indexing.

# INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2013, *Foreign Affairs* published two competing articles on the effectiveness of United States drone strikes. Daniel Byman, a Professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University and a Senior Fellow in the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings Institution, wrote the article on "Why Drones Work." Audrey Kurth Cronin, a Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University, wrote the opposing article "Why Drones Fail." Byman (2013) argued there were multiple reasons for continued drone use: drones eliminate key leaders in Al Qaeda and the Taliban, they deny sanctuary to potential terrorists, there is little financial cost, and there are fewer civilian casualties than many of the alternative methods. Cronin (2013) provided counter arguments on the effectiveness of drones: drones kill leaders but increase the levels of recruitment from the casualties of strikes, they alienate U.S. allies who disagreement with the legal grounds for their use, and they eliminate the potential for gathering necessary intelligence to stop the next terrorist attack.

These two articles are useful to explain the basic arguments on both sides of the debate on drones. However, this spirited debate has not been reflected in public opinion. Currently, there is a large amount of public support for drone strikes. A recent 2013 *New York Times* poll showed that over 70% of the American public favor government use of drones (2013). Drone policy has received consistent support. A 2013 February poll

showed 56% of Americans supported drones strikes (Drake, 2013).  A 2013 March

Gallup poll conducted after the 13-hour filibuster by Sen. Rand Paul on drone strikes

found 65% of Americans supported U.S. drone strikes (2013). The polling evidence is

surprising, as the opposition piece by Cronin has been argued by multiple scholars

(Flannes, Hudson, & Owens, 2013; Brown, 2013).

Many forecasts predict continued reliance on drone strikes. The United States'

defensive strategy is entering a new period. According to Brimley (2013), the vice

president and director of studies at the Center for a New American Security, the United

States is dealing with multiple geopolitical issues: a rising and more assertive China

investing resources into its military, unrest throughout the Middle East and Northern

Africa, and a North American energy boom that will significantly reshape global energy

flows. Budget sequestration is forcing the military to put more emphasis on warfighting

dominated by unmanned and autonomous robotic systems (Brimley, 2013). This position

is fully supported by the Obama administration, which has used over 400 drone strikes

since 2008 (Cronin, 2013). This debate warrants attention to how news media covers the

issue of drone strikes, specifically whether there is a positive or negative portrayal of

drones. A exploration of news coverage on this issue is important, as news sources are

how the majority of people getting their information on the government (Hauser, 1997).

Without a reliable and trustworthy news service, the ability to curb and limit corruption

of the government would be severely diminished.

Using a content analysis, this study conducts exploratory research on domestic

newspapers coverage of drone strikes. The goal of the study is to discover whether

divergent views are expressed on drones, or if the majority of articles merely reference

Obama administration's opinion on the program. This study used a content analysis of

major American newspapers (such as the *New York Times, Wall Street Journal* and

*Washington Post*) using the databases LexisNexis and Factiva.

Indexing was the guiding theory for this study. Indexing predicts a news story will

be constrained by a standard journalistic practice of tying frames to the range of sources

within official decision circles (Bennett, 2006). Indexing suggests views on drones

counter to those of the Obama administration will not be heard equally or will be

excluded in the media. This study looked at both conservative and liberal newspapers to

see if partisanship has an effect on how indexing predicts journalists will act.

This study has significant implications for news coverage on foreign affairs, as it

potentially shows print media does not provide neutral reporting of events. In a world

with many controversial political issues, the results of this study call into question the

idea of the print media as the "watchdogs" of democracy (Hauser, 1997). The results of

this content analysis also provide a recent and relevant case study of the indexing model.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Indexing**

Indexing was developed by W. Lance Bennett (1990), a professor at the University of Washington, and states "mass media news professionals, from the boardroom to the beat, tend to 'index' the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic" (p. 106). The goal of indexing is to explain the behavior, or patterns, of leading press organizations, such as prestigious national newspapers, wire services, television networks, and news magazines (1990). Indexing is typically applied to coverage of military decisions, foreign affairs, trade, and macroeconomic policy (1990).

The theory was derived from two previous paradigms on the relationship among the state, press, and publics: the liberal pluralist paradigm and the critical paradigm (Bennett and Lawrence, 1995). The liberal pluralist paradigm says the mass media is a conduit between which the government and various publics interact with one another (1995). The liberal paradigm touts the role of the media as a key inter-mediator between the two groups, and thus gives the media great independence. On the other hand, the critical paradigm sees the news as being dominated by elites. Indexing is concerned with

addressing both paradigms by explaining the instances in which media is a conduit between the state and public as well as the role elites play in this process.

