

Press Independence in the Guantanamo Controversy:  
Effects of *The New York Times*' Coverage on Public Opinion  
During the Bush and Obama Administrations

Abstract

This study analyzed *The New York Times*' coverage of the Guantanamo prison issue between 2004 and 2010. It investigates two aspects of the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba: How NYT covered the controversy over the closing of the Guantanamo prison during the Bush and the Obama administrations; and How NYT's choice of frames affected public opinion. NYT showed itself a powerful and consistent challenger to the Bush administration on the Guantanamo issue by using more torture framing which described the Guantanamo prison as violating the human rights of prisoners and lacking due process. However, NYT's coverage did not have an impact on the public's judgment about the closing of the Guantanamo prison. NYT's framing might be outweighed in the public's mind by the "War on Terror" frame.

Key words: Guantanamo, Framing, Indexing, Content analysis, Public opinion, Terrorism

## Introduction

Since 2002, the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has given rise to a relentless controversy over whether the U.S. government's treatment of prisoners there is lawful or not. The former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld called the Guantanamo prisoners "unlawful combatants," pointing out that "technically, unlawful combatants do not have any rights under the Geneva Conventions" (Whitlock, 2003, May 16). The Bush administration had claimed that the Taliban and al Qaeda fighters do not "qualify for the convention's protection," unlike prisoners of war (DORF, 2002, Jan. 23). However, in its May, 2005 annual report, Amnesty International voiced strong criticism: "Guantanamo has become the gulag of our times, entrenching the notion that people can be detained without any recourse to the law" (2005, May 25).

This study addresses the different ways of framing the issue of the Guantanamo prison used by Presidents Bush and Obama. President Bush highlighted national security in elaborating the policies justifying the Guantanamo prison. He considered it an indispensable strategy to protect the national security of Americans and to punish unlawful terrorists. However, President Obama framed the Guantanamo prison as a serious threat to the reputation of the U.S. as a democratic country in the world, as well as to the human rights of prisoners.

Taking these different frames of the Bush and Obama administrations into account, this study investigates two topics of inquiry related to the Guantanamo prison: (1) How has *The New York Times* covered the controversy over the closing of the Guantanamo Bay prison during the Bush and the Obama administrations? and (2) How did *The New York Times*' choice of frames in the Guantanamo Bay debate affect public opinion?

The Guantanamo prison is one of the representative issues that typify the U.S. government's anti-terrorism policy. To what degree the news media is independent from the government's influence is one of the major issues in explaining the relationship between the news media and the government. By analyzing the news coverage of the Guantanamo issue, this study can assess to what extent the news media have played an independent role as a watchdog of government power and public officials.

In the Cold War era, the U.S. news media were criticized on the grounds that their coverage of political and foreign issues tended to be manipulated or swayed by their government (Herman, 1993; Herman & Chomsky, 2001; Rachlin, 1988). So then, has the media's coverage of foreign issues changed since the ideological confrontation between the West and the East collapsed? Has the press's independence from the government expanded?

Opposing views have been voiced in answer to these questions. On the one hand, Entman (2003, 2004) proposes the cascading activation model as a framework to explain government-media relations after the end of the Cold War. Criticizing hegemony and indexing theories, Entman (2003) asserts that "Neither describes the precise mechanisms by which government's preferred interpretations of new foreign events and issues get translated into specific choices of politically consequential words and images in the news" (p. 416). He claims that hegemony and indexing theories "cannot fully account for changes in international politics and media behaviors since the Soviet Union began withering away" (2004, p. 4). He asserts that the U.S. media can exert an independent influence on foreign policies because the White House's hegemonic control is limited as the news media's power grows (Entman, 2004).

On the other hand, there is a perspective that the critical and independent role of the news media is still tenuous, if not illusory. Standing on his indexing theory, Bennett (2009) claims

that, even since the end of the Cold War, the news media is still limited in challenging the government's framing. He (2009) points out that the U.S. media did not properly confront President Bush and his government officials who had promoted the Iraq war in 2002 and 2003. In a similar context, Gamson (2005) disagrees with Entman's assertion that the media became less dependent on the U.S. government in their coverage of foreign policy issues, and counters Entman's claim as not being persuasive, claiming that "*The New York Times* has taken the unusual step of apologizing for its failure to examine more critically the George W. Bush administration's claims on the nature of the threat from Iraq in the months preceding the U.S.-led invasion" (p. 325-326).

This study is significant for three reasons. First, it tests the feasibility of some major theories related to the state-media relationship after the end of the Cold War. More specifically, it investigates whether or not *The New York Times* has changed its framing of the Guantanamo prison issue according to the different frames used by the Bush and Obama administrations. Second, by applying framing as a theoretical framework for analyzing news coverage of the Guantanamo issue, it will provide a test of the theory. This study relies on framing theory to analyze the relationship between media and government and to examine the effects of media framing on public opinion in a longitudinal study. Third, this study enriches communication scholars' understanding of the effect of the media by analyzing how the dominant news frames affect public opinion regarding the Guantanamo prison.

