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The next election looms over nearly all decisions democratic leaders make. Choices about military strategy are no exception. Whatever the merits of a particular policy, it could well be overturned, along with the rest of a leader's agenda, if it prompts voters to remove him or her from office. Some observers have long worried that electoral pressures give rise to short-term thinking and other pathologies in foreign policy decisionmaking.[1] Others have argued, on the contrary, that electoral accountability leads to greater caution and prudence about war and peace.[2] Andrew Payne's article addresses the important question of how electoral pressures actually worked in an important recent conflict. Its case studies of decisionmaking under the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama during the latter stages of the Iraq War are detailed and compelling. The evidence reviewed in the article could also speak to alternative theoretical mechanisms that the article does not consider in detail.

Payne makes a straightforward theoretical argument to explain the impact of electoral pressures. He begins with the Kantian observation that "because citizens bear the brunt of the human and financial costs of war, they will hold a natural aversion to recklessly entering conflicts" (166). Democratic leaders who care about their own political future, or that of their party, have to consider this fact, especially as elections approach. While these leaders may find ways to mitigate public concern about the costs of war, the principal effect of electoral considerations in Payne's account is to constrain belligerent behavior.

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[1] For example, see Walter Lippmann. *Essays in the Public Philosophy* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1955), esp. 16-27 and the writers reviewed in Jack Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in Manus Midlarsky, ed., *The Handbook of War Studies* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 259-288, and Benjamin O. Fordham, "More than Mixed Results: What We Have Learned from Quantitative Research on the Diversionary Hypothesis," in William R. Thompson, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Empirical International Relations Theory*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 549-564.

[2] For example, see Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Bruce W. Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *International Studies Quarterly* 36:1 (March 1992): 49-74, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2600916.

The article shows that this constraint operated in different ways during the Bush and Obama administrations. The Bush administration's move to increase the number of U.S. troops in Iraq as part of a population-centered counterinsurgency strategy reflects what the author calls the "delay effect." In this case, leaders postpone consequential policy choices until after an election, when the political stakes are lower (171-172). Many in the Bush administration realized as early as 2005 that their military strategy in Iraq was not working, but the White House postponed a high-level review of the matter until after the November 2006 mid-term election. Once the election was over, the administration moved quickly toward a risky increase in the number of troops in Iraq, the so-called 'surge.'

The Obama administration illustrates a "dampening effect," in which leaders scale down policy choices that cannot be delayed by removing their most unpopular features (172-173). The Obama administration considered negotiating a revised status of forces agreement (SOFA) with the Iraqi government that would have permitted a substantial U.S. military force to remain in the country beyond 2011. However, the number of troops required for a militarily capable force proved politically unacceptable as the 2012 election season approached. This constraint was obvious even to policymakers outside the White House. Recounting early discussions within the Department of Defense, Colin Kahl, then a senior Pentagon official, recalled the prevailing opinion that "[a] president who campaigned on not leaving a Korea-style presence in perpetuity is not going to leave a Korea-style presence in Iraq. That's not going to happen" (195). In the end, when even the smallest plausibly effective force proved politically unpalatable, the administration opted to leave the 2008 SOFA in effect and remove all U.S. forces from the country as this agreement required.

The greatest strength of the article is the author's careful account of how the electoral pressure played out in the minds of policymakers. Payne has done an admirable job of eliciting telling details from original interviews, memoirs, and primary documents. These details matter. For instance, in the case of the Bush administration, the precise date of the election was crucial. It determined when the president thought he could take action. Bush appears to have settled on an alternative strategy before the election but was reluctant to admit that the old strategy had failed before voters went to the polls. Some officials, such as Philip Zelikow in the State Department, were clearly frustrated by the delay in changing course (177). By contrast, the timing of the election was less important during the Obama administration. The debate about revising the SOFA was delayed until after the 2010 mid-terms, but this appears to have made little difference. Leaving a large force in Iraq would have been no more politically acceptable in 2009 than it was a year or two later.

The details presented in the case studies also provide ample food for thought about the normative implications of electoral pressure. The idea of national leaders risking their soldiers' lives in order to enhance their electoral prospects will strike most people as an odious abuse of power, one that they are reluctant to impute to most presidents. Payne's account suggests the ease with which leaders can explain their behavior--to themselves as well as others--in ways that avoid this charge. George W. Bush delayed replacing a failing strategy in an effort to avoid the electoral punishment his party would suffer by admitting failure. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and some other administration policymakers appear to have understood the delay in roughly these terms but were not overly distressed by it (180-1). Stephen Hadley, the National Security Adviser, justified the decision by pointing to the harmful effects of Democratic control of the House and Senate (181). By contrast, in his memoirs, Bush explained the delay as an effort to avoid the charge that he was making personnel and policy changes in order to influence the election. "I didn't want the American people to think I was making national security decisions for political reasons" (180). The ready availability of such rationalizations makes the influence of electoral considerations on wartime decisions seem less normatively weighty in practice than it does in theory.