There are two major components of indexing theory. First, there are rules or principles journalists tend to use when representing politics in the news. Second, is the premise that people who have their hands on the levers of power—elites—have a privileged voice in the news. In journalism, it is accepted as common norm that official sources dominate the coverage of political stories (Bennett, 1996). The indexing model suggests news analysis will "narrow or widen depending on how officials respond to the story" (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2006). Furthermore, if officials present a unified front, other views or voices may be excluded. It is only when serious debate breaks out that opposing views will be considered. Overall, indexing is concerned with the trend of not showing, or giving equal credence to, the opposite side of an issue (Bennett, 1996).

**Empirical studies of indexing.** Bennett (1990) first tested the indexing model by conducting a content analysis of the *New York Times* coverage of U.S. funding for Nicaraguan contras. The author found that "despite a lot of media coverage on the Iran-contra scandal, the media seemed content to allow the government to investigate itself, assess the importance of the problem, define the problem, and pronounce the denouncement of the story" (1990). Furthermore, the results showed of the 889 voice opinions in the news, Bennett found only 15% of the voices were from non-governmental domestic voices (1990).

In a more recent article, Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2006) applied the indexing model to the interrogation program at Abu Ghraib. The study conducted a content analysis of the media portrayal of the event. The authors found the media lacked opposing side views and overwhelming used positive administration wording of the event (2006). The *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Sun-Times*, for example, used terms such as "abuse" and "mistreatment" (2006). This was problematic as there was clear evidence of the alternative story of "torture" (2006). Both the Nicaragua and Abu Ghraib examples show the media gives officials a privileged voice in the news that often comes at the expense of views that challenge government policy.

Researchers have also attempted to apply indexing to domestic topics. At times, journalists have gone against elite framing of events that trigger powerful images. For example, Lawrence (1996) conducted a content analysis of media coverage of police brutality in Los Angeles over a six-year period, which culminated in the Los Angeles riots. The first was a content analysis of the *Los Angeles Times* coverage of the police brutality after the Rodney King beatings, where Mr. King was almost beaten to death by a group of white police officers (1996). The second content analysis was taken from the same newspaper and looked at coverage after Officer Don Jackson was beaten. Officer Jackson invited a crew from an NBC affiliate to film him as he drove around Los Angeles in a rental car and in normal clothes, to show the racial discrimination white cops showed (1996). Both of the beatings were filmed and distributed nationally (1996). The results of the content analysis showed that opinion and other views were also shown in articles discussing the L.A. riots, such as the high level of racial discrimination in the Los

Angeles police department. This study provided the polar opposite result indexing model would suggest, since in both beatings officials supported the police department initially (1996). One official went as far as to say the King beating was an "aberration" (1996). The study, however, provided a lesson on indexing; the theory does not apply to accidents or iconic moments (1996). When the event is spontaneous and unplanned by officials, then it has the ability to capture the attention of the media and allows for counter frames to surface.

**Implications**. Overall, as a framework for understanding press-government relationships, indexing speaks to the larger role of media in a democratic setting. When the media allows for the state to frame an issue, the press is not fulfilling the "watchdog" role that many members of the public believe is the duty of the media (Bennett, 1990). The model also has a practical implication for the media. If media discourse is constrained to exclude alternative views of a topic, the public will remain poorly informed and there will be an increased chance of the public being manipulated (Althaus, Edy, Entman, & Phalen, 1996).

**Framing**

One of the underlying theories to indexing is framing. According to Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in the news can have an influence on how it is perceived by various publics (p. 11). The goal of framing is assemble a narrative that highlights connections to promote a particular identity (Entman, 2007). Framing allows for the sender of a message to persuade its intended audience through the use of persuasive symbols (Lewis & Reese, 2009).

Framing is effective in altering audience members' interpretations and preferences through priming. Priming occurs when an issue is strategically used in repetition (McCombs, 2005). The media uses this strategic repetition, or priming, in order to show the importance of an issue. The salience, or the frequency in which the frame(s) are mentioned is crucial in framing (Hangli, 2011). Framing, therefore, is more effective when a singular interpretation is used to describe an event.

Framing and the agenda setting process are often conflated as the same theory, with framing being the "second level" of agenda setting. However, the two are distinct in their intentions. The difference between the two is agenda setting looks at *whether* we think about an issue, while framing is concerned with *how* we think about an issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). While agenda setting is concerned with the level of an issue, framing looks at the various aspects of the same issue (Hangli, 2011).

**Connection to indexing**

The indexing model is concerned with how frames are used by journalists. Specifically, indexing predicts that the frames of elite officials will be used more often, or at the exclusion, of competing frames. The focus on news sources is important here, as journalism acts as a transportation vehicle for the government to define frames to various publics (D'Angelo, 2012). The news media is then used as a tool for public officials and other elites to exercise political influence over various audiences (Lewis & Reese, 2009). Indexing looks at the trend of frames that are used and shows journalists will give privileged voice to frames from government officials (Bennett, 1990).