### **Perspectives of media-state relations**

There are the two categories of models which have been proposed for explaining media-state relations: the elite-driven model and the independent model (Robinson, Goddard, Parry, & Murray, 2009).

***The elite-driven model***

The elite-driven model, including indexing theory, highlights the news media's tendency to follow elite perspectives and support the U.S. government's foreign policies.

Indexing theory stresses the "persistent failures among U.S. journalists" in questioning the U.S. governments' foreign policies (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 536). This theory claims that if there are significant conflicts within the elite groups, such as between the president and the congress, the news media will allow for the points of views of various other social voices (such as social activists and civil organizations) in their news coverage (Bennett, 2009, p. 16). Bennett (2009) explains indexing as "the journalistic practice of opening or closing the news gates to citizen-activists (and more generally, a broader range of views) according to levels of conflict among public officials and established interests involved in making decisions about an issue" (pp. 15-16). Similarly, Hallin (1986) points out that U.S. journalists have not expressed their independent voices beyond the viewpoints provided by the U.S. administration and congress.

Hegemony theory can be included within the category of the elite-driven model (Robinson et al., 2009). This perspective focuses on the institutional structure surrounding the news media. It claims that the media's dependence on the government arises from the process of "safeguarding the business climate in which media conglomerates operate" (Bennett, 1990, p. 103). Herman and Chomsky (2001) propose that the major role of the U.S. news media is to "inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state" (p. 298).

The U.S. media have been frequently criticized for producing news which is in accord with the U.S. government's foreign policies during the Cold War era. After analyzing the news coverage of the first Gulf War, Herman (1993) concluded that "U.S. mass media coverage was to

an extraordinary degree a servant of official policy,” adding that “the mainstream media served ongoing government policy, not the democratic polity” (p. 45). Similarly, Rachlin (1988) had claimed that news articles on international issues “seem shaped more by images and understandings originating in an American society/political/economic ecology than by the events themselves” (p. 127).

So, has the dissolution of the Cold War system changed the press’s dependence on the U.S. government? After analyzing the U.S. media’s news coverage of the Iraq War in 2003, Bennett (2009) concludes that the U.S. news media did not play a watchdog role and, accordingly, allowed the U.S. government to go to war without any solid evidence supporting the assertion of Saddam Hussein’s involvement in Al Qaeda’s terrorist attacks.

### *The independent model*

The independent model claims that the news media can be autonomous from the elites, including government officials. This model contends that “elite perspectives are not passed on unquestioningly by media but are, instead, subjected to scrutiny” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 539). Hallin (1994) had previously claimed that journalists’ professional journalistic pursuit of balance and accuracy can function as a countervailing force against the dominant role of elite perspectives.

Althaus (2003) analyzed the news coverage of the Persian Gulf crisis in 1990–1991 and concluded that “the press was much more independent in reporting the Persian Gulf crisis than scholars of political communication usually presume it to [have been]” (p. 402):

“The 1990–1991 Persian Gulf crisis had all of the elements that should have undermined press independence: a unified executive, a deferential Congress, a military buildup signaling American intentions for war, and an easy villain in Saddam Hussein....Journalists frequently presented competing

perspectives and were often the instigators rather than merely gatekeepers of critical viewpoints.” (p. 402)

Entman (2003, 2004) has proposed the cascading activation model, claiming that journalists can play an independent role in opposing elite perspectives, and agreeing with Bennett’s assertion to some degree. He claims that, even after the attacks of September 11, 2001, “one thing it did not change was the news media’s traditional promotion of patriotic rallies around presidents when America appears under attack” (Entman 2004, p. 2). However, he also somewhat cautiously asserts that the news media “are not entirely passive receptacles for government propaganda, at least not always” (Ibid., p. 428), and emphasizes that “Even in a time of one-sided domination by the White House line, the post-9/11 period provides an intriguing opportunity to see how journalists working against the White House line can influence news coverage and elite and public thinking” (2003, p. 416).

Entman (2003) also pays attention to the frame challenged by Seymour Hersh, a regular contributor to *The New Yorker* magazine, and by Thomas Friedman, a foreign affairs columnist at *The New York Times*, who raised the issue of the royal family of Saudi Arabia’s links to Al Qaeda’s terrorism. In his column, Friedman criticized Saudi Arabia’s religious hostility, pointing out that “there is an Islamist element incubating religious hostility toward America and the West, particularly among disaffected, unemployed Saudi youth” (2001, October 30).

