Media Content Coding

To construct measures of the elite rhetoric and reporting on wartime events to which the British public was exposed concerning the Afghan War between October 2001 and April 2010, we downloaded every front-page article appearing in either *The Guardian* or *The Telegraph* that contained the word "Afghanistan." This search returned 1,378 articles. A team of two trained coders then divided the articles in half and coded for a number of factors, including whether each article mentioned British casualties, the financial costs of the war, and insurgent attacks. Patterns in coverage reporting on each of these types of conflict events are presented in Figure 2 of the text and SI Figure 2. For each article, coders were also asked to evaluate whether the overall tone of the article was positive or negative toward the British war effort. For those articles describing conditions on the ground, coders were also asked to code whether the article, on balance, described progress or deterioration.

To assess inter-coder reliability, both coders were asked to code a random sample of fifty articles. The two coders agreed on the overall tone of the article in 49 of the 50 cases. The two coders also agreed in 47 of the 50 articles about whether the article described the situation on the ground as either deteriorating or progressing. In none of the cases of disagreement did one coder code the story as describing progress whereas the other coded it as describing deterioration, or vice versa. Rather in each of the three cases of disagreement, one coder believed there was enough in the article to code it on this dimension, whereas the other did not code the article as being specific enough in its assessment of conditions on the ground to code either way.

SI Figure 3 presents an alternative visualization of this data on overall tone and the relative balance of coverage emphasizing setbacks vs. progress. With but a few exceptions, media coverage of the war in Afghanistan, on balance, was overwhelmingly negative from 2003

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through 2010. This stands in stark contrast to the overwhelming support for the war emanating from political elites.

Coders also extracted from each article all statements made by Members of Parliament (including leaders) regarding the war in Afghanistan. Initially, coders then coded each statement as either supportive of the war (i.e. supporting either the initial decision to use force or advocating the continuation of the British mission in Afghanistan) or opposed to it (i.e. either opposing the decision to use force in Afghanistan or advocating the withdrawal of British troops). Statements that did not take a clear position were not coded. To assess inter-coder reliability, both coders were asked to code a random sample of fifty MP statements. The two coders agreed on 49 of 50 statements; the only disagreement concerned a statement that one coder identified as pro-war, whereas the other coder judged it too non-specific to merit coding.

Following the suggestion of an anonymous reviewer, in fall 2015 we re-coded each elite cue to distinguish the nature of the argument along two dimensions: whether it retrospectively supported or opposed the decision to use force in Afghanistan; and whether it advocated staying the course in Afghanistan or withdrawing British troops. A single elite cue could be coded on one or both dimensions. One of the original coders re-coded all of the elite cues according to this new coding scheme. This is the data presented in Figure 1 and to construct the independent variables used in the regression analyses in Table 1. As a robustness check on the reliability of the data from this coder, the original second coder also coded a random sample of 30 elite cues according to the new criteria. Cronbach alpha measures of inter-coder reliability across the four codes (retrospective support; retrospective opposition; stay the course; withdraw) were all above .80. The lowest score was for codes of retrospective support (.82). The scores for both of the

prospective elite cue codes (identifying whether the cue advocated staying the course or withdrawal, respectively) were .89 and .92, respectively.

The analyses in the text all focus on data from front-page coverage in *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*. We argue that this high profile coverage likely best reflects the balance of elite rhetoric to which the average Briton was exposed. However, as a robustness check on our characterization of the balance of elite cues transmitted to the public, we also conducted a second round of searches to identify all statements made by each party leader, as well as the Foreign and Defence Secretaries, and their respective shadow ministers in each of the three main parties. These searches returned an additional 1,299 articles. A pair of coders, dividing the articles between them, first scanned each article to identify relevant elite cues about the war in Afghanistan. They were initially coded in the same manner as described above. In fall 2015, a single coder re-examined each relevant elite cue and re-coded it along the two dimensions (i.e. retrospective vs. prospective) described above. Trends in party leadership cues are presented in SI Figure 1. The patterns are quite similar to those observed in our content-coding of all front-page elite rhetoric reported in Figure 1 in the text. If anything, the data makes plain that cues from party leaders were even more uniformly supportive of the Afghan War on both dimensions.

Additional Aggregate-Level Polling

Because of the extended gaps in the time series during which few polls queried British support for the Afghan War, Figure 3 in the text presented polling data exclusively from 2007 through the general election in 2010. SI Figure 4 presets all polls from the entire time series ranging from October 2001 through April 2010.

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Regression Analysis of Aggregate Data

We conducted several robustness checks on the regression analyses of aggregate-level polling data presented in the text. First, the model of factors driving changes in opposition to an expeditious withdrawal of British forces from Afghanistan presented in the text included only the net balance of elite rhetoric supporting staying the course in Afghanistan. Theoretically, we did not expect the balance of elite rhetoric retrospectively supporting the use of force in Afghanistan to affect public opposition to withdrawal. As a robustness check, we re-estimated this model with the net balance of elite rhetoric supporting the decision to use force. Results are presented in SI Table 1. Consistent with our argument, the coefficient for prospective elite cues supporting staying the course in Afghanistan. By contrast, the coefficient for retrospective elite cues is negative and statistically insignificant.