Research by Lewis and Reese (2009) provides supporting evidence to the indexing model. The researchers interviewed reporters from the *USA Today* on their use of the term "War on Terror" in their articles. The authors found the interviewees cited words of public officials, namely President Bush, when it came to the War on Terror. Many of the reporters did not agree with the framing of the War on Terror, but used it because that is what the administration used. This study shows that reporters will use the president's frame and push it into public discourse.

**Application to drone strikes**

News framing is concerned with how news messages are processed by recipients (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Due to the singular nature of framing, as framing is often concerned with how one issue is described, there is competition for what part of that issue will be focused on. A frame occurs when one narrative is used to provide an interpretation of an issue and this comes at the exclusion of other frames. Entman (2003) defines these other frames as counter frames, which when used "puts together a complete alternative narrative, a tale of a problem, cause, remedy, and moral judgment possessing as much magnitude and resonance as the administration's" (p. 417).

There are four functions of framing: problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgment, and remedy promotion. (Entman, 2007). The indexing model predicts that journalists will use the frames of government officials over the frames of other competing sources.

H1: The media frames drones positively.

Currently, the Obama administration and members of Congress have consensus on the use of drone strikes (Ismael, 2013). According to the indexing model, journalists will give privileged voice to officials on drone strikes, which are pro-use in the status quo. The function of framing in terms of drone strikes is to provide moral judgment on American use of drones. The results of this content analysis should then show articles providing support for the continued use of drones and the effective part they play in the War on Terror. A strong presence of articles speaking to the victims of drone strikes, or counter frames, would run contrary to the indexing model. Due to the various public opinion polls and elite consensus that currently exists, however, this content analysis will find the media frames drone strikes positively.

**Political Views**. Moreover, to date indexing has not explicitly looked at potential differences in coverage between liberal and conservative news media sources. In their case study on Abu Ghraib, Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2006) gathered data from the *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*, newspapers many could arguably be considered liberal. If the *Wall Street Journal*, for instance, showed the negative portrayals of drone strikes, it would provide analysis that newspapers do challenge administration sources. The newspapers were labeled liberal or conservative based on their ideological leaning for the 2012 presidential election (Lewison, 2012; Peters & Woolley, 2012). This content analysis is unique, in that it will provide evidence if partisanship overwhelms the journalistic tendency to quote government sources. The Abu Ghraib example, where a liberal newspaper used administration framing while a conservative was president presents the following hypothesis on the conservative/liberal distinction on indexing:

H2: Conservative and liberal media frames drones positively.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study conducted a content analysis of major print newspapers to explore what sources journalists cite on U.S. drone policy. The content analysis used the LexisNexis Academic and Factiva databases to gather articles. The units of analysis were the individual news articles. The sample size came from major newspapers within the United States. Specifically, the *New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, and USA Today*. These five newspapers are also in the top 10 U.S. newspapers based on the average weekday circulation (Associated Press, 2013). Articles were taken from January 1st of 2009 to December 31st of 2013. This timeline covered the entire Obama administration to date. As previously stated, the Obama administration has used drone strikes far more than any previous administration, which makes the inclusion of the entire Obama years necessary to gauge media response to drone strikes (Bergen & Braun, 2012). "Drones or (unmanned vehicles!)" was the specific search term used in the content analysis.

The population of articles pertaining to drones was 2,716. The number of articles from the *New York Times* was 1,265, 46 from the *Los Angeles Times*, 123 from *USA Today*, and 1,040 from the *Washington Post*. The number of articles from the *Wall Street Journal* was 242. In order to properly evaluate the difference between conservative and liberal newspapers, the sample included 125 articles from both groups to a total of 250.

Articles that were letters to the editor or passing references and did not clearly refer to the topic were excluded.

**Coding Categories**

**Voice**. Previous content analyses on indexing have looked to the voices referenced in articles – specifically, cites sources (Bennett, 1990). For this study, voices include but are not limited to an Obama official, a Pakistani or Yemeni official, or a family member who lost a relative in a drone strike. Bennett (1990) categorized the different voices that are used by journalists: editorial and op-ed, administration source, congressional course, judicial source, popular (non-governmental source), and foreign opinion from U.S. allies (1990). An interest group or poll is included in the popular voice category (1990). The codebook in this content analysis adopted this format and included an administration source, an official source, foreign opinion source, popular (non-governmental source), and non-popular (non-governmental source). An administration source would include information quoting the Obama administration, such as the Secretary of Defense of the Secretary of State. An official source would include government officials not directly tied to the Obama administration. These sources would typically quoted U.S. Senators or military officials. The following article by Coker, Entous, and Barnes (2011), from the *Wall Street Journal*, is an example of an article quoting an official voice:

> The U.S. launched a drone strike in Yemen on Thursday aimed at killing Anwar
> al-Awlaki, the American-born radical cleric suspected of orchestrating terrorist
> attacks in the U.S, but he evaded the missile, Yemeni and U.S. officials said. The

attack came days after a U.S. Navy SEALs team killed Osama bin Laden at a

compound in Pakistan. Had Thursday's strike succeeded, the U.S. would have

killed two of the most-wanted terrorists in a week.