Entman (2004) claims that these two journalists’ influence on the mainstream discourse shows how the news media can challenge the government’s framing following the end of the Cold War. He adds that the news media’s “influence has been growing since before the certitudes of the Cold War began to fade” (pp. 4-5). He criticized the hegemony and indexing theories, pointing out that “these approaches are based mostly on events before 1991. Not surprisingly, they cannot account fully for changes in international politics and media behavior

since the end of the Cold War” (2003, p. 416). Entman (2004) asserts that, contrary to the assumption of hegemony theory, not only have the differences or conflicts among elite groups become more widespread, but also “patriotic deference to the president does not come automatically or last indefinitely” (p. 5). Also, according to Entman (2004), indexing theory “does not explain why leaders sometimes contest the president’s frame and other times keep quiet, or just how much elite dissent will arise or what it will focus on” (p.5). Entman (2003, 2004) contends that the news media can cultivate their own independent and critical frame, sometimes moving away from the government’s preferred frame.

### **From “Red Menace frame” to “Anti-terrorism frame”**

Entman’s model has been criticized for two reasons. First, he does not give a convincing answer to the question of why the U.S. media did not prevent the Bush administration from justifying the Iraq war even though there was not credible evidence to link Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. Gamson (2005) points out that Entman’s claim is not validated when we consider “the success of the Bush Administration in using 9/11 to justify the Iraq war” (p. 326). In the end, after September 11, 2001, the news media’s autonomy from the influence of government officials appears questionable, in that the Bush administration’s “war on terror” was implemented without any notable constraint by the news media. In addition, in his proposal of the cascading activation model, Entman might overestimate the assertions of Hersh and Friedman as a kind of counterframe challenging the White House’s anti-terrorism framing after September 11, 2001.

Second, there is a possibility that the cascading activation model is underestimating the anti-terrorism frame. Entman’s model suggests that national security crises are no longer easily presented as “us versus them” and “good versus evil” dichotomies because the bipolar structure

of the Cold War era has disappeared (Althaus, 2004, p. 702). However, since September 11, 2001, anti-terrorism has become a pivotal framework in the U. S.'s foreign policies. Anti-terrorism is a magical term for curbing dissenting voices, just like the Cold War frame had been in the past (Bennett, 2009; Lawrence, 2006). Barnett and Reynolds (2009) claim that "Terrorism became a part of the daily news cycle in the United States after September 11, and it entered into some of the routine questions journalists asked at disaster and other crime scenes" (p. 47).

Lawrence (2006) criticizes Entman's model by asking, "Is he [Entman] really correct that we've entered a fundamentally different political era, one marked by more dissensus than bipartisan consensus?" (p. 106). Pointing out the limits of Entman's model in explaining the government-media relationship following September 11, Lawrence (2006) also emphasizes that further research is needed "in an era in which the Red Menace has been replaced by the ever-shifting menace of 'terrorism'" (p. 106). The present study attempts to meet the need to test Entman's cascading activation model by applying it to the Guantanamo issue.

### **Framing and Public Opinion**

Entman (1993) explained framing as a way "to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). The reason that framing is important in an analysis of the news coverage of the Guantanamo issue comes from the news media's "ability to frame the news in ways that favor one side over another" (Entman, 2004, p. 4). Media can "shape political action by framing – reporting the news from a particular perspective so that some aspects of the situation come into close focus and others fade into the background" (Graber, 2006, p. 160).

The present study proposes to examine the frame flow from the news media to the public concerning the Guantanamo issue in two steps. Lim and Seo (2009) analyzed how the preferred frame of the Bush government and *The New York Times* affected public opinion in North Korea during a four-month period, beginning on January 29, 2003. They discovered that, as the government and *The New York Times* shifted their frames from a military-threat frame to a non-military frame over time, the public favored non-military solutions. More remarkably, they pointed out, “as the newspaper significantly decreased the usage of the military threat frame, the magnitude of the frame completely disappeared in government policy statements in a later month” (p. 219). They conclude that, “in the foreign policy areas, the frame flows are not just in one direction from the government to the news media, but instead, the two actors influence each other” (p.219).

However, Bennett et al. (2006) claim that, even post-Cold War, indexing theory is more valid than Entman’s model. After analyzing the news coverage of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in the major print and TV media between January 1, 2004, and August 31, 2004, they conclude that the U.S. news media framed the Abu Ghraib prison scandal as a regrettable abuse, rather than as torture, unlike “the alternative press, which did in many cases apply the torture frame to the story” (p.481). Bennett et al. (2006) emphasize that “the framing of events at Abu Ghraib by the mainstream press followed the predictable pattern of indexing” (p. 481). They conclude that “the nation’s leading media proved unable or unwilling to construct a coherent challenge to the administration’s claims about its policies on torturing detainees” (p. 482).

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

In the present study, Entman’s counterframe is used as an empirical assessment tool (Entman, 2004; Bennett et al., 2006). The term “counterframe” refers to a frame that “attains

sufficient magnitude to gain wide understanding as a sensible alternative to the White House’s interpretation” (Entman, 2004, p.17). When Amnesty International criticized Guantanamo as “the gulag of our times” in May of 2005, President Bush criticized AI’s report as an “absurd allegation” (Knowlton, 2005, June 8). However, Susan Crawford, a judge who supervised tribunals for Guantanamo Bay detainees for the Pentagon, disclosed that the U.S. military tortured Mohammed al-Qahtani, a Saudi national, in Guantanamo. She said: “We tortured Qahtani. His treatment met the legal definition of torture” (MacAskill & Dodd, 2009, Jan. 15).

