

The politicians, the press and the people: the contested dynamic of framing Canada's military mission in Afghanistan.

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The politicians, the press and the people: the contested dynamic of framing mission in Afghanistan

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Abstract

This research's classic content analysis (n = 900) critically investigates the mediated dynamic of framing Canada's military mission in Afghanistan between 2006-2011. This study found that while journalists overwhelmingly interviewed news sources, they frequently fact checked the media frames sponsored by government and military leaders. Journalists used various criteria to evaluate and critique the media frames sponsored by military and government leaders. Most news coverage of the conflict was hegemonic, episodic and event-oriented rather than thematic and contextual. While Canadian news sources fact checked official claims of improving security, for instance, the news media's coverage of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan lacked broader critical appraisal. The abundance of fact checking by news professionals did not challenge hegemonic interpretations about the war, the military and Canadian foreign policy, raising questions about the normative role in Canadian democracy. This research also presents the findings of a population-based experiment (n = 1,131) aimed at testing the potential influence of fact checking and media discourse surrounding the news coverage of Afghanistan. This experiment found no statistically significant influence of fact checking on news consumption. Journalists may wish to re-think how they challenge the media messages of officials. This study argues that the current practice of fact checking – coupled with an abundance of episodic coverage – does not offer audiences the information needed to make considered decisions about issues and events. This research found that Canadians' attitudes about the role in Afghanistan are best understood as a confluence of media discourse, popular wisdom and experiential knowledge.

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