Matthew A. Baum’s

Sex, Lies and War:
How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public
Sex, Lies and War
Matthew A. Baum - University of California, Los Angeles
American Political Science Review, Vol. 96, No.1
March 2002

1) Introduction
2) Method
3) Arguments & Findings
4) Analysis
5) Questions
Introduction
## INTRODUCTION

### Hard and Soft News

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HARD NEWS</th>
<th>SOFT NEWS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News in the form of standard reporting common to such shows as:</td>
<td>News in the form entertainment common to such shows as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- NBC Nightly News</td>
<td>- Entertainment Tonight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ABC World News</td>
<td>- Oprah Winfrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- CNN</td>
<td>- Howard Stern Show</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Features of Soft News

Deals with celebrity gossip, crime dramas, disasters, sex scandals, and other human-interest stories.
A quantitative approach
Examines the relationship between media consumption and public attentiveness on high-profile foreign crises
Seeks to determine whether soft news increases awareness of politics and foreign affairs in a public that is normally uninterested
Findings are mainly based on previous scholarly works completed and secondary data resources

A significant amount of certain political and foreign policy stories are indeed covered in soft news

An inattentive public is incidentally engaged in politics, including foreign policy
Cognitively speaking, watching soft news expends less energy than hard news.

Soft news provides an entertainment value that is attractive and allows viewers to compare their lives to others.

Hard news does not provide an entertainment value and comparatively does not get into the human side of stories.
INTRODUCTION

Baum’s 4 Hypotheses

1) People watch soft news programs to be entertained versus learn about politics or foreign affairs

2) People uninterested in foreign affairs, yet consume soft news, are more attentive than those who consume neither
INTRODUCTION

Baum’s 4 Hypotheses

3) Viewers of soft news media:
   1) have a strong positive relation with foreign crisis attentiveness among those who have the lowest engagement in politics
   2) have a low positive relation to attentiveness among the most politically engaged

4) Less accessible or dramatic and more partisan political issues are more unlikely to be covered by soft news media
Sex, Lies and War
How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public

Method
Described the difference between hard and soft news media

Outlined previous scholarly works on the mass public’s attentiveness to politics

Collected a series of data showing TV program viewership behaviour

Statistically compared soft news and hard news viewership with viewers’ attentiveness to politics and foreign policy
Sex, Lies and War
How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public

Arguments & Findings
ARGUMENTS & FINDINGS

Viewership Behaviour

- Soft news allows for coverage of some high-profile political issues, including foreign crises, which have an influence on its viewers.
- Soft news viewers who watch sensationalized stories revolving around foreign policy and other similar stories form opinions on those stories and consequently vote in elections.
Soft news viewers are less supportive of American efforts abroad due to highly dramatized and provoking emotions.

- Especially among the uneducated.
ARGUMENTS & FINDINGS

Soft News’ Influence on Politics

- Soft news has brought more public awareness to foreign crisis scenarios and has consequently encouraged the increase in democratization of foreign policy.
- The government can no longer communicate solely through conventional means.
- The government is forced to strategically communicate to a soft news audience.
ARGUMENTS & FINDINGS

Significant Statistics

FIGURE 1. Probability of Following Foreign Crises *More* than “Not at all Closely,” as Interest in International Affairs and Soft News Consumption Vary

*How Closely Do You Follow International Affairs?*
- Not at all Closely
- Not Very Closely
- Somewhat Closely
- Very Closely

- **Israel-Lebanon**
  - Probability of following more than “Not at all Closely”
  - Soft News Exposure: Low to High

- **Anti-Terrorism Debate**
  - Probability of following more than “Not at all Closely”
  - Soft News Exposure: Low to High

- **Bosnia**
  - Probability of following more than “Not at all Closely”
  - Soft News Exposure: Low to High
Sex, Lies and War
How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public

Analysis
A thorough study providing the reader with a strong statistical analysis of whether soft news influences traditionally apolitical American audiences.

Soft news can be beneficial and may lead to a stronger voter base and more political involvement.

Soft news still may not accurately represent an issue and so may disseminate an incomplete or inaccurate representation.
Perhaps one is made aware of a crisis overseas through the lens of a mother who has lost her son in battle.

This may bring awareness to a specific overseas crisis, however it may serve no purpose toward attaining an educated opinion on the government’s policy in that region.
ANALYSIS

The Impact on Foreign Policy

- Helps policymakers understand the importance of soft news in the public and its impacts on traditionally apolitical individuals
- Soft news creates an active voice for the public
- Foreign policymakers can use this form of two-way communication to further understand the public’s concerns and beliefs
Sex, Lies and War
How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public

Questions
QUESTIONS

#1

Do you believe that soft news programs accurately provide its audiences with a source of ‘valuable’ political and foreign policy information?
In your opinion, do you believe that soft news media helps the mass public and foreign policymakers communicate?
Do you feel that the type of soft news program, and the audience it is directed to, have an influence on the voting habits of Americans?
Matthew A. Baum’s

Sex, Lies and War:
How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public