On January 22, 2009, President Obama signed executive orders which called for the closing of the Guantanamo prison within a year, saying that “We believe we can abide by a rule that says, we don’t torture” (Shane, 2009, January 22). His view that Guantanamo prison is damaging to the U.S.’s moral reputation in the world is in sharp contrast to President Bush’s perspective that the Guantanamo prison is both necessary and lawful. With this background, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent did *The New York Times* resist President Bush’s “anti-terrorism” frame?

RQ2: To what extent did *The New York Times* resist President Obama’s “torture” frame?

We also examine how frequently *The New York Times* used anti-Guantanamo terms (e.g., torture, waterboarding, rule of law, human rights, Geneva Convention, etc.). These terms were chosen based on previous studies and critical statements about the Guantanamo prison by human rights organizations (Bennett et al., 2006; Amnesty International Report 2005). In contrast, pro-Guantanamo terms (e.g., enemy, danger, threat, risk, security, etc.) were chosen by examining the terms frequently used in statements by President Bush and officials of his government. These terms were chosen because the Bush administration frequently emphasized the positive aspects of the Guantanamo prison. We therefore pose these questions:

RQ3: To what degree did *The New York Times* use anti-Guantanamo terms (e.g., “torture,” “waterboarding,” “rule of law,” “human rights,” and “Geneva Convention”) in its news coverage of Guantanamo?

RQ4: To what degree did *The New York Times* mention pro-Guantanamo terms (e.g., “enemy,” “danger,” “threat,” “risk,” and “security”)?

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in *The New York Times*’ usage of anti-Guantanamo and pro-Guantanamo terms during the Bush and Obama administrations?

In contrast to their emphasis on objectivity in their news reporting, the members of the news media tend to more freely express their opinions about political issues in their opinion sections. Thus, it is possible that there is a difference in the usage of frames and counterframes between the news section and the op-ed section.

H1: *The New York Times* will emphasize the torture frame in its op-ed section more than in its news section.

The frame on which *The New York Times* puts more emphasis – between President Bush’s “anti-terrorism frame” and the “torture frame” as a counterframe – might have affected public opinion about the closing of Guantanamo prison. Bennett (2009) points out that “the battle for control of news images was the most important factor in shaping support both for the war and for the Bush administration’s capacity to govern effectively for several more years” (p. 8). Entman (2004) claims that the effectiveness of a frame depends on cultural resonance and magnitude. He points out that, “The more resonance and magnitude, the more likely the framing is to evoke similar thoughts and feeling in large portions of the audience” (p. 6).

Consistently, *The New York Times* criticized the Bush administration’s Guantanamo policy as “lawless,” and asserted, in an editorial on January 25, 2008, that the Guantanamo prison “has trampled on far too many people’s rights” (2008, January 25). When we consider the authority of *The New York Times* and its ability to affect public opinion on foreign issues

(Carpenter, 2007), it is likely that its use of the torture frame for opposing the Guantanamo prison had an effect on public opinion on this issue. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H2: The more critical The New York Times is of the Guantanamo prison, the more likely the public is to support its closing.*

### **Method**

This study analyzes the news coverage of the Guantanamo prison issue by *The New York Times* from November 8, 2004 to May 31, 2009. The first date was chosen as the starting point because it was on that date that federal district court Judge James Robertson ruled, “the Bush administration violated the Geneva Conventions in its handling of prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay prison” (Savage, 2004, November, 9). This decision not only brought about the Bush government’s outrage, but also the social and political controversy over the lawfulness of the Guantanamo prison. News content from *The New York Times* is divided into five time periods, according to the dates that public opinion polls about the closing of the prison were conducted.

*The New York Times* is considered to be among the most influential newspapers in the U.S. (Carpenter, 2007), and is particularly noted for its influence in the U.S. in the areas of political and international news coverage (Gitlin, 1980; Glowaki, Johnson, & Kranenburg, 2004). All the news stories that covered the Guantanamo issue in the front section of the NYT from the period under study were retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis database. These stories were classified according to whether they appeared in the “news section” or the “op-ed section.” “Guantanamo” was used as a keyword for the search. The following number of news stories in the five time periods were retrieved: (1) November 8, 2004 - June 19, 2005 (258 stories); (2) June 20, 2005 - July 8, 2007 (674 stories); (3) July 9, 2007 - December 14, 2008 (405 stories); (4) December 15, 2008 - January 17, 2009 (43 stories); and (5) January 18, 2009 - May 31, 2009 (169 stories).

