

# What Matters Most? Comparing Coverage of Trump's Decision to Withdraw from the Iran Deal in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*

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## **Abstract**

On May 8, 2018, President Trump announced his decision to pull the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal. This decision was argued to have serious consequences for the world, Iran, and the United States. By conducting a content analysis based on Chyi and McCombs's (2004) analytic framework, this study compares the coverage of the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Iran deal in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. The results show that while these newspapers had different positions regarding this foreign policy decision and its consequences, they mostly used the same frames to attack, praise, or report it. In both newspapers, Iran-related frames were marginalized, and the international frame concerned with the position of the United States in the world and among its allies was the dominant space frame.

**Keywords:** Analytic Framework; Content Analysis; Iran; New York Times; Nuclear Deal; Wall Street Journal; President Trump.

## Introduction

President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran deal might have a variety of international and domestic implications for Iran and the United States. Some journalists argued that it might make the Middle East safer by constraining Iran's activities,<sup>1</sup> and might strengthen the negotiating position of the United States with North Korea.<sup>2</sup> Some others debated that this decision could give the upper hand to hardliners in Iran, disappoint Iranians who are for reform and progress, and complicate the Middle East situation.<sup>3</sup> It might also undermine the U.S. position in the world, and damage international pursuits of peace and denuclearization in other countries.<sup>4</sup> A quick glance at the coverage of this issue shows that there has been no consensus regarding the consequences of this decision in the U.S. press and media.

The Iran nuclear agreement was achieved on July 14, 2015, between Iran and the P5+1 group (the five permanent U.N. Security Council members: Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany). Trump's decision directly affects other countries besides Iran, which were involved in this deal and agreed to lift international sanctions on Iran. Therefore, this decision is an international and multifaceted foreign policy choice and examining its coverage in U.S. news media can shed light on their approach to these issues.

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- 1 See for example Daniel Henninger, "America's So-Called Allies," *Wall Street Journal*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/americas-so-called-allies-1526511633> (Accessed on April 19, 2020).
  - 2 See for example Tod Lindberg, "Before Meeting Kim, Trump had to Repudiate the Iran Deal," *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/before-meeting-kim-trump-had-to-repudiate-the-iran-deal-1527029167> (Accessed on April 19, 2020).
  - 3 See for example Abbie Llewelyn, "Trump's Withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal 'Empowers Hardliners,' Warns John Kerry," *Express*, September 10, 2018, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1015274/Trump-news-Iran-deal-John-Kerry-CNN-interview-dangerous> (Accessed on April 19, 2020); Kay Armin Serjoie, "'The Americans Cannot Be Trusted.' How Iran Is Reacting to Trump's Decision to Quit Nuclear Deal," *Time*, May 9, 2018, <http://time.com/5270821/iran-nuclear-deal-trump-ayatollah-khameini-hassan-rouhani/> (Accessed on April 19, 2020).
  - 4 See for example Kevin Liptak & Nicole Gaouette, "Trump withdraws from Iran nuclear deal, isolating him further from world," *CNN*, May 9, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/08/politics/donald-trump-iran-deal-announcement-decision/index.html> (Accessed on April 19, 2020).

Communications scholars argue that news media play an essential role in shaping public opinion, especially regarding international topics, since compared to domestic issues, audiences rely more on them for being informed.<sup>5</sup> Due to Iran's geopolitical significance and its decisive role in the Gulf region, this country is a matter of great importance for American foreign policy, and consequently for public opinion in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, because of the position of the United States in the world, and the impacts of news media on policy makers' decisions and actions,<sup>7</sup> it is important to examine in what ways the U.S. press frames a multilateral foreign policy decision with different international and domestic implications.

The present study analyzes the media coverage of Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran deal. News articles, editorials, news analyses, and opinion pieces are collected from two mainstream American newspapers, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. This study extends Chyi and McCombs's<sup>8</sup> framework to compare the framing of this decision in these American newspapers with various political tendencies, and investigates how they presented this issue and what aspects of this decision were made more prominent than others. In the following sections, first, the pillars of Chyi and McComb's framework and the historical background of this research are explained. After elaborating on the research questions and the method of the study, results, discussion, and a conclusion are presented.

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- 5 Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
  - 6 William A. Dorman & Mansour Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign policy and the Journalism of Deference* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, "Preface," in Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh (ed.) *Boundary Politics and International Boundaries of Iran* (Boca Raton, FL.: Universal Publishers, 2006).
  - 7 Paul R. Brewer, Joseph Graf & Lars Willnat, "Priming or Framing: Media Influence on Attitudes toward Foreign Countries," *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies*, 65:6 (2003), pp. 493-508; Jim Willis. *The Media Effect: How the News Influences Politics and Government* (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 2007).
  - 8 Hsiang Iris Chyi & Maxwell E. McCombs, "Media Salience and the Process of Framing: Coverage of the Columbine School Shooting," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81:1 (2004), pp. 22-35.

## A Review of the Literature

While the present study builds upon Chyi and McCombs's<sup>9</sup> analytic framework, it is situated in a greater discourse about the salience of events and their framing in the news media. Thus, agenda setting and framing theory are the theoretical bases of this research.

### Agenda Setting

Agenda setting refers to the process by which specific issues, events, and topics get selected and highlighted by politicians or journalists, and consequently shape public perceptions on those issues.<sup>10</sup> Agenda setting enables politicians and journalists to single out some aspects of reality based on their interests and priorities and to ignore other aspects.<sup>11</sup>

McCombs<sup>12</sup> argues that one of the main goals of the agenda setting done by news media is to achieve consensus among members of society about the significance and importance of an issue or event. Journalists, by calling attention to some realities and ignoring others and by highlighting some aspects of those realities and dismissing others, not only tell the public what the critical issues of the day are<sup>13</sup> but also guide them to consider certain

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid; Maxwell E McCombs, Donald L. Shaw & David H. Weaver (eds.), *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-setting Theory* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1997).

