Terrorism, Elections, and Democracy

Political Campaigns in the United States, Great Britain, and Russia

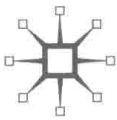
Sarah Oates, Lynda Lee Kaid, and Mike Berry

Terrorism, Elections, and Democracy

Political Campaigns in the United States, Great Britain, and Russia

Sarah Oates, Lynda Lee Kaid,
and Mike Berry

palgrave
macmillan



TERRORISM, ELECTIONS, AND DEMOCRACY

First published in 2009 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978–0–230–61357–7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: January 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

Terrorism, Elections, and Democracy

PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS

Sarah Oates

Introduction to Media and Politics (2008)
Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia (2006)
The Internet and Politics: Citizens, Voters and Activists (coeditor, 2006)
Elections and Voters in Post-Communist Russia (coeditor, 1998)

Lynda Lee Kaid

The Encyclopedia of Political Communication (coeditor, 2008)
The EU Expansion: Communicating Shared Sovereignty in the Parliamentary Elections (coeditor, 2008)
The Handbook of Election News Coverage around the World (coeditor, 2008)
The Sage Handbook of Political Advertising (coeditor, 2006)
The Handbook of Political Communication Research (editor, 2004)
Videostyle in Presidential Campaigns: Style and Content of Televised Political Advertising (coauthor, 2001)

Mike Berry

Israel and Palestine: Competing Histories (coauthor, 2006)
Bad News from Israel (coauthor, 2004)

Graphs and Tables

Graphs

Tables

Acknowledgments

In a broad perspective, this book addresses intersecting themes in political communication, comparative politics, and security studies. In a more pragmatic way, the genesis of this book lies in a missed meeting, a marginal cup of coffee, and a favor to a colleague at the University of Glasgow.

The central idea for the book was suggested by Prof. Stuart Croft, director of the New Security Challenges program at the British Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the United Kingdom. Stuart had traveled to the University of Glasgow in 2003 to discuss the program with some academics, but the professor who studied Russia and international relations happened to have a class when he arrived. As a favor to the colleague and to show the polite face of the Politics Department, Sarah took Stuart to the Adam Smith Building common room for some coffee from a machine. On the way, she remarked that she had nothing to do with security in that she studied media and elections, mostly in Russia. Stuart perked up and immediately said that he thought media was an underrepresented area in his grant program. Soon after, Sarah was making a surprise grant pitch, talking about how Russian leaders use security threat as a means of winning public support. While exploring the idea, it became clear that the role of terrorist threat in elections was by no means limited to the Russian case. As a former U.S. journalist, Sarah had to admit that it would be quite an important part of the U.S. 2004 elections as well.

This led to the first ESRC grant award to support this book (Grant R223250028, *The Framing of Terrorist Threat in U.S. and Russian Elections*). At this point, Lynda agreed to come on board, and we were delighted that we were collaborating again. It is difficult to understand the role of campaign communication in one country—and very challenging to try to compare it across country boundaries. Lynda also activated a network of U.S. scholars, including Mitchell McKinley, John Tedesco, and Andrew Williams as well as her smart team of graduate students at the University of Florida. They worked on a very modest budget, often volunteering their time, to create an impressive dataset for the U.S. 2004

elections. Work from the preliminary results was presented at several academic conferences, including the American Political Science Association Annual Meetings. While we realized that security threats played a significant role in the U.S. 2004 elections, we were surprised by the extent of that role. As a Russian specialist, Sarah was shocked by some of the parallels between the U.S. and Russian audience.

Even the United States and Russia weren't quite enough for us. In 2005, we were awarded further funds from the Economic and Social Research Council to study the 2005 British parliamentary elections (Grant R228250048). Not only did this bring a Western European country into the study, but it also brought Dr. Mike Berry as a research assistant. Mike, who had just earned his PhD with the Glasgow Media Group, brought a level of expertise on the British media to the discussion. It also meant there were often lively discussions about where there are flaws and where there are strengths in media systems around the world. In this book, the British media and political system seem to resist the politics of fear.