Irrelevant articles, such as letters to the editor and mere corrections, were removed. Also, considering the disproportionate number of stories in the five time periods, a systematic random sampling was done. The unit of analysis in this study was the paragraph, which is regularly used by communication scholars in the analysis of news content because it is an effective way to grab cues or indicators of the whole subject of any given news story (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967, p. 34). Thus, 2,216 paragraphs in the five time periods were finally content-analyzed: T1 (November 8, 2004 – June 19, 2005, N = 381); T2 (June 20, 2005 – July 8, 2007, N = 440); T3 (July 9, 2007 – December 14, 2008, N = 581); T4 (December 15, 2008 – January 17, 2009, N = 291); T5 (January 18, 2009 – May 31, 2009, N = 523).

### *Coding*

**Frame:** Each paragraph was coded according to whether it has (1) an anti-terrorism frame; (2) a torture frame; or (3) a mixed frame. These frames are defined as follows:

- (1) Anti-terrorism frame: a news paragraph focuses on positive aspects of the Guantanamo prison. This frame implies the point of view that the Guantanamo prison is necessary to protect the security of Americans and to punish unlawful terrorists.
- (2) Torture frame: a news paragraph focuses on negative aspects of the Guantanamo prison. This frame implies that the Guantanamo prison suppresses the human rights of prisoners and lacks due process.
- (3) Mixed frame: refers to the cases where it is difficult to select one dominant frame between the anti-terrorism frame and the torture frame.

**Anti-Guantanamo terms and Pro-Guantanamo terms:** How much *The New York Times* used anti-Guantanamo and pro-Guantanamo terms in each paragraph of its news coverage was examined. Anti-Guantanamo terms and pro-Guantanamo terms were listed as follows:

- (1) Anti-Guantanamo terms: Torture; Human rights/humanitarian/humiliating; Water-boarding/ Beating/Sleep deprivation; Rule of law/under the law; Geneva Convention; Abuse/brutality/mistreatment; Indefinite (secret or arbitrary) detention; International law; Illegal/lawless/moral; Unconstitutional/constitutional.

- (2) Pro-Guantanamo terms: Enemy; Danger/Dangerous/perilous; Threat; Risk; Security/defense; Safety/safer/secure; Innocent civilian/save; Terrorism suspects/war against terror/terrorist; September 11 victims; Al Qaeda.

**Intercoder Reliability:** Coding was done by the author of this study and a graduate student in mass communications. Ten percent of the total (223 paragraphs) was used to establish inter-coder reliability. The following results were obtained from that process, using Cohen's *Kappa*, which corrects for agreement by chance: Frame (.75) and pro & anti-Guantanamo terms (.82). Rogers and Escudero (2004) contend that "Kappa values between .60 and .75 are considered good, and values above .75 are judged as excellent estimates of reliability" (p. 40). Landis and Koch (1977) claim that Cohen kappa figures of between 0.61 and 0.81 are quite substantial for any quantitative research.

#### *Survey Data*

As a way of measuring public opinion about the closing of the Guantanamo prison, this study used the public opinion polls results provided by Gallup (June 16–19, 2005; July 6–8 2007; January 16–17, 2009; and May 29–31, 2009) and the ABC/Washington Post poll of December 11–14, 2008. The poll data over these five time periods directly corresponded to the five time points for the content analysis performed in this study. The Gallup and ABC/Washington Post polls asked the respondents whether the United States should – or should not – close the prison at the Guantanamo Bay military base in Cuba. Each poll was conducted by telephone, using a national random sample of adults including users of both conventional and cellular phones.

[Table 1 about here.]

## Findings

This study examined which frame was most prevalent during the Bush and Obama administrations in the news coverage of the Guantanamo prison issue. Table 2 shows that *The New York Times* used the torture frame in 57.4% of the relevant news paragraphs during the Bush period, while it contained the anti-terrorism frame in only 21.3%. On the other hand, during the Obama period, only 40.3% of the relevant paragraphs used the torture frame, whereas 28.3% employed the anti-terrorism frame. These results demonstrate that *The New York Times* criticized President Bush's anti-terrorism frame for the Guantanamo prison more vigorously during the Bush period. However, *The New York Times* used the torture frame less conspicuously in the Obama period. The finding confirms that there is a significant difference in *The New York Times*' news coverage of Guantanamo between the Bush and Obama administrations ( $\chi^2$  (df=2)=47.485,  $p<.001$ ).

[Table 2 about here]

In the examination of frames according to the time periods, the torture frame is dominant from November 8, 2004 to July 8, 2007. The torture frame was used in more than 60% of the coverage during the first and second periods between these dates (Table 3).