11 Gregg Barak, "Media, Society, and Criminology," in Gregg Barak (ed.), *Media, Process, and the Social Construction of Crime: Studies in Newsmaking Criminology* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994); Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979); Maxwell E. McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978).

12 McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, *Communication and Democracy*.

13 Barak, "Media, Society, and Criminology;" Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," *Journal of Communication*, 57 (2007), pp. 163-173; Maxwell E. McCombs, "Building Consensus: The New Media's Agenda-Setting Roles," *Political Communication*, 14:4 (1997), pp. 433-443; Stephan D. Reese, "The Framing Project: A Bridging Model for Media Research Revisited," *Journal of Communication*, 57:1 (2007), pp. 148-154.

aspects of those issues as more important and relevant than others.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the way the public understands issues, their significance, and even their important attributes can be determined by media portrayals.<sup>15</sup>

In the case of Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran deal, the news media agenda setting and the attention that journalists attributed to this issue can be measured by the number of stories generated and the attributes that were emphasized in them. As mentioned before, journalists, by highlighting some features, attributes, or aspects of a story, can impact the way an issue is framed and presented to audiences. Framing theory as an extension of agenda setting shows how the stance and position of media can influence the audience's perceptions, lead them to consider some aspects as relevant and noteworthy and ignore others as irrelevant or inconsequential.

## Framing

According to Reese,<sup>16</sup> framing is a way of understanding the world based on particular interests, sources, communicators, and culture. Not only what is said, but also what is excluded is part of the process of framing.<sup>17</sup> Gamson and Modigliani<sup>18</sup> see a frame

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- 14 Salma I. Ghanem, "Filling in the Tapestry: The Second Level of Agenda Setting," in McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, *Communication and Democracy*; Spiro Kiouis, Philemon Bantimaroudis & Hyun Ban, "Candidate Image Attributes: Experiments on the Substantive Dimension of Second Level Agenda Setting," *Communication Research*, 26 (1999), pp. 414-428; Spiro Kiouis & Maxwell E. McCombs, "Agenda-setting Effects and Attitude Strength," *Communication Research*, 31:1 (2004), pp. 36-57; David H. Weaver, "Agenda-setting Effects among the Media, the Public, and Congress, 1946-2004," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 84: 4 (2007), pp. 729-744.
  - 15 Barak, "Media, Society, and Criminology;" Dietram A. Scheufele & David Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models," *Journal of Communication*, 57:1 (2006), pp. 9-20.
  - 16 Stephan D. Reese, "Prologue—Framing Public Life: A Bridging Model for Media Research," In Stephan D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy Jr. & August E. Grant (eds.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (Mahwah, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001).
  - 17 Claes H. De Vreese, Jochen Peter & Holli A. Semetko, "Framing Politics at the Launch of the Euro: A Cross National Comparative Study of Frames in the News," *Political Communication*, 18:2 (2001), pp. 107-122.
  - 18 William A. Gamson & Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology*, 95:1 (1989), pp. 1-37.

as a “central organizing idea” that indicates what is relevant or irrelevant and that presents the overall picture of a particular reality to the audience. Likewise, Tankard argues that a media frame is a “central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is, through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration.”<sup>19</sup>

Entman points out, to frame is “to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, different frames define problems or issues differently, and consequently lead to distinct moral evaluations and treatment recommendations. Entman defines “salience” as “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences.”<sup>21</sup>

Early studies of framing mostly adopted a textual analytical approach to find the salient frames or concepts and were criticized because of the subjective nature of their analysis.<sup>22</sup> In an effort to make framing analysis more objective, Chyi and McCombs<sup>23</sup> developed a two-dimensional measurement scheme to investigate frames. This framework is based on two dimensions of time and space that Chyi and McCombs believe “represent central organizing ideas in journalistic practice.”

In the two-dimensional measurement scheme, the space dimension consists of five levels: 1) Individual level: the news story is framed based on individuals involved in an event or issue, 2) Community level: the news story is framed based on a particular community, 3) Regional level: the news story is framed based on a more general population as in a state or similarly large area, 4) Societal level: the news story is framed based on

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19 James W. Tankard Jr., “The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing,” In Reese, Gandy Jr. & Grant, *Framing Public Life*, pp. 100-101.

20 Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication*, 43:4 (1993), p. 193.

21 Ibid, p. 53.

22 Catherine A. Luther & M. Mark Miller, “Framing of the 2003 U.S.-Iraq War Demonstrations: An Analysis of News and Partisan Texts,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82:1 (2005), pp. 78-96.

23 Chyi & McCombs, “Media Salience and the Process of Framing,” pp. 22-35.

its national and societal significance, and 5) International level: the news story is framed based on international concerns and perspectives. The time dimension in this framework is comprised of three levels: 1) Past: the news story is focused on previous events with no direct relevance to the main event or topic; 2) Present: the news story is focused on the main event or topic and its immediate consequences without majorly considering the past events leading to it or its future implications; and 3) Future: the news story is focused on the long term implications of the event and the solutions and actions that could be put into effect in that regard.

Based on Chyi and McCombs's<sup>24</sup> measurement scheme, this project seeks to examine and compare how the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* covered Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal. The goal is to examine how journalists presented this decision and what frames they used in this regard. This measurement scheme is a good fit for this project's topic since Trump's decision has different aspects and implications for Iran, the United States, and the world. Furthermore, five other countries were involved in reaching the nuclear agreement with Iran, and this decision has direct consequences for those countries' foreign relations and their economies.

U.S. news media coverage of foreign diplomacy has been criticized for being ethnocentric<sup>25</sup> and elite-driven.<sup>26</sup> Baum and Potter<sup>27</sup> argue that in regard to the coverage of foreign policy, U.S. media is not likely to fulfill its watchdog role and question the officials' acts and their consequences in the world. Prior research has shown that in coverage of Middle Eastern countries, U.S. media are focused on the U.S. position and

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24 Ibid.

25 John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1987); John Vivan, *The Media of Mass Communication* (Essex: Pearson, 2006).