Foreign opinion sources included quotes from government officials from other

countries and other media outlets, such as *Reuters* and *Al-Jazeera*. The above quote could

have also been logged as a foreign opinion source, but the majority of that article

included quotes from government officials. The following example from the Wall Street

Journal shows what a foreign opinion source and U.S. administration source looks like:

U.S. and Pakistani intelligence officials are drawing up a fresh list of terrorist

targets for Predator drone strikes along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, part of a

U.S. review of the drone program, according to officials involved. Pakistani

officials are seeking to broaden the scope of the program to target extremists who

have carried out attacks against Pakistanis, a move they say could win domestic

support. The Obama administration is weighing the effectiveness of the program

against the risk that its unpopularity weakens an important ally (Soloman,

Gorman, & Rosenberg, 2009)

Popular sources include sources do not have power on an issue, but provide

analysis and agree with government positions. Many popular and non-popular sources

come from think tanks—reviewing and providing analysis of government decisions—and

lobby groups, with a stake in drone strikes. Wilson (2011) from the *Washington Post*

provides an example of this quoting the New America Foundation:

… Obama has … significantly expanded the use of drones against al-Qaeda

leaders and foot soldiers. In Pakistan alone, the United States has carried out 227

drone strikes since Obama took office, nearly five times more than Bush

conducted during his eight-year tenure. According to the New America

Foundation, the Obama administration has killed at least 1,100 combatants in

those strikes, also a nearly fivefold increase from the Bush years. Those figures

do not include civilian deaths that resulted from the remotely controlled attacks.

Similarly, non-popular sources include those without power but disagree with

government officials and government decisions. An article written by Pérez (2010) of the

*Wall Street Journal* is a good example of a non-popular source:

Civil-liberties groups on Tuesday filed suit against the Obama administration,

challenging what they say is a requirement that lawyers get government

permission to represent certain terror suspects. The lawsuit serves as a proxy

challenge to what the government calls its "targeted killing" program, which

mostly uses drones operated by the Central Intelligence Agency to hunt down

suspected terror leaders.

**Pro-drone and anti-drone frames**. Two categories were created to group the two

ways drone strikes would be framed. These were called the pro-drone and anti-drone

frames. The pro-drone consisted of positive claims about drones and their use. The pro-

drone frame would paint the picture of drone strikes being necessary to help in the War

on Terrorism. A pro-drone frame would also justify the use of drone strikes against the

potential drawbacks of their use. The anti-drone frame consisted of negative terrorist and

emotion claims. Here, with the anti-drone frame, articles would include the harm drone strikes cause in the War on Terror and also highlight the drawbacks of their use.

Both frames were logged into four categories: no mention, positive, neutral, and negative. The three categories were coder for a presence or absence. The coder logging in as positive would say the article made the issue better, and vice versa with logging in negative. The neutral category would have articles that provide a balance story on both sides of the issue, similar to the two *Foreign Affairs* articles shown at the beginning of this study. The pro-drone category included articles that quoted claims about the effectiveness of drone strikes. The following excerpt from a *Wall Street Journal* article by Rosenberg (2009) shows the side of drone strikes:

> The drones, operated by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, have so far killed 11 of the men on the U.S.'s initial list of the top 20 al Qaeda targets, the official said. The U.S. has since drawn up a fresh list, including the nine holdovers from the first one. Four of the men on the new list are now dead, too. Those who remain are focused on finding sanctuary, possibly at the expense of operations and training, say officials and militants with links to al Qaeda.

> Pro-drone positive frames highlight the benefit of continued use of drone strikes.

A pro-drone frame would also justify against the drawbacks of drone strikes, such as justifying the potential civilian cost of continued drone strikes. The anti-drone frame would provide claims about the negative aspects of drone strikes, such as the backlash from local populations that the U.S. was conducting drone strikes in. An editorial in the *Washington Post* by David Ignatius (2011) provides an example of an anti-drone frame.