[Table 3 about here]

The results in Table 4 show that an average of .14 pro-Guantanamo terms were used per paragraph during the Bush period, while an average of .17 pro-Guantanamo terms were used in the Obama period. There is no significant difference in the mean usage of the pro-Guantanamo terms between the Bush period and the Obama period. However, an average of .30 anti-Guantanamo terms was used during the Bush period, whereas .15 anti-Guantanamo terms were used on average during the Obama period. A T-test shows that there is a significant difference in

the mean usage of the anti-Guantanamo terms between the Bush and Obama administrations (See Table 3,  $t=5.212$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The T-test confirms that *The New York Times* used anti-Guantanamo terms such as “torture” or “waterboarding” more frequently in covering the Guantanamo prison issue during the Bush administration than it did during the Obama administration.

[Table 4 about here]

Table 5 demonstrates that the torture frame was more common in the op-ed section of *The New York Times* than in its news section. 64.4% of the content-analyzed paragraphs in the news section used the torture frame, while an extraordinary 95.4% in the op-ed section employed the torture frame. On the other hand, while 35.6% in the news section used the anti-terrorism frame, only 4.6% in the op-ed section employed the anti-terrorism frame. Thus, the results in Table 5 support H1, with a *chi-square* figure of  $\chi^2 (df=1)=113.313$ ,  $p<.001$ .

[Table 5 about here]

H2 examines how the news coverage of *The New York Times* affected public opinion about the closing of the Guantanamo prison. This study compared the media frames and the results of public opinion polling during the five time periods. The findings show that there is not a significant correlation between the torture frame (critical of Guantanamo) and the public’s support for the closing of the prison ( $\rho=.30$ ,  $p=.624$ , 2-tailed,  $n=5$ ). Thus, H2 is not supported. The results show that *The New York Times*’ news coverage of the Guantanamo issue—in particular, its emphasis on the torture frame as a counterframe against Bush’s anti-terrorism frame—did not have a big impact on the degree of public support for the closing of the Guantanamo prison.

On the other hand, during the Obama administration (January–May, 2010), the torture frame was to be seen in 40% of the analyzed news stories, compared to 50-65% during the Bush administration. Corresponding with the decreasing prominence of the torture frame in 2010, the public's support of the closing of the Guantanamo prison shrank slightly from 35% to 32%. Also, more strikingly, during the same period, public opinion opposing the closing of the Guantanamo prison rose, from 45% to 65% (Figure 1).

[Figure 1 about here]

### **Discussion**

#### *News media's resistance to the anti-terrorism frame*

One of the issues that this study explores is whether American news media played an independent role as a watchdog of the government's framing by challenging the Bush government's anti-terrorism frame rather than by acting as the government's guard dog and consistently reinforcing its frames. The Bush government had dismissed the claims of the torture of terrorist prisoners in the Guantanamo prison as merely baseless and absurd allegations. This study proposes that there is undeniably a framing contest over the Guantanamo prison issue, and, more specifically, between the torture frame and the anti-terrorism frame. Also, it suggests that the examination of frames in the news coverage of *The New York Times* can disclose in more detail how *The New York Times* has covered the controversy over the closing of Guantanamo Bay prison during the Bush and Obama administrations and to what degree it challenged Bush's anti-terrorism frame.

The findings show that, during the Bush administration, 57.4% of content-analyzed paragraphs were coded as using the torture frame, while only 21.3% used the anti-terrorism frame. More remarkably, in Time period 1 (November 8, 2004-June 19, 2005) and Time period 2

(June 20, 2005-July 8, 2007), the percentages of the use of the torture frame are 64.6% and 63.0%, respectively. This shows that *The New York Times* vigorously challenged Bush's anti-terrorism frame for the Guantanamo prison issue. More specifically, in an editorial, *The New York Times* claimed that, "The horrible abuses at Abu Ghraib and other American prison camps badly damaged the nation's image as a defender of human rights" (2005, March 3). *The New York Times* made an unusual apology for not examining more critically "the George W. Bush administration's claims on the nature of the threat from Iraq in the months preceding the U.S.-led invasion" (Gamson, 2005, p. 325-326). Given this, it is possible that *The New York Times'* strong criticism of the Bush administration's Guantanamo policy might be due to its own belief that it did not properly play its watchdog role after September 11, 2001, and during the beginning of the Iraq War. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, in the op-ed section, 95.4% of analyzed paragraphs used the torture frame.

In the examination of the usage of anti-Guantanamo terms, this study shows that the anti-Guantanamo terms, which associate the Guantanamo prison issues in a negative light, are more frequently found in coverage during the Bush administration than the Obama administration. The average number of anti-Guantanamo terms is .30 in the Bush period, while it is .15 in the Obama period. These results indicate that *The New York Times* was more apt to portray the Guantanamo prison issue in the context of the torture controversy, e.g., in a way that opposed the Bush government's viewpoint, when Bush was in power.