That cup of coffee took the research agendas for all three of us in new directions. While we always had been committed to the idea of the role of the media in comparative perspective, carrying out a project across four elections and three countries has shown us how difficult this can be at times. The book does not follow a rigid parallel structure because it would be nearly impossible to write a coherent book in that manner. Rather, we used a common coding frame with additions in each country. We attempted to place the study both within the relevant campaign literature (which is particularly vast for the United States) but acknowledge this is a subtle and shifting paradigm at times. We learned that the notion of security is not confined to some remote government body or defense experts. Fears about terrorism and personal security are intertwined with an understanding (or lack thereof) of the international sphere in the United States and Russia. This suggests that there are indeed "new" security challenges in a post-9/11 world. As much as academics and analysts might want to assume that security has little to do with their interests, it would be impossible to understand the U.S. and Russian elections in 2004 without reference to the politics of fear.

As noted above, this project would not have been possible without collaboration and discussion that has ranged over different countries and continents. In particular, we would like to thank the Politics and Sociology Departments at the University of Glasgow for hosting much of the work. The Glasgow Media Group kindly lent us their equipment for taping and coding. Gordon Ramsay worked diligently as a coder at the University of Glasgow and was subverted to the point that he is now writing a PhD analyzing the development of televised election coverage over time in the

United Kingdom. Glasgow colleagues Ana Langer and Stephen White provided advice on scholarly work in Britain and Russia respectively. The New Security Challenges program has provided not only financial support, but scholarly supports in the form of meetings such as the Manchester "Sandpit" in 2006 to further explore innovative scholarly collaborations to address security issues. This led to participation by Sarah in a cross-disciplinary grant sponsored by three British research councils, which has contributed to the development of the ideas in the book (Safer Spaces: Communication Design for Counter Terror, joint project of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council/Arts and Humanities Research Council/ Economic and Social Research Council, Grant EP/F008503/1). Lynda would also like to thank Prof. McKinney (University of Missouri) as well as Profs. Tedesco and Williams (Virginia Tech University) for their assistance with focus groups. At the University of Florida, graduate students Monica Postelnicu, Kristen Landreville, Drew Bagley, and Sarah Urriste assisted with focus groups and with coding.

As always, we acknowledge the support of family and friends, without whom we would not be able to thrive as people and as scholars. In particular, we would like to thank David Cross, Clifford Jones, and Rosemary Oates.

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

In the months and years that followed 9/11, grief, shock, and anger dominated political discussions around the globe. While the most intense elements of these feelings faded for the majority of people in a few weeks, there remained an enduring sentiment that something fundamental had shifted in the way in which many viewed society and the security of their everyday lives. Although 9/11 was unusual both in terms of location and scope of the attack, the unique elements of the terrorist attack were not the focal point for most Americans. Rather, the event stripped away illusions about the invulnerability of U.S. citizens in a violent and often chaotic world. This was a lesson about security that had already been learned in the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation, as many domestic terrorist attacks and the subsequent publicity had made this point clear to the British and Russian citizens for years. Yet, 9/11 elevated levels of insecurity, particularly as it was linked to the significantly enhanced risk from fundamentalist Islamic terrorists, to new heights both within U.S. borders and abroad. How would this affect the normal course of politics in these three countries?

This book examines how fears about terrorism resonated into election campaigns and voter response across three very different societies. In a study of the first major national elections in the United States, Russia, and Great Britain in the wake of 9/11, this book analyzes the framing of security issues and terrorism in political advertising, campaign news on television, and through audience reaction to security messages. This study analyzes the relatively close contest between George W. Bush and John Kerry in the U.S. presidential elections in November 2004. It examines the British parliamentary contest in May 2005, which was dominated by Labour and the Conservatives. In addition, the book explores data from two Russian elections: the contest for the lower house of the parliament in December 2003 and the landslide victory of Vladimir Putin in March 2004 to his second term as Russian president. The conclusions present a brief analysis of political advertising in the 2008 U.S. presidential election.

Through a parallel study of news, campaigns, and audiences in these three countries, it is possible to theorize about the role of the "politics of fear" in comparative perspective. The central questions posed in this book are as follows: How did candidates and parties handle the issues of terrorism prevention and security? How did television news incorporate discussions about terrorism and national security into election campaigns? Did this play a significant part in the framing of issues and discussions about the elections? Finally, by using focus-group discussions in the three countries, the study analyzes how potential voters responded to the campaign news, the candidates, and political parties. Did fear and insecurity drive their perceptions of candidates and their vote choice? Or, despite the memory of 9/11 and other terrorist acts, did voters stick to electoral business as usual, relying more on long-term ideological preference and wider voting cues than the topical issues of national security?