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And then there are the drone attacks: In its frustration with Pakistan, the administration sharply increased its Predator strikes over North Waziristan last year. But a Pakistani military official says that in the 118 drone attacks they counted last year, only one al-Qaeda "high-value target" was killed. Meanwhile, the Pakistani public seethed at what it saw as a violation of sovereignty.

The inclusion of words such as "innocent" and "children" are another example of the anti-drone frame. Other words such as "senseless attacks" and "murder" will also be included to signify the emotional and negative frame from drones. For instance, Houreld (2013), a *Reuters* reporter, said that a grandmother and 18 civilian laborers were killed in a drone strike last year. The journalist made the direct choice to include an alternative frame, that drone strikes kill innocent men and women, instead of the government frame (i.e. the drone was needed to combat terrorism). An article by Komblut and Tumulty (2010) from the *Washington Post* is a good example of this:

> While many experts argue that the military should be better than the C.I.A. at carrying out precise lethal operations, the strikes have not always played out that way. In Yemen, for example, Mr. Obama brought the C.I.A. into the drone campaign in 2011 in part because several of the military's strikes went awry, killing women and children and a popular deputy governor.

Previous methodologies on the indexing theory have not been without criticism. A study by Porpora, Nikolaev, and Hagemann (2010) repeated the methodology in the study of Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2006) on the interrogation policy of the United States in Abu Ghraib. The initial study coded single words such as a "few bad apples"

and "torture" (2006). Porpora et al. (2010) found the single word coding did not accurately depict the results from specifically the *Washington Post*. The content analysis in this study has remedied this methodological problem. The coders will not look at single word coding and will instead search for symbolic framing, by looking at the context in which the frame is deployed.

An intercoder reliability test was also conducted to see if both coders reached the same conclusion on whether a frame was pro-drone or anti-drone. Two coders looked at the same 25 articles in the sample size of the content analysis. ReCal was used to conduct the intercoder reliability test. The results of the test were not promising, with a Krippendorf's Alpha of .132 in the pro-drone frame, -0.315 in the anti-drone frame, and .003 in the voice frame. The results of the test were unfortunate, but not surprising, as this was the first content analysis conducted to completion by the researcher.

# RESULTS

The data was first analyzed by looking at the presence or absence of the pro-drone and anti-drone frames. The valence of the articles that were present were then used to describe how many of the articles drones were framed as positive, negative, or neutral. The results were logged looking at all of the newspapers individually and then were grouped into the liberal and conservative categories. Lastly, the sources journalists would quote in articles on drone strikes were also logged.

The number of articles from each paper in the sample size was: *New York Times* n = 62, *Los Angeles Times* n = 4, *USA Today* n = 3, *Wall Street Journal* n = 125, *Washington Post* n = 56. Due to the small sample size of the USA Today and Los Angeles Times, the data from these two papers was omitted from much of the following results, except the Tables, because of the lack of data in the sample size and for brevity purposes. However, the data was included when the papers were grouped into the liberal and conservative categories.

**Pro-Drone**

   **All articles**.

   *Presence*. The pro-drone frame was present in the 96.8% (n = 60) of the *New York Times* articles, 98.2% (n = 55) of the *Washington Post* articles, and 97.6% (n = 122)

of the *Wall Street Journal* articles. The Chi-Square for the presence of the pro-drone

frame was the following: $X^2$ (4) = 29.002, p = .000.

    *Valence*. The positive pro-drone frame was present in 60% (n = 36) of *New York*

*Times* articles, 54.5% (n = 30) of *Washington Post* articles, and 68.9% (n = 84) of *Wall*

*Street Journal* articles. The Chi-Square for the presence of the positive pro-drone frame

was the following: $X^2$ (4) = 5.617, p = .230.

    The neutral pro-drone frame was present in 25% (n = 15) of *New York Times*

articles, 23.6% (n = 13) of *Washington Post* articles, and 19.7% (n = 24) of *Wall Street*

*Journal* articles. The Chi-Square for the presence of the neutral pro-drone frame was the

following: $X^2$ (4) = 2.553, p = .635.

    The negative pro-drone frame was present in 15% (n = 9) of *New York Times*

articles, 21.8% (n = 12) of *Washington Post* articles, and 11.5% (n = 14) of *Wall Street*

*Journal* articles. The Chi-Square for the presence of the negative pro-drone frame was the

following: $X^2$ (4) = 4.145, p = .387.

**Table 1. Pro-Drone All Newspapers Chi-Square Tests**

|  | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 5.617 | 4 | .230 |
| Neutral | 2.553 | 4 | .635 |
| Negative | 4.145 | 4 | .387 |
| Present | 29.002 | 4 | .000 |

**Conservative and liberal**.

*Presence*. The pro-drone frame was present in 96% (n = 120) of liberal newspapers and 97.6% (n = 122) of conservative papers. The Chi-Square for the presence of the pro-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (1) = .517, p = .472.