26 W. Lance Bennett, "Toward a Theory of Press-state Relations," *Journal of Communication*, 40:2 (1990), pp. 103-125; W. Lance. Bennett, "The News about the Foreign Policy," in W. Lance Bennett & David L. Paletz (eds.), *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence & Steven Livingston, *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

27 Matthew A. Baum & Philip B. K. Potter, "Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11:1 (2008), pp. 39-65.

whether those countries serve U.S. interests or not.<sup>28</sup> American news media are also criticized for relying on familiar schemes and stereotypes and ignoring the complexity of politics in those countries. This research extends these studies by investigating the U.S. press coverage of a situation in which a Middle Eastern country and five nations in addition to the United States, are involved. In the case of Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran deal, journalists have to explain various groups' positions and concerns, and elaborate on this decision's multidimensional consequences for their audiences.

## Historical Background

In June 2013, Hassan Rouhani, a moderate politician, became the 11<sup>th</sup> president of Iran. Since solving the nuclear issue of Iran with the world and seeking better ties with the West were among Rouhani's campaign slogans, three days after his inauguration, he announced his willingness to resume nuclear negotiations with the P5+1 group. Shortly afterwards, Iran's new president spoke on the phone with then-president of the United States, Barack Obama, about Iran's nuclear program and the future of negotiations in this regard. On October 15 and 16, 2013, the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 started in Geneva.

On November 24, 2013, the interim deal, titled the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was agreed upon between Iran and the six world powers in Switzerland. Finally, after 20 months of negotiations, on July 14, 2015, Iran and the P5+1 group reached a historic accord. Based on this agreement, Tehran, in return for lifting international and

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28 Andrea L. Guzman, "Evolution of News Frames during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: Critical Discourse Analysis of Fox News's and CNN's Framing of Protesters, Mubarak, and the Muslim Brotherhood," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 93:1 (2016), pp. 1-19; Dina Ibrahim, "Framing of Arab Countries on American News Networks Following the September 11 Attacks," *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 1 (2008), pp. 279-296; Dina Ibrahim, "The Framing of Islam on Network News Following the September 11<sup>th</sup> Attacks," *International Communication Gazette*, 72 (2010), pp. 11-125.



financial sanctions, for ten years underwent “the toughest inspections and verification-inspection regime ever imposed in an arms-control deal.”<sup>29</sup>

After the deal was announced, the reactions of news media toward this agreement ranged from entirely positive<sup>30</sup> to utterly negative.<sup>31</sup> During the 2016 United States presidential election debates, the Republican nominee, Donald J. Trump, described the Iran nuclear deal as “one of the worst deals ever negotiated,”<sup>32</sup> and announced that dismantling the deal and renegotiating the whole thing would be his top priority after assuming office.<sup>33</sup>

Since the election of Donald Trump in November 2016, the Iran nuclear deal has seemed fragile and uncertain, and it was predicted that this agreement would not survive President

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- 29 Robin Wright, “Trump Destroys the Iran Deal—and a Lot More,” *New Yorker*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trump-destroys-the-iran-dealand-a-lot-more> (Accessed on April 19, 2020).
  - 30 Richard Javad Heydarian, “Iran Nuclear Deal is a Triumph of Diplomacy,” *Aljazeera*, August 8, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/07/iran-nuclear-deal-triumph-diplomacy-150726121334719.html> (Accessed on April 19, 2020); Nahal Toosi, “Scholars: Iran Deal Will Stabilize Mideast,” *Politico*, August 27, 2015, <https://www.politico.com/story/2015/08/iran-deal-praised-for-stabilizing-mideast-121778> (Accessed on April 19, 2020).
  - 31 Karen DeYoung, “McCain Says Iran Deal Increases Risk of Middle East,” *Washington Post*, July 29, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/mccain-says-iran-deal-increases-risk-of-middle-east-conflict/2015/07/29/720b5322-35fa-11e5-b673-1df005a0fb28\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/mccain-says-iran-deal-increases-risk-of-middle-east-conflict/2015/07/29/720b5322-35fa-11e5-b673-1df005a0fb28_story.html) (Accessed on May 13, 2020); Loveday Morris & Hugh Naylor, “Arab States Fear Nuclear Deal Will Give Iran a Bigger Regional Role,” *Washington Post*, July 14, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/arab-states-fear-dangerous-iranian-nuclear-deal-will-shake-up-region/2015/07/14/96d68ff3-7fce-4bf5-9170-6bcc9dfe46aa\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/arab-states-fear-dangerous-iranian-nuclear-deal-will-shake-up-region/2015/07/14/96d68ff3-7fce-4bf5-9170-6bcc9dfe46aa_story.html) (Accessed on April 19, 2020); Missy Ryan, “Disagreement over Iran Deal Hangs over Netanyahu’s Meeting with Carter,” *Washington Post*, July 21, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/defense-secretary-meets-with-netanyahu/2015/07/21/57cf7d8c-2f09-11e5-818f-a242f28e7022\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/defense-secretary-meets-with-netanyahu/2015/07/21/57cf7d8c-2f09-11e5-818f-a242f28e7022_story.html) (Accessed on May 13, 2020).
  - 32 Ariane Tabatabai, “How to Ensure the Iran Nuclear Deal Survives the Next President,” *New York Times*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/20/opinion/how-to-ensure-the-iran-nuclear-deal-survives-the-next-president.html> (Accessed on April 19, 2020).
  - 33 Jenna Johnson, “‘I Will Give You Everything.’ Here Are 282 of Donald Trump’s Campaign Promises,” *Washington Post*, November 28, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/i-will-give-you-everything-here-are-282-of-donald-trumps-campaign-promises/2016/11/24/01160678-b0f9-11e6-8616-52b15787add0\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.e0371210ef8c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/i-will-give-you-everything-here-are-282-of-donald-trumps-campaign-promises/2016/11/24/01160678-b0f9-11e6-8616-52b15787add0_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e0371210ef8c) (Accessed on April 19, 2020); Nick Wadhams, “Shredding Iran Nuclear Deal May be Harder than Trump Thinks,” *Bloomberg*, December 1, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-12-02/shredding-iran-nuclear-deal-could-prove-harder-than-trump-thinks> (Accessed on April 19, 2020).