The findings in this book were surprising, in that there were intriguing parallels between the U.S. and Russian elections in the way in which voters talked about a desire for strong, steady leadership in a time of perceived crisis. The British electoral experience, however, remained distinctive from these neighbors to the West and East. The research found that British campaign news focused on long-term public policies rather than emerging terrorist concerns. At the same time, British voters were often suspicious—or even skeptical—about government messages and news about "terrorism" in ways that were not so apparent in the United States and not apparent at all in Russia. Unlike in the United States or Russia, in which relatively few spoke out against the ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Chechnya, the British electorate was unsupportive and sometimes quite angry about Britain's involvement in the post-9/11 invasion of Iraq. This raises questions about how and why fears about security can affect an electorate in some, but not all, societies.

What do the differences among news, campaigns, and voters mean in terms of understanding the effect of terrorism on politics? The different responses among the three countries illuminate some key points in the field of political communication. First, attempts to build a political consensus based on the call for greater security and antiterrorism measures may be effective in the short term in countries such as the United States. In a more militarized and authoritarian state such as Russia, calls for the "strong hands" of leadership and little questioning of the human rights aspects of security measures (and wars) against terrorists form a permanent part of the political dialogue. Yet, the politics of fear found little resonance in the British parliamentary elections of 2005. Even in focus groups that were held just after the 2005 London transport bombings by British Jihadi terrorists, there was little acceptance of a wide frame on security that would parallel the broad sweep of America's "War on Terror."

Why did the British elections have the least link to a rhetoric of fear, with little echo of a post-9/11 sense of insecurity among the public? Has the long British experience with terrorism linked to Northern Ireland somehow inoculated the public against reaction to terrorism linked to fundamentalist Islam? Meanwhile, why did U.S. and Russian voters appear to share similar views if they lived in such different societies? Are Russians and Americans more connected by their superpower history than separated by their distinct political cultures? Was 2004 a year in which Americans and Russians shared particular attitudes—and will these similarities intensify or fade in coming years? This book will explore the reasons for this variation, from political systems, to media systems, to the experience of a public with antiterrorism measures and terrorism itself over a longer period. In looking at these intriguing points of similarity and difference among the three electoral experiences, we seek to illuminate broader points about the role of elections, the fear of terrorism, and emotion in democracies in general. The extraordinary attention paid to terrorism in the 2004 U.S. elections may have been an unusual event spurred by the largest terrorist attack in U.S. history. It would be fair to say that terrorism as part of the political agenda was not exceptional for British and Russian elections. Yet, did the focus on fear and security in the wake of 9/11 in some way fundamentally challenge or change the relationship among the politicians, the media, and the public?

Terrorism, Media, and Elections

The deluge of 9/11 news coverage and strong reaction generated by the attacks inspired many scholars to analyze further the relationship among political leaders, the media, the public, and terrorism news (for example, Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007; Croft, 2006; Entman, 2003; Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2007; Jackson, 2005; Tuman, 2003; Zelizer and Allan, 2002). During the crisis itself, routine news norms in the United States appeared to disappear, as major television networks cancelled advertising and became rolling news channels. The coverage was intensive worldwide, but particularly so in the United States in which all major networks devoted extensive coverage to the event. This led to an extreme example of what Graber describes as the "crisis model" of news reporting (2005). During a crisis—whether an inner-city riot, a hurricane poised to hit an American city, or a terrorist attack—there is an enormous appetite for news about the event. At the same time, there is often very little ability to gather news on the ground. There is a heightened demand for news that is combined with a very small supply of timely information. As a result, media outlets—and particularly television—are pushed to report very rapidly, which often leads to inaccurate or damaging reports. The

repetition of distressing images or even words can be upsetting to viewers (Hill, 2004). In addition, there is a tendency to produce very quick journalistic "analysis," which is often reliant on a small set of commentators or the reporters themselves talking to camera with little background information. Given the dearth of facts and the rush to broadcast, the commentary and reporting are often misleading and sometimes simply wrong. All of this leads to a distortion of information and even panic on the part of the local or national population that can even impede rescue efforts. This is against the broader background of U.S. news norms, which tend to treat violent events as isolated (episodic) rather than placing them within social or thematic contexts (Iyengar and Simon, 1993).