*Valence*. The positive pro-drone frame was present in 58.3% (n = 70) of liberal newspapers and 54.5% (n = 84) of conservative newspapers. The Chi-Square for the presence of the positive pro-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (1) = 2.893, p = .089.

The neutral pro-drone frame was present in 24.2% (n = 29) of liberal newspapers and 19.7% (n = 24) of conservative newspapers. The Chi-Square for the presence of the neutral pro-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (1) = .714, p = .398.

The negative pro-drone frame was present in 17.5% (n = 21) of liberal newspapers and 11.5% (n = 14) of conservative newspapers. The Chi-Square for the presence of the neutral pro-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (1) = 1.775, p = .183.

**Table 2. Pro-Drone Liberal / Conservative Chi-Square Tests**

|  | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 2.893 | 1 | .089 |
| Neutral | .714 | 1 | .398 |
| Negative | 1.775 | 1 | .183 |
| Present | .517 | 1 | .472 |

**Anti-Drone**

**All articles**.

*Presence*. The anti-drone frame was present in the 12.9% (n = 8) of the *New York Times* articles, 12.5% (n = 7) of the *Washington Post* articles and 15.2% (n = 19) of the *Wall Street Journal* articles. The Chi-Square for the presence of the anti-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (4) = 4.959, p = .292.

*Valence*. The positive anti-drone frame was present in 12.5% (n = 1) of *New York Times* articles, 57.1% (n = 4) of *Washington Post* articles, and 47.4% (n = 9) of *Wall Street Journal* articles. The Chi-Square for the presence of the positive anti-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (3) = 5.173, p = .160.

The neutral anti-drone frame was present in 37.5% (n = 3) of *New York Times* articles, 42.9% (n = 3) of *Washington Post* articles, and 42.1% (n = 8) of *Wall Street Journal* articles. The Chi-Square for the presence of the neutral anti-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (3) = 2.705, p = .439.

The negative anti-drone frame was present in 50% (n = 4) of *New York Times* articles, none of the *Washington Post* articles, and 10.5% (n = 2) of *Wall Street Journal* articles. The Chi-Square for the presence of the negative anti-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (3) = 8.716, p = .033.

**Table 3. Anti-Drone All Newspapers Chi-Square Tests**

|  | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 5.173 | 3 | .160 |
| Neutral | 2.705 | 3 | .439 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Negative | 8.716 | 3 | .033 |
| Present | 4.959 | 4 | .292 |

**Conservative and liberal**.

*Presence*. The anti-drone frame was present in 13.6% (n = 17) of liberal newspapers and 15.2% (n = 19) of conservative newspapers. The Chi-Square for the presence of the positive anti-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (1) = .130, p = .719.

*Valence*. The positive anti-drone frame was present in 29.4% (n = 5) of liberal newspapers and 47.4% (n = 9) of conservative newspapers. The Chi-Square for the presence of the positive anti-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (1) = 1.217, p = .270.

The neutral anti-drone frame was present in 47.1% (n = 8) of liberal newspapers and 42.1% (n = 8) of conservative newspapers. The Chi-Square for the presence of the neutral anti-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (1) = .089, p = .765.

The negative anti-drone frame was present in 23.5% (n = 4) of liberal newspapers and 10.5% (n = 2) of conservative newspapers. The Chi-Square for the presence of the negative anti-drone frame was the following: $X^2$ (1) = 1.092, p = .296.

**Table 4. Anti-Drone Liberal / Conservative Chi-Square Tests**

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 1.217 | 1 | .270 |
| Neutral | .089 | 1 | .765 |
| Negative | 1.092 | 1 | .296 |
| Present | .130 | 1 | .719 |

**Voice**

**All articles**. Results on sources showed print media sources gave a privileged voice to elites. The content analysis showed the majority of articles quoted either an administration (n = 84, 33.6%) or official (n = 98, 39.2%) source when discussing drone strikes. Examples of these sources include a quote from President Obama, the Secretary of Defense or State, or a member of the military, such as a colonel or general. Other voices were not often quoted: foreign opinion source (n = 35, 14.%), popular source (n = 12, 4.8%), and non-popular source (n = 21, 8.4%). These were most often Pakistan officials, such as Pakistan military members, or they were local civilians. The data in this content analysis supports the predictions made by the indexing model, which predicts newspapers will quote from people with positions of power that often comes at the exclusion of local voices.

The above example is consistent with the rest of the data gathered, writers would often quote commanders who justify or announce the strikes more than a local citizen whose family member was killed in a drone strike.