Trump's first term in office.<sup>34</sup> After firing Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, who were both against the withdrawal of the United States from the Iran deal, and replacing them with "Iran Hawks," John Bolton as National Security Advisor and Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State, the likelihood of the United States' pullout from the deal became stronger.<sup>35</sup> Finally, Trump stated some conditions and gave the deadline of May 12, 2018, to the U.K., Germany, and France, as well as to the U.S. Congress to fix his concerns including unlimited access to Iran nuclear sites for atomic energy inspectors, putting more limitations on Iran's uranium enrichment, and issuing a ban on ballistic missile testing by Iran.

However, some days ahead of the May 12 deadline, on May 8, 2018, with Trump's announcement of his decision to pull the U.S. out of the Iran deal, "the Obama's administration's signature foreign-policy achievement"<sup>36</sup> was unraveled. The former president of the United States, Barack Obama, described this withdrawal as an act which left the world less safe.<sup>37</sup> According to him, this decision left the world with only two options: a nuclear-armed Iran or another war in the Middle East.

The President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, reacted to this withdrawal by acknowledging that despite the United States' decision, if other countries involved in the negotiations continue to collaborate with Iran, his country might stay in the deal.<sup>38</sup> However, Rouhani also mentioned that his country was prepared to start nuclear enrichment if staying in the deal was no longer effective for Iran. Overall, Trump's decision to withdraw from

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34 Holly Ellyatt, "Iran Nuclear Deal 'Won't Outlast Trump's First Term' in Office," *CNBC*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/30/iran-nuclear-deal-wont-outlast-trumps-first-term-in-office.html> (Accessed on May 13, 2020).

35 Colum Lynch & Elias Groll, "Trump Taps Uber-Hawk Bolton as National Security Advisor," *Foreign Policy*, March 22, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/22/trump-taps-uber-hawk-bolton-as-national-security-adviser/> (Accessed on April 19, 2020).

36 Wright, "Trump Destroys the Iran deal—and a Lot More."

37 Mark Landler, "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned." *New York Times*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-nuclear-deal.html> (Accessed on April 22, 2020).

38 Wright, "Trump Destroys the Iran deal—and a Lot More."

the Iran deal was considered a landmark of the foreign policy decisions in his presidency, with serious domestic and international repercussions.<sup>39</sup>

Because of the multifaceted nature of this decision and its implications, journalists were faced with a complex foreign policy situation. By using the framing theory and applying Chyi and McCombs's<sup>40</sup> measurement scheme, this study investigates how journalists from two American mainstream newspapers presented this decision and its implications, and gave a coherent view of this complicated foreign policy development to their audiences.

In this research, the following questions are addressed:

Research Question 1: How many stories about the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Iran deal were published by the *New York Times* (NYT) and the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ)?

Research Question 2: What is the distribution of the space frames across the five levels—individual, regional, societal, community, and international—in the *NYT* and *WSJ*?

Research Question 3: What is the distribution of the time frames across the three levels—past, present, and future—in the *NYT* and *WSJ*?

Research Question 4: What is the distribution of the position of the piece across three categories – critical, supportive, and ambiguous in the *NYT* and *WSJ*?

Research Question 5: Are there any differences in the use of the space and time frames when comparing the coverage of the *NYT* and *WSJ*?

Research Question 6: Are there any differences in the distribution of the position of pieces when comparing the coverage of the *NYT* and *WSJ*?

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39 See for example Ian Bremmer, "How President Trump's Iran Deal Decision Could Backfire," *Time*, May 8, 2018, <https://time.com/5270395/president-donald-trump-iran-decision-backfire/> (Accessed on April 19, 2020); Richard Ottaway, "Donald Trump's Decision on the Iran Nuclear Deal Could Have a Disastrous Ripple Effect on the Fight against Terrorism," *Independent*, May 6, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/iran-nuclear-deal-donald-trump-jcpoa-a8338716.html> (Accessed on May 13, 2020).

40 Chyi & McCombs, "Media Salience and the Process of Framing," pp. 22-35.

## Method

Content analysis was used to answer the research questions. For the period of 30 days following Trump's announcement of his decision to withdraw from the Iran deal on May 8, including the day of the announcement (from May 8, 2018 to June 6, 2018), the researcher conducted full-text keyword searches for "Iran" and "deal" in *Nexis Uni* to collect *NYT* articles and in *Factiva* to collect *WSJ* articles. The *Wall Street Journal* and The *New York Times* were selected because both of these newspapers are among the elite press in the United States; regarding international news, especially, they are considered to be leading media.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, these newspapers have different political inclinations, and their comparison can show how journalists with different perspectives frame an international policy issue. The *Wall Street Journal* is described as having a conservative viewpoint.<sup>42</sup> Carr<sup>43</sup> argues that this journal has adopted a more conservative tone after it was purchased by Rupert Murdoch. The *New York Times* is regarded as liberal,<sup>44</sup> and its editorial page is described as following the same political orientation.<sup>45</sup>

Among the texts that the initial search revealed, the ones discussing Trump's decision to withdraw from the deal as one of their main subjects were selected for further coding. If the main subject of an article was an issue other than Trump's decision (e.g., oil prices),