Overall, *The New York Times* has carried extensive coverage of the Guantanamo prison issue. It has elevated the Guantanamo issue to a national agenda item, because it voiced the judgment that the harsh interrogations or forms of torture carried out against the terrorist prisoners there has the power to damage the reputation of the United States as a leading country

in the world. In this respect, irrespective of how much *The New York Times* affected public opinion or the execution of anti-terrorism policies during the Bush administration, the paper's efforts to counter the anti-terrorism frame of the Bush government are notable. *The New York Times*' greater emphasis on the torture frame as a counterframe is also worth mentioning, considering that the U.S. media did not defy President Bush and his government officials during the beginning of the Iraq war in 2002 and 2003. This study demonstrates that, as a representative national news medium in foreign affairs and political areas in the U.S., *The New York Times* fiercely challenged President Bush's "War on Terror" frame.

In conclusion, *The New York Times* showed itself a powerful and consistent challenger to the Bush administration on the Guantanamo issue by using more torture framing than anti-terrorism framing in their coverage. This study shows that *The New York Times*' news coverage can be understood in the context of the "cascading activation" model proposed by Entman, who asserted that the news media could play an independent role in reporting without being constrained by the government's official framing.

#### *The NYT's moderate tone during the Obama period*

This study also shows that, since the start of the Obama administration in January of 2009, both the torture frame and the frequency of anti-Guantanamo terms diminished in the news coverage of *The New York Times*. There might be two reasons for this trend. First, President Obama declared Guantanamo prison to be a symbol of torture and promised to close it down in a year, saying that the United States will no longer torture. Thus, among journalists, the newsworthiness of disclosing the harsh interrogations of the Guantanamo prison may have diminished because the Obama government already acknowledged some kinds of wrongdoing

and injustices which had been practiced in the Guantanamo prison, and the torture controversy thus became “old news.” Also, *The New York Times* and the Obama government share a similar “torture frame” perspective in viewing the Guantanamo prison issue. These circumstances may make *The New York Times* less inclined to aggressively use the torture frame in its news coverage.

Second, the major concern behind the Guantanamo prison issue was transferred from the controversy over whether torture was done (or is being done) to how the U.S. government should close down the prison, or how the U.S. government should try the terrorist prisoners using due process, and reduce the possible risks of releasing those prisoners. As a result, it was understandable that negative responses to the closing of the Guantanamo prison should ensue, as in fact they have. This fact has probably boosted the use of the anti-terrorism frame in news coverage while, at the same time, the torture frame has declined. Thus, it can be said that the torture frame ceased to function as a counterframe in the Obama period because of the change of presidents. In 2010, ironically, anti-terrorism has become a counterframe to President Obama’s torture frame. Not surprisingly, the conservative media, such as Fox news or conservative blogs, now use the anti-terrorism frame as a counterframe against President Obama’s torture frame in their news coverage.

#### *The NYT’s limited impact on public opinion*

This study examined to what degree or in which direction *The New York Times*’ coverage of the Guantanamo prison issue influenced public opinion about the closing of the prison. The findings show that there is no significant correlation between *The New York Times*’ emphasis on the torture frame and public opinion on the Guantanamo issue. That is to say, *The New York*

*Times*' coverage did not have an impact on the public's judgment about the closing of the Guantanamo prison. There are two possible ways to explain this result.

First, *The New York Times*' framing might be outweighed in the public's mind by the "War on Terror frame." Reese (2007) points out that the War on Terror "has been institutionalized as a way of looking at the world, with far-reaching ramifications for U.S. policy" (p. 152). Possibly, the War on Terror frame can be a kind of window on the world outside in the post-Cold War period. This frame might actually affect public attitudes and behaviors and, thus, the public's evaluation of national security issues, to an extent that limits the independent influence of *The New York Times* on public opinion about the Guantanamo prison issue. In the end, due to the War on Terror frame, the public might be more concerned with possible terrorist attacks and the weakening of national security, even though it remains convinced that there had been harsh interrogations and even torture at the Guantanamo prison. This concern might hamper public support for closing down the Guantanamo prison.

Second, the diversification and complexity of the news media in the Internet environment might restrict *The New York Times*' influence on public opinion. Even though *The New York Times* is an influential news medium in the U.S., its influence on the public may be more confined than it once was because of the increasing power of the cable news channels (e.g., Fox TV, MSNBC, and CNN) and new media news sources such as blogs and social media. The public are more exposed to various media outlets by the Internet, rather than being constrained to just reading newspapers or viewing network TV news. Also, possibly, the conservative media's emphasis on the anti-terrorism frame, which mainly coincides with the Bush government's foreign policy, might make the public less willing to support the closing of the Guantanamo prison.

*Concern about the closing of Guantanamo prison in the Obama period*

Since President Obama declared, in January of 2010, that the Guantanamo prison will be closed down within a year, public opinion opposing the closing of the Guantanamo prison increased rapidly from 45% in January of 2010 to 65% in May of the same year, a comparatively short period of a mere four months. During the same period, the use of the torture frame by *The New York Times* was 40.3%, much less than the 57.4% average in the Bush period. This study does not claim that the *increase* in public opinion opposing the closing of the Guantanamo prison is due to the *decreased* prominence of the torture frame in *The New York Times* during the period January–May, 2010. However, this decrease might have affected public opinion about the closing of the Guantanamo prison *to some degree* even though we must assume that there were surely other factors which also affected it.