**Conservative and liberal**. Conservative and liberal newspapers covered drone strikes similarly. Conservative papers showed the positive side of drone strikes 67% of the time, while liberal newspapers were at 56%. The more striking consistency between the two sides was the coverage of the emotion frame. 3.2% of liberal newspapers showed the negative emotion frame, while conservative papers had a smaller percentage of 1.6%.

This statistic most significantly shows the indexing model applies to both liberal and conservative print media sources.

Further evidence of the indexing model came from what voices were cited by both ideologies. Conservative newspapers quote administration (40%) and official (37%) sources more often than foreign opinion or non-popular sources. While liberal newspapers did quote from popular and non-popular sources more often, this was still in the minority. Furthermore, liberal newspapers also quote administration (26.4%) and official (41.6) sources the majority of the time.

# DISCUSSION

## Hypothesis 1

This study sought to provide insight on why drone strikes are currently popular in the status quo. The indexing model predicts that the media will cite government officials when there is elite consensus on an issue, at the exclusion of other competing frames. The results of this content analysis were correct in proving that the media frames drone strikes positively. Specifically, the major presence of a pro-drone frame across all newspapers, the lack of a significant anti-drone frame across all newspapers, and the administration and government officials being the dominant voice heard in articles provides support to the indexing model.

First, the pro-drone frame had a major presence in all of the newspapers, with the positive pro-drone frame being used more than the balance and anti-drone frames. This finding is not surprising, since there is elite consensus on drone strikes. With the Obama administration pushing for a continued reliance on drones, it would be logical to conclude the news media would report pro-drone frames, as the media gives a privileged voice to elites.

Second, the majority of articles quoted administration and government officials when writing articles about drone strikes. Voice and source play significant roles with indexing. The sources a journalist quotes often play a significant role in the language the

author uses in the article. With elites being given a privileged voice in the print media, this makes it extremely difficult for challenging views to be heard by various publics. However, there is also a practical reason for the lack of other sources being used on drone strikes. The military and government officials are the ones conducting the drone strikes, which makes quotes from them relevant to the conservation on drones. Furthermore, drone strikes are carried out in unstable regions, such as Pakistan and Yemen, where it is costly and dangerous to have a reporter go out to a village where a drone strike occurred and interview some of the victims. The strong evidence of administration and government voice in this content analysis provide further support to the idea that journalists follow the people who have the power.

Lastly, while there was a major presence of a pro-drone frame in all newspapers, the most telling indicator of was the significant lack of an anti-drone frame. The lack of substantial counter frames, such as innocent murder or a story from a locals point of view provide support to the claim official voices are heard more loudly in newspapers.

**Hypothesis 2**

As stated in the introduction of this study, while President Bush did use drone strikes, the amount of strikes was increased drastically during the Obama administration. Thus, in a world of partisan media, it would make logical sense that conservative outlets would backlash or provide partisan information on a significant foreign policy issue, like drone strikes. However, this content analysis proved the indexing model trumps partisan concerns. The second hypothesis, that conservative and liberal newspapers *both* frame drone strikes positively was also proven true.

Liberal and conservative newspapers showed pro-drone frames an overwhelming amount more than the anti-drone frames. While there were differences, such as liberal newspapers providing anti-drone frames more often than conservative newspapers, the difference was minimal. The significant absence of an anti-drone frame was evidence across both sides of the aisle. This provides clear evidence to predict that partisanship does not play a large role in whether journalists quote government officials or challenging sources when there is elite consensus.

**Implications**

The implications of this research paper have profound impacts on how we view journalism. Journalism has often been viewed as containing a watchdog role for civil society (Hauser, 1997). Many have contended for civil society to flourish, there has to be a transparent balance between conflict and consensus (1997). This study provides depressing evidence against that view; as the data of this content analysis shows journalists do not use that watchdog role on drone strikes.

It is important to note print media is not necessarily the mode in which the public absorbs information. Due to rapid changes in technology, people now consume information via email, websites, chat rooms, forums, and blogs (Bennett, 2006). Critics have argued this change in media has made theories on the media obsolete as information intake diversifies. However, a study by McCombs (2005) found there was no difference, and that media was still very homogenous. The study found that websites people most frequented were also the websites of major newspapers (2005). In fact, while technology has led to more information diversity, audience tastes and industry economic trends have

been steadily pushing towards less diversity and consistent news content (Bennett, 2006).

While the sample size of this content analysis should be expanded to garner better results,

the study from McCombs shows data gathered from a couple of major newspapers is

sufficient to see how the media frames drone strikes and how people view drone strikes.