We have argued that front-page elite cues concerning the war provide the best measure of the balance of elite rhetoric to which most Britons were exposed. However, as a robustness check we re-estimated both models from Table 1 with alternate operationalizations of elite rhetoric using all elite cues from party leaders reported anywhere in either paper (SI Figure 1). SI Table 2 presents the results, which are substantively similar to those presented in Table 1. In the model of public opposition to withdrawal, the coefficient for the balance of elite rhetoric supporting staying the course in Afghanistan is positive and statistically significant. In the general approval model, neither elite rhetoric coefficient is statistically significant.

As a final robustness check, to control for potential autocorrelation we follow Baum and Groeling (2010) and re-estimate both models in Table 1 with the lag of the dependent variable as a control. SI Table 3 presents the results, which are substantively similar to those presented in the text. Elite cues supporting staying the course in Afghanistan increase opposition to an

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expeditious withdrawal. Neither retrospective nor prospective pro-war elite cues influence general approval of the war in Afghanistan.

SI Figure 1: Party Leader Cues Reported in The Telegraph and The Guardian, 10/01-4/10



UK Was Right/Wrong to Use Force in Afghanistan

British Troops Should Stay in/Withdraw from Afghanistan







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SI Figure 3: Percentage of Front-Page Coverage with Negative Tone or Describing Situation as Deteriorating

Note: Breaks in dashed line from 2002 through 2005 represent quarters in which there were no front-page articles in *The Guardian* or *The Telegraph* that described the situation on the ground in Afghanistan either as progressing or deteriorating.



SI Figure 4: British Support for War in Afghanistan, 2001-2010 (all available polls)

SI Table 1: Retrospective and Prospective Elite Cues and Opposition to Withdrawal

	Oppose withdrawal
Net Stay the Course Rhetoric,	1.72***
	(.61)
Net Right to Use Force Rhetoric _{t-1}	-1.14
Casualties _{t-1}	(1.23)
	(.13)
Net Negative Media Coverage _{t-1}	08
	(.17)
Constant	.91
	(.99)
Observations	32
R^2	32
11	

OLS regressions of factors influencing change in war support from the preceding to the current month. Standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

* p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

Net Stay the Course Rhetoric_{t-1} $.57^*$ $.48$ Net Right to Use Force Rhetoric_{t-1} $.11$ Net Right to Use Force Rhetoric_{t-1} $.09$ Casualties_{t-1} $(.14)$ $(.12)$ Net Negative Media Coverage_{t-1} $(.15)$ $(.12)$ Net Negative Media Coverage_{t-1} 1.06 62 Constant 1.06 62 Observations 32 32 R ² $.20$ $.10$		Oppose withdrawal	Approve of war
Net Stay the Course Rhetoric_{t-1}(.33)(.62)Net Right to Use Force Rhetoric_{t-1}11 $Casualties_{t-1}$ 09.05Casualties_{t-1}(.14)(.12)Net Negative Media Coverage_{t-1}28*11(.15)(.15)(.12)Constant1.0662Observations32.32 R^2 .20.10	Net Stay the Course Rhetoric _{t-1}	.57*	.48
Net Right to Use Force Rhetoric_{t-1} $\begin{array}{c} .11 \\ (.30) \\ .09 \\ (.14) \\ .12) \\$		(.33)	(.62)
$\begin{array}{cccc} \text{Casualties}_{t-1} &09 & .05 \\ (.14) & (.12) \\28^{*} &11 \\ (.15) & (.12) \\ 1.06 &62 \\ (1.05) & (.84) \end{array}$	Net Right to Use Force Rhetoric _{t-1}		.11 (.30)
Casualities_{t-1}(.14)(.12)Net Negative Media Coverage_{t-1} 28^* 11 (.15)(.12)Constant 1.06 62 (1.05)(.84)Observations 32 32 R^2 $.20$ $.10$	Casualties _{t-1}	09	.05
Net Negative Media Coverage_{t-1}28*11 $(.15)$ $(.15)$ $(.12)$ Constant 1.06 62 (1.05) $(.84)$ Observations 32 32 R^2 $.20$ $.10$		(.14)	(.12)
Net Negative Media Coveraget-1 $(.15)$ $(.12)$ Constant 1.06 62 (1.05) $(.84)$ Observations 32 32 R^2 $.20$ $.10$	Net Negative Media Coverage _{t-1}	28*	11
Constant 1.06 62 (1.05) (.84) Observations 32 32 R^2 .20 .10		(.15)	(.12)
Constant (1.05) $(.84)$ Observations 32 32 R^2 .20 .10	Constant	1.06	62
Observations 32 32 R^2 $.20$ $.10$		(1.05)	(.84)
R^2 .20 .10	Observations	32	32
	R^2	.20	.10

SI Table 2: Party Leader Elite Cues and Support for Afghan War

OLS regressions of factors influencing change in war support from the preceding to the current month. Standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

* p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

	Oppose withdrawal	Approve of war
Net Stay the Course Rhetoric _{t-1}	1.40**	.44
	(.53)	(1.02)
Net Right to Use Force Rhetoric _{t-1}		08 (.50)
Casualties t-1	13	.19*
	(.13)	(.11)
Net Negative Media Coverage _{t-1}	22	14
	(.15)	(.14)
Change in support t-1	16	42**
	(.16)	(.19)
Constant	1.14	-1.15
	(1.00)	(.80)
Observations	31	31
\mathbb{R}^2	.34	.23

SI Table 3: Elite Cues and Change in Support for War, with Lagged DV

OLS regressions of factors influencing change in war support from the preceding to the current month. Standard errors in parentheses. All significance tests are two-tailed.

* p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01