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- 41 William A. Hachten, & James F. Scotton, *The World New Prism: Challenges of Digital Communication* (8<sup>th</sup> Edition) (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2012); Foad Izadi & Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria, "A Discourse Analysis of Elite American Newspaper Editorials: The Case of Iran's Nuclear Program," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 31:2 (2007), pp. 140-165.
  - 42 Richard Vetter, "Wall Street Journal," in Bruce Frohnen, Jeremy Beer & Nelson O. Jeffrey (eds.), *American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia* (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006), pp. 898-899.
  - 43 David Carr, "Under Murdoch, Tilting Rightward at the Journal," *New York Times*, December 13, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170223011945/http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/14/business/media/14carr.html> (Accessed on April 23, 2020).
  - 44 Aaron Blake, "Ranking the Media from Liberal to Conservative, Based on their Audiences," *Washington Post*, October 21, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/10/21/lets-rank-the-media-from-liberal-to-conservative-based-on-their-audiences/> (Accessed on May 13, 2020).
  - 45 Larry Atkins, *Skewed: A Critical Thinker's Guide to Media Bias* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2016);

but the impacts of Trump's decision on that matter were expanded on in the article, it was still chosen for the coding process – since the goal of this research was to see whether journalists elaborated on Trump's decision and considered different aspects and consequences of it. The same procedure was applied to the *NYT* Weblog and *WSJ* Online stories. To avoid duplication of data, online items which were also published in a paper version were excluded, and the paper versions were kept for coding. Letters to the editor and passing references that marginally mentioned the Iran deal and Trump's decision were excluded. That reduced the total number of items to 126; among those, 68 items were for the *NYT* and 58 for the *WSJ*.

**Coding.** Each news article, editorial, news analysis, and op-ed piece was considered a unit of analysis. A unit of analysis was coded based on six criteria: Name of the publication, article category, paper or online version, time frame, space frame, and position of the piece. Based on the study by Chyi and McCombs,<sup>46</sup> the time frame in this study consisted of three levels: 1) Past: focus on events/developments about the nuclear negotiations and the deal in the past to explain Trump's decision; 2) Present: focus on events/developments surrounding Trump's decision and its immediate consequences with no direct or significant discussion of future effects; and 3) Future: focus on the long-term effects of Trump's decision. Based on Schwartz and Willis,<sup>47</sup> if several time frames were used in a piece, the one that was most often found was selected. The number of paragraphs with different time frames were counted and the most frequent frame was coded.

Based on the measurement scheme of Chyi and McCombs,<sup>48</sup> the space frame consisted of five levels: individual, community, regional, societal, and international. However, since the two countries of Iran and the United States were the main subjects of this decision and its consequences, the community and societal levels had two subcategories each—one for each country. The international level was also divided into two subcategories, one for the international position of the U.S., and the other for world affairs. Furthermore, each level of the space variable was defined based on the context of this study. For example, in this

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46 Chyi & McCombs, "Media Salience and the Process of Framing," pp. 22-35.

47 Joseph Schwartz & Aaron Willis, "Coverage of Methamphetamine in GLBT Newspapers," *Mass Communication and Society*, 13:1 (2009), pp. 30-47.

48 Chyi & McCombs, "Media Salience and the Process of Framing," pp. 22-35.

study, the regional level, which in Chyi and McCombs<sup>49</sup> was defined as a geographically broader area (e.g., metropolitan area or state), refers to the Middle East that is the region Iran is located in.

The five levels of space frames for the coders to choose from were: 1) Individual level: focusing on Trump, his administration, or his personal reasons to make this decision (e.g., arguing that Trump withdrew from the Iran deal to shred Obama's foreign policy legacy); 2) Regional level: focusing on the impact of this decision on the Middle East (e.g., arguing that this decision might bring more chaos to this region); 3.1) Societal level 1: focusing on the impact of this decision on Iranian society (e.g. arguing that this decision might disappoint Iranians hoping for reform and better foreign relations); 3.2) Societal level 2: focusing on the impact of this decision on American society (e.g., mentioning its impact on the price of oil in the U.S. markets); 4.1) Community level 1: focusing on the impact of this decision on the community of politicians or politics in Iran (e.g., arguing that this decision emboldens hardline politicians in Iran and encourages this country to pursue nuclear weaponry); 4.2) Community level 2: focusing on the impact of this decision on American politics and the community of politicians in this country (e.g., arguing that it might lead to more polarization in American politics); 5.1) International level 1: focusing on the impact of this decision on world affairs (e.g., how it influences international goals of peace and denuclearization); and 5.2) International level 2: focusing on the impact of this decision on the position of the United States in the world or among its allies (e.g., arguing that this decision negatively affects relations between the U.S. and European countries). Based on Chyi and McCombs,<sup>50</sup> the dominant frame of a piece was determined by the headline, lead, and central organizing idea for the story. In case a story contained multiple attributes, similar to the time frame coding, the coders chose the most frequently found frame in a piece.

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49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

Since, in contrast to former research done with the two dimensional framing scheme,<sup>51</sup> this research was about a political issue and the goal was to see whether journalists criticized and considered different aspects of this issue, each unit of analysis was also coded based on the position of the piece towards Trump's decision to withdraw from the deal. The position of the piece consisted of three categories: 1) Critical: the piece was coded as critical if the author questioned Trump's decision, its justifications, or consequences, or if the majority of statements from sources in a news article were critical of Trump's decision. 2) Supportive: the piece was coded as supportive if the author supported Trump's decision or the most frequently found statements in a news article were supportive of Trump's decision, its justifications, or consequences. 3) Divided/Ambiguous: the piece was coded as divided or ambiguous if the author or most of the statements in an article were neutral or expressed conflicting information about Trump's decision, its justifications, or consequences.

The author of the study served as the main coder. For reliability purposes 27 stories (21.4 percent) were coded by another coder. Using Scott's Pi, the level of agreement was .90 for the time frame variable, 0.89 for the space frame variable, and 0.87 for the position of piece variable.

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51 Williams P. Cassidy, "Inching Away from the Toy Department: Daily Newspapers Sports Coverage of Jason Collins' and Michael Sam's Coming Out," *Communication and Sport* (2016), pp. 1-20; Chyi & McCombs, "Media Salience and the Process of Framing," pp. 22-35; Glenn W. Muschert & Dawn Carr, "Media Salience and Frame Changing across Events: Coverage of Nine School Shootings, 1997-2001," *J&MC Quarterly*, 83:4 (2006), pp. 747-766; Jaclyn Schildkraut & Glenn W. Muschert, "Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools: A Comparison of the Columbine and Sandy Hook Massacres," *Homicide Studies*, 18:1 (2014), pp. 23-43; Joseph Schwartz & Julie L. Andsager, "Sexual Health and Stigma in Urban Newspaper Coverage," *American Journal of Men's Health*, 2:1 (2008), pp. 57-67; Schwartz & Willis, "Coverage of Methamphetamine in LGBT Newspapers," pp. 30-47.