The article's account of electoral pressures contains a great deal of truth but, at the same time, it may be too simple in some respects. Previous research suggests different ways these pressures may have worked during the Iraq War. Electoral considerations do not always constrain belligerent behavior. The Bush administration certainly refrained from a risky escalation before the 2006 election, but it went ahead with such a plan immediately afterward. This decision, too, had electoral implications that are worth considering. It resembles what George Downs and David Rocke have called

"gambling for resurrection."[3] In their model, unpopular leaders who expect to suffer electoral punishment have an incentive to take greater risks because they have little to lose. George Bush was not eligible for reelection in 2008 but he surely still cared about the consequences of a disastrous electoral defeat for his party. From this perspective, taking a substantial risk to secure a better military outcome by 2008 was preferable to admitting defeat. As with the influence of electoral considerations on the choice to delay the surge until after the election, gambling for resurrection need not have involved self-conscious electoral calculations. Motivated bias could do the heavy lifting when policymakers evaluated the potential costs and benefits of the new strategy.

The Obama administration's choices present an interesting puzzle in light of research on how voters' pre-existing image of the leader as a 'hawk' or 'dove' can affect their assessment of that leader's choices. This work suggests that doves may find it difficult to deescalate without raising public concern about their overall resolve and thus incurring electoral punishment, especially if their peace overtures are not reciprocated. If so, hawks can more easily deescalate military conflict or end international rivalries.[4] Interestingly, this is not the pattern one observes during the Iraq War. How did Barack Obama, who was a dove relative to his Republican opposition, avoid electoral punishment when he withdrew troops from Iraq? Sarah Croco's work on the dynamics of culpability offers a possible answer to this question.[5] The fact that Obama did not start the Iraq War, and was thus less responsible than his predecessor for bad outcomes in the eyes of voters, made it politically easier for him to take the risk. The evidence Payne has assembled might shed light on whether and how these processes actually influenced policy choice.

Looking beyond the Iraq War, there are other reasons scholars should not always expect electoral considerations to constrain belligerent behavior. The public may punish leaders not only for the costs of war but also for failing to secure the outcomes it values. If the goals of the war weigh as heavily as its costs, electoral considerations could lead to escalation. For example, Daniel Ellsberg's account of decisionmaking during the Vietnam War concludes that presidents faced substantial pressure not only to minimize costly escalation, as in Iraq, but also to avoid a Communist victory before the next election.[6] These conflicting electoral pressures created what Ellsberg termed the "stalemate machine," incentivizing incremental escalation undertaken more to avoid defeat than in any real hope of military success. Nothing quite like this happened during the Iraq War. U.S. goals in Vietnam drew added significance from their connection to the broader stakes of the Cold War. In contrast, the U.S. public was not as deeply engaged with the goals of the Iraq War, particularly after it became clear that the Iraqi government did not possess the weapons of mass destruction that had justified the U.S. invasion. The weight the public attaches (or is believed to attach) to war goals makes a difference for how electoral pressures work.

While these nuances are worth considering when evaluating the role of electoral considerations in other cases, they do not diminish the value of Payne's excellent account of the Iraq War. It offers readers useful insights not only about those

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[3] George W. Downs and David M. Rocke, "Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War," *American Journal of Political Science* 38:2 (May 1994): 362-380, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2111408.

[4] Michael Colaresi, "When Doves Cry: International Rivalry, Unreciprocated Cooperation, and Leadership Turnover." *American Journal of Political Science* 48:3 (July 2004): 555-570, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0092-5853.2004.00087.x; Kenneth A. Schultz, "The Politics of Risking Peace: Do Hawks or Doves Deliver the Olive Branch?" *International Organization* 59:1 (January 2005): 1-38, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818305050071.

[5] Sarah E. Croco, "The Decider's Dilemma: Leader Culpability, War Outcomes, and Domestic Punishment." *American Political Science Review* 105:3 (August 2011): 457-477, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055411000219; Sarah E. Croco, *Peace at What Price? Leader Culpability and the Domestic Politics of War Termination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[6] Daniel Ellsberg, "The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine," in Daniel Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 42-135.

decisions but also about foreign policymaking in a democracy more generally. The question of how electoral pressures work will continue to be critically important for understanding democratic foreign policymaking and perhaps even for the normative assessment of democracy itself.

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