## LIMITATIONS

This study looked at only five major newspapers and would benefit greatly from the inclusion of other print media sources. Furthermore, only the *Wall Street Journal* was included to describe conservative newspapers. Other sources of news should provide similar results to those found in this study since those other sources would also get their information from the same elite voice. One could make the argument there could be a bias in the results of this study due to there being the same sample size from both the liberal and conservative newspapers, since the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were close to 80% of the population. However, the over-representation was necessary to test the liberal and conservative newspaper hypothesis. An oversampling of liberal newspapers would have provided the same bias, due to the uneven size of the two groups in the population. The *Wall Street Journal* is a credible conservative newspaper, which would be included by any researcher looking to gather data on conservative newspapers. The potential for bias in the sample was a necessary flaw for the purpose of this content analysis.

The search terms used in this study were "Drones or (unmanned vehicles!)". While collecting the population, the author found half of the articles found in the database searches were not pertinent to drone strikes. Many of the articles talked about music festivals and the "drone" of certain instruments. This was a tedious task to sift

through the articles to gather relevant data; the search terms were still the most effective ones for this content analysis. The search terms "drone strikes!" would have gathered sufficient articles on U.S. use of drone strikes and saved multiple hours of data gathering. However, the researcher found while coding, many of the articles on drone strikes would have not use the two terms together and would instead only say drones, relying on its intended audience to understand the context in which it was written. It is for this reason the search terms of this study were the most desirable for finding out how the media frames drone strikes.

One potential limitation to indexing research may be the distance in which many foreign affairs articles take place. As stated in the discussion section and in some of the examples of articles from the methodology section, drone strikes are conducted in unstable regions in the world. The major purpose of drone strikes is to decrease the casualties of American soldiers. Due to this unstable nature, it may be difficult for reporters to readily access counter frames, which is why journalists quote elite sources and not because there is elite consensus.

Now it is important to note that this content analysis can only tell how the media is covering the issue of drone strikes, the study here does not speak to the potential effects of the messages on audiences. The researcher has provided a connection between the pro-drone messages the print media uses and the high public support of drones in the status quo, however, further research would be needed to make this a stronger causal relationship. Future research could conduct a survey of how people perceive various frames on drone strikes. A survey could include both pro-drone and anti-drone articles

that use administration and non-popular sources as the main sources in articles to

determine if people perceive where the information came from as important.

**CONCLUSION**

This study was conducted to see if elite officials were given a privileged voice in the print media, specifically in the instance of drone strikes. The findings of this content analysis of five major newspapers, both liberal and conservative, showed journalists would often describe the administration's pro-drone point of view and largely exclude anti-drone counter frames. Furthermore, the findings of this paper provide an explanation for the pro-use status quo of drone strikes. This content analysis provides supporting evidence to Bennett's indexing model, as well as gives new evidence that the partisanship of a newspaper does not trump the predictions of the indexing model.

Codebook
Unit of Analysis: the entire article
General Procedure: In many cases, you may need to read through an article multiple times, so please re-read the article or sections of the article as many times as necessary. You many want to take notes or mark in the margins of the article as you read.
When finished, enter the appropriate codes on the coding sheet. IF you listed "other" for any variable, please type in a good description of the information. You will need a separate coding sheet for each article. For all questions, unmanned vehicles may be considered as a substitute.

1. Coder ID:

2. Article ID:

3. Article Date: (MM/DD/YYYY):

4. Which newspaper was the article from?
(1) = New York Times
(2) = Los Angeles Times
(3) = Washington Post
(4) = USA Today

5. On what page did this article appear (For example, an article may appear in A6 of a newspaper). List if it is available, and if not listed write (2) for no.

6. Is the article an editorial or an opinion piece?
(0) = No / News
(1) = Yes / Editorial/Opinion

Issues: For each of the follow list:
(0) = No Mention
(1) = Positive (Makes the issue better)
(2) = Neutral (No stance, discusses both sides without conclusion)
(3) = Negative (Makes this issue worse)

7. Pro-Drone Frame:

Examples include Al Qaeda, bombing, massacre, adults, and insurgents.

8. Anti-Drone Frame:
Examples include murder, senseless attacks, women, and children.

9. <u>Voice</u>: What source was cited on a fact or what organization/government was quoted in the article?
(1) Administration source. This includes sources from the Obama administration.
(2) Official source. This includes sources from Congress and the military.
(3) Foreign opinion source. This includes sources from other countries, such as foreign neighbors. The Guardian or the Telegraph are examples.
(4) Popular source (non-government). This includes an interest group or poll.
(5) Non-popular source. (non-government) This includes an interest group or poll that has an unfavorable view of U.S. drone strikes.

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# BIOGRAPHY

Peter A. Susko was born in Erie, Pennsylvania. Peter graduated from Cathedral Preparatory School. He received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Mary Washington in 2012, where he majored in Political Science. Peter works as a debate coach at George Mason University and received his Master of Arts in Communication from George Mason University in 2014.