Despite the fact that 9/11 was unusual in terms of scale and location of attack, coverage still was dictated in many ways by the general understanding of the relationship between media and terrorists. Wilkinson (1997: 52) described this relationship as symbiotic, in that terrorists need the media in order to spread fear as a key part of their objectives—while at the same time the media find terrorism newsworthy. However, while terrorists are supposed to be seeking to make a political point, U.S. news media fairly consistently frame terrorists as criminal rather than political in nature (Iyengar, 1991). In a study of the news immediately after the 9/11 attacks, McDonald and Lawrence (2004) found that the coverage followed the classic television "crime script" that elevates the drama before providing the viewers with a reassuring sense of response and resolution. The standard crime story on American television has a familiar set of characters, including victims, loved ones, criminals, and police. The script elevates the drama, while suggesting the promise of a satisfying closure.

In the reporting of 9/11, however, there was no known script for the latter half of the coverage. The news of the disaster, particularly the unprecedented amount of uninterrupted time without advertising that was given to the event, elevated the drama with little ability to provide a sense of reconciliation or retribution for the viewers. This left the audience upset, confused, emotional, and with little meaningful information for reassurance. This set the stage for what Entman termed "cascading activation," in that the Bush administration was able to then set the illogical, yet compelling agenda that invasion of Iraq was the appropriate response to the 9/11 attacks. The Bush administration was able to create and maintain this top-down, dominant news frame, despite the lack of evidence of terrorism support or weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. According to Entman (2003), this was due to a dearth of alternative responses or useful information on international security provided via the primary source of television. In a study of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines, Hutcheson et al. (2004) found that journalists focused more on patriotism than news values in

the five weeks after 9/11. Government and military officials consistently emphasized American core values and themes of U.S. strength and power while simultaneously demonizing the "enemy." Journalists closely paralleled these nationalist themes in their own texts (Hutcheson et al., 2004).

While coverage of 9/11 could have been predicted by previous reporting on terrorism and an understanding of crisis news, the scale of the event and the subsequent link in the public's mind with the Iraq War makes the case much more complex. Viewers did look for reassurance from leaders and found this helpful in processing the events—but only to a degree. Indeed, when images became particularly distressing, leadership reassurances lose their efficacy (Bucy, 2003). When paired with the fact that viewers understandably react much more emotively to terrorism in their own country or region (Shpiro, 2002; Slone, 2000), 9/11 news created an unusually high degree of distress while transmitting little useful knowledge of international security to U.S. viewers. Support for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was generated, to a large degree, by anger over the 9/11 attacks. Yet, as the media tended to ignore the difficult job of providing background or contextual information, confusion about 9/11 and the causes of the attack continued long after the event. As McDonald and Lawrence (2004) point out, the availability of more news time for the event did not lead to greater depth of analysis. Rather, the initial "24/7 news hole" spawned a repetition of reports, with some disturbing images, that underlined a sense of powerlessness and anger (p. 1). If the classic crime news script leaves viewers unable to think critically and holistically about the problem of social transgression, the episodic coverage of the attacks of September 11 could prime Americans to look for easy answers and quick resolution of the terrorism problem. It also encourages Americans to think of all "terrorists" in the same way, when in fact "terrorists" are as diverse as the causes, peoples, or nations they purport to represent (Hewitt, 1992).

It might be tempting to blame journalists for a lack of attention to objectivity and balance in the wake of 9/11. It is widely acknowledged, however, that journalists work within the constraints of national political environments and media systems (Graber, 2005; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1984). The events of 9/11 and its aftermath aggregated and exaggerated certain elements of this system, leading to particularly emotive, yet uninformative coverage. Entman points out that journalists at elite media outlets such as the *New York Times* tried to highlight that Saudi Arabia was a more likely source of anti-American terrorist activity than Iraq, but with little success. As Entman (2003: 428) argues, 9/11 provides evidence that, as hegemony theory predicts, predicts, "media patrol the boundaries of culture and keep discord within conventional bounds. As Entman (2003: 428) argues, 9/11 provides evidence that, as hegemony theory predicts, "media patrol the boundaries of culture and keep discord within conventional

bounds." However, while "inside those borders, even when government is promoting 'war' against terrorism, media are not entirely passive receptacles for government propaganda" (p. 428). Yet, the minor deviations in the U.S. media that attempted to challenge the "cascade" of information and influence from the White House were ineffectual after 9/11, allowing the news frame that linked overseas war to safety against terrorism on American soil to flourish. As Hallin (1986) found in his study of Vietnam War coverage, elite discord is a key factor that can prompt serious challenge to executive direction and communication strategy. There was little elite discord that was publicized in the United States in the wake of 9/11. As later chapters in this book will show, there was much more elite disagreement—and discord reflected in the media—about the 2003 invasion of Iraq in Britain.