In short, since President Obama promised to close the Guantanamo prison within a year of his assuming office, concern for national security may have increased among the public. Former Vice President Dick Cheney criticized President Obama's Guantanamo policy, saying that "to ban waterboarding, close the Guantanamo Bay detention center in Cuba and stop labeling detainees as enemy combatants" makes the country less safe (2009, March 15). On the other hand, in 2010, there have been many news reports that the terrorist prisoners from the Guantanamo prison will be transferred to the continental U.S. and the trials of terrorist prisoners will be held in U.S. civil courts. Those news reports may also fuel concerns for national and local security, because of the possibility that terrorists responsible for 9/11 might, potentially, be brought into the country in the future. In addition, it is plausible that conservative media such as Fox News could have played a crucial role in bolstering the anti-terrorism frame by covering

extensively the concerns and assertions of Bush administration officials such as former Vice President Cheney.

This study has some limitations. First, this study content-analyzed only the news content of *The New York Times*; content analysis of more varied media outlets, including TV and Internet media, was not conducted. It might be claimed that a content analysis of a single paper's contents is not enough to trace the media messages' impact on public opinion about the closing of the Guantanamo prison. We need to examine the difference in the frames used by the various news media outlets. Also, in order to track the NYT's impact on the public opinion about the closing of the Guantanamo prison, a more powerful time series analysis should be considered in a future study. Second, this study did not analyze the speeches or press releases made by government officials. A further study should investigate empirically the government's actual frames by analyzing the speeches made by the President, government officials and legislators, and then compare the government's frames with the media's frames. Third, the source of the framing devices used by the news media has not been analyzed. If this study had considered the sources used in each news paragraph, it could have disclosed where the challenging frames (e.g., human rights groups, politicians, and the NYT itself) opposing the government frame came from. Also, it would have provided a clearer picture of how media frames are indexed among diverse sets of news sources, including government officials.

In spite of these weaknesses, this study produced useful findings of how *The New York Times* challenged the government's framing of the Guantanamo issue. Furthermore, this study illuminated the changing landscape of the state-media relationship in a part of the period after the end of the Cold War and, more specifically, to what degree *The New York Times* was independent in challenging the "War on Terror" frame or anti-terrorism in the post-9-11, period.

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Table 1. Poll trend about closing of Guantanamo Bay prison

Poll Date	June 16-19, 2005 (Gallup/USA Today/CNN)	July 6-8, 2007 (USA today/Gallup)	Dec. 11-14, 2008 (ABC/Washingt on Post)	January 16-17, 2009 (Gallup)	May 29-31, 2009 (Gallup)
<b>Should close</b>	36%	33%	40%	35%	32%
<b>Should not close</b>	58%	53%	44%	45%	65%

Table 2. Torture vs. Anti-terrorism frame

	Anti-terrorism frame	Torture frame	Mixed frame	Total
Bush Administration	21.3 % (361)	57.4 % (972)	21.3 % (360)	100 % (1693)
Obama administration	28.3 % (148)	40.3 % (211)	31.4 % (164)	100 % (523)

\* $\chi^2$  (df=2)=47.485,  $p < .001$

Table 3. Torture vs. Anti-terrorism frame for five time periods

	Anti-terrorism frame	Torture frame	Mixed frame	Total
November 8, 2004 ~ June 19, 2005	19.4 % (74)	64.6 % (246)	16.0 % (61)	100 % (381)
June 20, 2005 ~ July 8, 2007	21.1% (93)	63.0 % (277)	15.9 % (70)	100 % (440)
July 9, 2007 ~ December 14, 2008	23.9 % (139)	50.0 % (291)	26.1 % (152)	100% (582)
December 15, 2008 ~ January 17, 2009	19.0 % (55)	54.5 % (158)	26.5% (77)	100% (290)
January 18,2009 ~ May 31, 2009	28.3 % (148)	40.3 % (211)	31.4 % (164)	100% (523)

\* $\chi^2$  (df=8)=82.102,  $p < .001$

Table 4. T-test of Pro-Guantanamo and Anti-Guantanamo terms

	Presidency	N=2216	Mean	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pro-Guantanamo	Bush	1693	.14	-1.376	.169
	Obama	523	.17		
Anti-Guantanamo	Bush	1693	.30	5.212	.000
	Obama	523	.15		

Table 5. Comparison of frames between News and Op-ed section

	Anti-terrorism frame	Torture frame	Total
News section	35.6% (495)	64.4% (894)	100% (1389)
Op-ed section	4.6% (14)	95.4% (288)	100% (302)

\* $\chi^2 (df=1)=113.313, p<.001$

Figure 1 Trend of Torture frame and polls (supporting closing of Guantanamo)