## Results

RQ1 addresses the number of stories published by *NYT* and *WSJ* during the first 30 days after Trump's announcement. Overall, 126 stories were published in the *NYT* and the *WSJ* about the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal during the 30-day period. There were 68 stories (54%) that were published in the *NYT* and 58 stories (46%) published in the *WSJ*.

Among these 126 stories, 94 items (74.6%) were news articles, 23 (18.3%) were opinion pieces, 5 (4%) were editorials, and 4 (3.2%) were news analyses. There were 80 stories (63.5%) published in print and 46 (36.5%) were published online.

RQ2 looks at the distribution of space frames across the five levels: individual, regional, societal, community, and international. The results show that the international level concerned with the position of the U.S. in the world and relations with U.S. allies was the most dominant space frame ( $n = 42$ , 33.3%). The second most dominant space frame was the international level, focusing on the impacts of this decision on world affairs ( $n = 22$ , 17.5%). Individual and regional frames were each covered by 20 stories (15.9%), and they were the third most dominant space frames in the analyzed stories. The community of politicians in Iran ( $n = 9$ , 7.1%), the U.S. societal level ( $n = 7$ , 5.6%), the Iranian societal level ( $n = 5$ , 4%), and the community of politicians in the U.S. ( $n = 1$ , 0.8%) were respectively the least prominent space frames overall in the stories in the *NYT* and the *WSJ*.



**Table 1.** Distribution of the Space Frames in the Coverage of Trump's Decision

	<b>NYT</b>	<b>WSJ</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Individual</b> Percent within Publication	<b>16</b> 23.5	<b>4</b> 6.6	<b>20</b> 15.9
<b>Regional</b> Percent within Publication	<b>7</b> 10.3	<b>13</b> 22.4	<b>20</b> 15.9
<b>Societal</b> Percent within Publication	<b>5</b> 7.3	<b>7</b> 12.1	<b>12</b> 19.4
Societal (Iran) Percent within Publication	2 2.9	3 5.2	5 4.0
Societal (U.S.) Percent within Publication	3 4.4	4 6.9	7 5.6
<b>Community</b> Percent within Publication	<b>7</b> 10.3	<b>3</b> 5.2	<b>10</b> 7.9
Community (Iran) Percent within Publication	6 8.8	3 5.2	9 7.1
Community (U.S.) Percent within Publication	1 1.5	0 0.0	1 0.8
<b>International</b> Percent within Publication	<b>33</b> 48.6	<b>31</b> 53.5	<b>64</b> 50.8
International (World Affairs) Percent within Publication	11 16.2	11 19.0	22 17.5
International (U.S. Position) Percent within Publication	22 32.4	20 34.5	42 33.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>126</b>

Table 1 shows that the international level, concerned with the U.S. position in the world and among its allies, was the most prominent space frame in both the *NYT* ( $n = 22$ , 32.4%) and the *WSJ* ( $n = 20$ , 34.5%). The second most prominent space frame was the individual level ( $n=16$ , 23.5%) in the *NYT* and the regional level ( $n = 13$ , 22.4%) in the *WSJ*. The third most prominent space frame in both newspapers was the international level, concerned with world affairs, with 11 stories in each publication. The *NYT* covered the regional level ( $n = 7$ , 10.3%), the Iranian politicians' community level ( $n = 6$ , 8.8%), the societal level (U.S.) ( $n = 3$ , 4.4%), the societal level (Iran) ( $n = 2$ , 2.9%), and the U.S. politicians community level ( $n = 1$ , 1.5%) as the least prominent space frames in the stories. The

*WSJ* covered the individual level ( $n = 4$ , 6.6%), the societal level (U.S.) ( $n = 4$ , 6.9%), the societal level (Iran) ( $n = 3$ , 5.2%), the community of Iranian politicians level ( $n = 3$ , 5.2%), and the community of U.S. politicians ( $n = 0$ ) as the least prominent space frames in the stories.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the Time Frames in the Coverage of Trump's Decision

	Past	Present	Future	Total
<b>NYT</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>68</b>
Percent within Publication	4.4	22.0	73.5	
<b>WSJ</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>58</b>
Percent within Publication	1.7	3.44	94.8	
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>126</b>

RQ3 addresses the distribution of time frames across three levels: past, present, and future. Table 2 shows that the future time frame was the most prominent time frame for both the *NYT* and the *WSJ* ( $n = 105$ , 83.3%). The present level ( $n = 17$ , 13.5%) and the past level ( $n = 4$ , 3.2%) accounted for far fewer time frames than the future level. The *NYT* had 50 (73.5%) stories in the future time frame, 15 (22.1%) in the present, and 3 (4.4%) in the past. The *WSJ* had 55 (94.8%) stories in the future, 2 (3.4%) in the present, and 1 (1.7%) in the past time frame.

**Table 3.** Distribution of the Position of Pieces in the Coverage of Trump's Decision

	NYT		WSJ	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>Critical</b>	51	75.0	13	22.4
<b>Supportive</b>	1	1.5	15	25.9
<b>Divided/Ambiguous</b>	16	23.5	30	51.7
<b>Total</b>	68	100	58	100

(Chi-Square (2,  $n = 126$ ) = 38.522,  $p < .001$ )

RQ4 looks at the distribution of the position of the pieces across three categories: critical, supportive, and ambiguous. Among the 126 stories, 64 (50.8%) were critical of Trump's decision, 16 (12.7%) were supportive, and 46 (36.5%) were divided or ambiguous.