The comparative nature of this research allows us to consider how and why the U.S. coverage of 9/11 was exceptional and led to an increase of fear without a balancing sense of perspective. Neither the British nor the Russians are strangers to the shadow of fear cast by domestic terrorism, and both countries have dealt with a greater frequency of attacks than the United States. The conflict between Catholic nationalists in Northern Ireland who seek the reunification of Ireland and Protestant Unionists who desire to continue as part of the United Kingdom has continued for decades.[1] While most of the violence has been in Northern Ireland itself, groups linked to the nationalist cause have carried out many terrorist attacks in England. The most recent terrorist attack in Britain that claimed many lives, however, was not linked to Northern Ireland. The bombings on the London transport system on July 7, 2005, which killed 52 commuters and injured hundreds, were carried out by a group of British residents who were Islamic extremists. Thus, while Britain currently faces a double terrorist threat related to both the dispute over Northern Ireland and Islamic fundamentalists, its experience has suggested that the greatest problems are with domestic or "home-grown" terrorists as opposed to an international threat. Meanwhile, Russians face the greatest terrorist threat from rebel Chechen forces. The country has been involved in a civil war with the breakaway territory for more than ten years, which have seen acts of terrorism including an attack on a school in Beslan in 2004 that left more than 300 people, many of them children, dead. While there have been attempts to link the Chechens, who are traditionally Muslim, with the fundamentalist call for holy war (Jihad), the Chechen-Russian conflict is better understood as a civil conflict over control of a specific region in Southern Russia rather than a war over religious ideals.

Given an arguably more permanent and sustained experience with terrorism, do the same issues of patriotism and dominant frames that have "cascaded" from the top down in the United States emerge in Britain

and Russia? The British media did try to deprive terrorists in Northern Ireland of what former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously called the "oxygen of publicity" for many years. From 1988 to 1994, the British Broadcasting Ban barred any representative of 11 organizations that the government claimed supported terrorism from speaking on television. This included the voices of loyalist as well as republican organisations, although a particular concern was the popular republican Sinn Fein party. As part of the peace process in Northern Ireland, the ban was lifted and a very different media policy ensued, in which newspaper columnists were encouraged to suggest that those labeled "terrorists" could engage in a political dialogue to promote peace (Sparre, 2001; Miller, 1995). Unlike after 9/11 in the United States, there was never one strong, single voice of authority that spoke for an overwhelming majority of citizens in Northern Ireland. There has always been considerable political support for the reunification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, even when much of the population did not support the tactics of terrorism. In the eyes of many in Northern Ireland, those whom the British media might label "terrorists" were perceived as "freedom fighters." While the British government persisted with anti-Republican frame for years, high-profile cases of people wrongly convicted of terrorism in the United Kingdom (such as the Birmingham Six) could lead people over time to question the truth and authority in the government message. On the other hand, the Russian media consistently frame the Chechen people and Chechen terrorists (with often little distinction between the two groups) as murderous criminals.

If there are such diverse experiences with terrorism in the three countries, how does media coverage of terrorism differ between the two democratic countries under study? In a comparison of televised coverage of 9/11 and the 2005 London bombings, it is clear that national news norms make a significant difference to the type of information offered to the viewer. Barnet, Reynolds, Roselle, and Oates (2008) analyzed the coverage by CNN and the public British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) of both terrorist attacks on both outlets, using qualitative analysis that compared language relating to the politics of fear, national identity, the context of the attack, as well as journalistic practices and norms. The study found that in the use of language, CNN was more sensationalist, while the BBC was more calming. The BBC placed more emphasis on public service than the U.S. commercial news broadcaster. CNN's coverage of 9/11 highlighted the U.S. government's inability to prevent the terrorist attack, while the BBC coverage of the July 2005 bombings emphasized how British preparation and planning for terrorist attacks over the years had led to a quick and effective response from public officials. While the size and scope of the 9/11 and the 2005 London transport attacks were quite different, it is