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Testing Models of Media Performance in Wartime: U.K. TV News and the 2003 Invasion of Iraq

[Piers Robinson](#), [Peter Goddard](#), [Katy Parry](#), [Craig Murray](#)

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Abstract

Debate over media coverage of foreign affairs has been dominated by a range of theoretical positions, here characterized as the 'elite-driven,' 'independent' and 'oppositional' models. In this article, we explore the relative cogency of these theoretical positions in the context of British media coverage of the 2003 Iraq War. We find that coverage generally conformed to the elite-driven model, reinforcing the coalition. Nevertheless, our analysis also provides evidence to support the independent and oppositional models. Regarding casualties and the humanitarian situation, we find significant levels of coverage which support the oppositional model and the notion of event-driven news. Overall, our study points toward a more nuanced understanding of media-state relations than is suggested by the existing elite-driven paradigm.

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