As seen in table 3, among 68 stories published in the *NYT*, 51 (75%) were critical of Trump's decision, 1 (1.5%) was supportive, and 16 (23.5%) were divided or ambiguous. Among the 58 pieces published in the *WSJ*, 13 (22.4%) were critical, 15 (25.9%) were supportive, and 30 (51.7%) were divided or ambiguous.

**Table 4.** Distribution of the Space Frames in the Coverage of Trump's Decision (2 Categories)

	U.S.-Centered	International	Total
<b>NYT</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>68</b>
Percent within Publication	61.8	38.2	
<b>WSJ</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>58</b>
Percent within Publication	48.4	51.7	
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>126</b>

(Chi-Square (1, n = 126) = 2.307, p = .129)

RQ5 examines differences between the use of the space and time frames in the *NYT* and the *WSJ*. In order to meet the statistical assumptions of conducting a reliable Chi-Square analysis, the frame categories were collapsed into two categories of U.S. centered and international. The space frames about the United States (individual, societal [U.S.], community [U.S.], and international level concerned with the position of the U.S.) were put in the U.S. centered category and the space categories concerned with the countries other than the United States (regional, societal [Iran], community [Iran], and international level concerned with world affairs) were put in the International category. The Chi-Square results show that the overall difference in the distribution of space frames among the *NYT* and the *WSJ* was not significant,  $X^2(1, n = 126) = 2.307, p = .129$ . 61.8% of the *NYT* stories and 48.3% of the *WP* stories were in the U.S. centered category.

Since our data for the time frames violated the cell frequency assumption of the Chi-Square, this measurement could not be used for this question. However, as table 2 shows, the future category was the most prominent time frame in both newspapers. While both

newspapers rarely used the past time frame, the *NYT* stories with the present time frame ( $n = 15, 22\%$ ) were more than the *WSJ* ( $n = 2, 3.4\%$ ).

RQ6 examines differences between the distribution of positions of the pieces in the *NYT* and the *WSJ*. Chi-Square results show that there is a significant difference between the distribution of positions of piece categories in the *NYT* and the *WSJ*,  $X^2(2, n = 126) = 38.522, p < .001$ . The majority of pieces in the *NYT* are critical of Trump's decisions and its consequences ( $n = 51, 75\%$ ), and the majority of pieces in the *WSJ* ( $n = 30, 51.7\%$ ) are ambiguous/divided toward this decision.

## Discussion

This study compared the coverage by the *NYT* with that of the *WSJ* in regard to the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal. As mentioned before, the *NYT* and the *WSJ* are two American mainstream newspapers with different political tendencies, and it is important to examine how journalists in these newspapers informed the public of this important foreign policy decision with significant consequences for Iran, the United States, and the world. This study adds to the body of literature about the framing of foreign policy issues in American media<sup>52</sup> and also extends the application of Chyi & McCombs's<sup>53</sup> analytic framework to political and especially foreign policy topics.

The numbers of published stories in the *NYT* ( $n = 68$ ) and *WSJ* ( $n = 58$ ) during the 30-day period following the announcement of Trump's decision show that these newspapers both considered this issue important and newsworthy. The number of stories with the future time frame also demonstrates that these newspapers portrayed this decision as a

52 Yehudith Auerbach & Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, "Media Framing and Foreign Policy: The Elite Press vis-à-vis U.S. Policy in Bosnia, 1992-95," *Journal of Peace Research*, 42:1 (2005), pp. 83-99; Cynthia Boaz, "War and Foreign Policy Framing in International Media," *Peace Review*, 17:4 (2006), pp. 349-356; Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Daniela V. Dimitrova & Jesper Strömbäck, "Foreign Policy and the Framing of the 2003 Iraq War in Elite Swedish and U.S. Newspapers," *Media, War & Conflict*, 1:2 (2008), pp. 203-220; Dower, *War without Mercy*.

53 Chyi & McCombs, "Media Salience and the Process of Framing," pp. 22-35.

consequential issue of foreign diplomacy. Overall, the results demonstrate that the coverage of this issue is comparable between the *NYT* and the *WSJ*, with one significant difference.

This study shows that, while the *NYT* and *WSJ* had different positions regarding Trump's decision and its consequences, they mostly used the same time and space frames to present this topic and their views about it. The *WSJ* stories criticized Trump's decision much less than the *NYT*, and they were mostly ambiguous/divided toward this issue (51.7%). However, the *WSJ* and the *NYT* were similar to each other in regard to having a remarkable number of their stories in the frames related to the United States.

The *NYT* stories, which were more critical of Trump's decision (75 percent), were mostly in the U.S. centered category (61.8 percent). Even in the stories with international perspectives, both newspapers were more concerned with the position of the U.S. in the world and among its allies than with international issues such as the future of denuclearization and the peace and safety of the world. It is important to mention that among the international level stories concerned with world affairs, six out of eleven in the *WSJ* and eight out of eleven in the *NYT* were about the consequences of this decision on the world's oil supply and oil prices. Although the oil supply and its prices were framed as international issues in those stories, it is clear that they were still closely related to the United States and the future of oil importing to this country. Therefore, if we exclude oil-related stories from the international level category focused on world affairs, there remain just five stories (8.6 percent) in the *WSJ* and three stories (4.4 percent) in the *NYT* concerned with international issues outside of the United States.

The *NYT* also used the individual frame more than the *WSJ* (23.6 percent vs. 6.6 percent). This outcome shows that this newspaper, in order to criticize Trump's decision, attacked his personality and his personal reasons for this foreign policy choice.

Neither newspaper elaborated upon the social or political situation in Iran. While there were various negative predictions in regard to the social and political future of Iran after this decision, the *NYT*'s pieces, which were mostly critical of Trump's decision, did not expand on those aspects. Just 2.9 percent ( $n = 2$ ) and 8.8 percent ( $n = 6$ ) of the *NYT* stories were on the societal (Iran) and Iranian politicians' community levels respectively.

Overall, these results show that the *NYT* and the *WSJ* were significantly different in their positions regarding Trump's decision and its consequences, but they mostly used the same

time and space frames to attack, praise, or report this foreign policy topic. In both newspapers, Iran-related frames were marginalized and the international level concerned with the position of the United States in the world and among its allies was the dominant space frame.

## Conclusion

Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran deal is an example of a foreign policy decision with significant implications for Iran, the Middle East, and the peace and stability of the world. However, as the results of this study show, the coverage of this decision and its consequences in two mainstream American newspapers was more U.S. centered than international. American journalism is criticized for not paying enough attention to international issues and what goes on in the rest of the world, unless those issues affect the United States.<sup>54</sup> It is criticized for being self-centered, parochial, and focused on domestic news and entertainment,<sup>55</sup> and this research does not suggest otherwise.

Since the United States is one of the most powerful nations in the world and its decisions have huge impacts on other countries, this U.S.-centric position of American journalism can disregard important aspects and consequences of U.S. foreign policy in the world. As media and foreign policy scholars argue, when it comes to foreign affairs, it is mostly the media coverage that informs the American public about the decisions of their executive officials and their consequences.<sup>56</sup> This kind of journalism can distort the understanding

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54 Richard Profozich, "Foreign News Coverage: How American Journalists Report the World and How They Report Us," *Global Media Journal*, 1:5 (2009), pp. 1-18.

55 Pablo J. Boczkowski & Seth Lewis, "The Center of the Universe No More: From the Self-centered of the Past to the Relational Stance of the Future," in Pablo J. Boczkowski & Zizi Papacharissi (eds.), *Trump and the Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018); Profozich, "Foreign News Coverage," pp. 1-18.

56 Matthew A. Baum & Tim Groeling, "Reality Asserts Itself: Public Opinion on Iraq and the Elasticity of Reality," *International Organization*, 64: 3 (2010), pp. 443-479; Richard A. Brody & Catherine R. Shapiro, "Policy Failure and Public Support: The Iran-Contra Affair and Public Assessment of President Reagan," *Political Behavior*, 11:4 (1989), pp. 353-69; Tim Groeling & Matthew A. Baum, "Crossing the Water's Edge: Elite Rhetoric, Media Coverage and Rally-round-the-flag Phenomenon," *Journal of Politics*, 70:4 (2008), pp. 1065-1085; Hallin. *The Uncensored War*.

of the American public about U.S. international policies and the fact that their effects go beyond the boundaries of the United States. Furthermore, a public informed by vague and incomplete coverage of foreign policies could be more easily manipulated and kept in the dark by officials.

These results might be explained by the reliance of U.S. journalists on American official sources<sup>57</sup> and/or the dominance of the market model of journalism that leads American journalists to provide their audience with what they want and dismiss the aspects of a story that are not interesting for them.<sup>58</sup> Especially in this study, the dominance of the frames regarding oil prices and the impact of this decision on the position of the United States in the world politically and economically can well be justified by the arguments of scholars that news media are increasingly concerned with providing financial news for their business clients.<sup>59</sup> While this study's scope cannot determine the causes of this situation, it shows that in the coverage of Trump's decision, the *NYT* and *WSJ* mostly dismissed the international consequences of this foreign policy and left their audience in the dark in that regard.

Filtering international and foreign policy news through the narrow lens of American centrism and its interests not only leads to ignorance on the part of the American public regarding their government's acts and consequently their failure to keep officials accountable for their decisions, but it can also have a severe impact on American foreign policy and make it more insular and U.S. centered. It is argued that media are among the main tools for American officials to assess U.S. public opinion,<sup>60</sup> and they can further

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57 Bennett, "Toward a Theory of Press-state Relations," pp. 103-125; Entman, *Projections of Power*; Regina G. Lawrence, "Accidents, Icons, and Indexing: The Dynamics of News Coverage of Police Use of Force," *Political Communication*, 13 (1996), pp. 437-454

58 Rachel Davis Mersey, *Can Journalism be Saved? Rediscovering America's Appetite for News* (Santa Barbara, CA.: Praeger, 2010).

59 Mel Bunce, "Management and Resistance in the Digital Newsroom," *Journalism*, 20:7 (2019), pp. 1-16.

60 Piers Robinson, "Media and U.S. foreign policy," in Michael Cox & Doug Stokes (eds.), *U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Warren P. Strobel, "The Media Influencing Foreign Policy in the Information Age," *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda*, 5:1 (2000), pp. 37-39.

empathy or indifference toward different groups of people.<sup>61</sup> If politicians feel that citizens care only about the United States, and the watchdog role of American journalism is at work only in regard to U.S. interests, Americans become less concerned with world affairs and the consequences of their government's decisions for other nations and countries.

Overall, this research extends the prior argument about the parochialism of American journalism. The decision of President Trump to withdraw from the Iran deal was a significant foreign policy choice with significant implications for Iran, the Middle East, and the world. However, the results of this paper show that even in the *NYT* articles, which were mostly critical of this decision, these international consequences were covered only marginally. The importance of this decision in these newspapers was presented in terms of the United States and its position in the world and among its allies.

This research has several limitations. It is about one foreign policy decision of an executive official, and future research should look at other instances. The analysis of this research is limited to the news coverage of this decision. Further research is required to investigate the causes of this coverage as this cannot be done through textual analysis of news coverage, and requires methods such as ethnographic observation and interviewing journalists. Moreover, while research shows that public opinion is impacted by news media coverage,<sup>62</sup> it is also argued that audiences have their own way of understanding and framing issues.<sup>63</sup> To understand how the American public understood Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran deal, further research should be done, as this knowledge is also not achievable through textual analysis of the news.

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61 Matt Evans, "Framing International Conflicts: Media Coverage of Fighting in the Middle East," *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 6 (2010), pp. 209-233; Robinson, *The CNN Effect*.

62 See, for example, Brewer, Graf & Willnat, "Priming or Framing," pp. 493-508; Willis. *The media effect*.

63 Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," pp. 51-58.



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