Does John Bull Rally ‘Round the Union Jack?

The Nature of the “Rally ‘Round the Flag” Effect in the United Kingdom, 1950 - 2000

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Abstract

The “rally ‘round the flag” effect literature has focused too narrowly on the United States, limiting our ability to understand whether rally effects are a generic product of democratic political institutions or a product of the particular political culture and geopolitical status of the U.S. This article takes a step towards remedying this problem by conducting the most systematic study to date of rally effects in the United Kingdom. Rally effects are measured by changes in the popularity of the prime minister, government, and party following 76 Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) between 1950 and 2001. Bringing recent refinements in the rally literature to bear on the British case, we emphasize the potential role of opinion leadership, media coverage, and a discerning public that differentiates between the purposes for which force is employed. As in the United States, there is no automatic, sizeable rally effect in the United Kingdom: the mean change in approval is 0.6%. Larger rallies arise when the UK is acting as part of a multilateral coalition and is not taking a revisionist stance, and when disputes are more severe. Unlike the United States, opposition behavior and media coverage do not exert a strong influence on the size of rallies. In general, our findings suggest that the British public is discerning and “pretty prudent” in its responses to the use of force abroad.
Introduction

In the more than thirty years since John Mueller coined the phrase “rally ‘round the flag” effect (Mueller 1970, 1973), a vast amount of research has investigated the link between international conflict and political support for the president. Yet for all its achievements, nearly all of this literature focuses exclusively on the United States. As a consequence, we have little idea whether rally effects are a generic product of democratic political institutions, or whether they are the product of the United States’ particular political culture, super-power status, or presidential political system. As democratic political institutions spread across the globe and the influential democratic peace literature spurs interest in the linkage between domestic political arrangements and foreign policy, understanding the dynamics of rally effects takes on greater importance, making this gap in our knowledge even more troubling. It is time for the rally literature to move beyond the United States. In this paper we take a step towards exploring the generalizability of the “rally ‘round the flag” effect by undertaking the most comprehensive and systematic study to date of rally effects in the United Kingdom.

Just as the rally effects literature has much to gain from a study of the United Kingdom, so can the small body of literature investigating rallies in the United Kingdom benefit from recent refinements of the rally literature on the United States. The early rally effect literature portrayed rallies as large, uniform, and the automatic products of reflexive patriotic reactions from the public. Yet recent refinements have painted a much more nuanced picture, emphasizing the highly contextual nature of rally responses. Instead of knee-jerk patriotic reactions, the recent rally literature emphasizes opinion leadership, media coverage, and a discerning public that differentiates between the purposes for which force is employed (Baker and Oneal 2001; Brody and Shapiro 1989; Jentelson 1992). However, these insights have failed to make their way into the handful of studies on rally effects in the United Kingdom. Most work on rallies in the United Kingdom focuses exclusively on the dramatic epi-
sode of the Falkland Islands War (Clarke, Mishler, and Whiteley 1990; Norpoth 1987, 1987; Sanders, Ward, and Marsh 1987), and the handful that investigate a wider range of events (Lanoue and Headrick 1994, 1998) fail to take into account recent refinements in the rally thesis. All suffer from selection bias by focusing on events known to have generated widespread media coverage and strong popular reactions. Testing recent refinements of the rally hypothesis on the United Kingdom thus yields twin benefits by both assessing their generalizability to other democracies and improving our understanding of the mechanisms generating rallies in the UK.

To engage these two literatures, we conduct the largest systematic study of rally effects in the United Kingdom to date. Whereas other studies of rally effects in the United Kingdom limit themselves to at most a handful of rally events, we investigate up to 76 conflicts drawn from an independently compiled data set (the latest revision of the Militarized Interstate Dispute data) spanning five decades of British politics, from 1950 to 2000. To test recent refinements of the rally thesis in the British context, we create an original data set of media coverage and opposition party behavior. We also code disputes for various characteristics that may affect the British public’s disposition to respond favorably. Our findings indicate that the “rally ‘round the flag” effect clearly operates in the United Kingdom, although in ways that are both similar and dissimilar to the United States. As in the United States, rallies in the United Kingdom are neither automatic nor necessarily even positive; the public’s response is variable and contingent on the context of conflict. Like the American public, the British public is “pretty prudent” (Jentelson 1992) and is more likely to rally when the UK is not taking revisionist actions and when it is acting as part of a multilateral coalition. In contrast to the US, we find little effect for media coverage and opposition behavior in shaping rally dynamics until recent years. Public responses are neither automatic reflexes of patriotism nor mediated echoes of opinion leadership, but instead appear to be a discerning judgment of the dispute.

The following section reviews developments in the “rally ‘round the flag” literature
in both the United States and the United Kingdom. We then discuss measurement issues arising when studying rallies in the British context, followed by a first cut at examining rally effects in the UK that presents our explanatory variables by way of exploring bivariate relationships. These are followed by a series of multivariate regression analyses. In the conclusion, we discuss similarities and differences between rally effects in the United Kingdom and United States, and discuss the implications of our findings for the possibility of diversionary behavior by British governments.

The Rally ‘Round the Flag Effect

The Early Rally Literature

The rally ‘round the flag effect first appeared in a seminal analysis of Presidential popularity by John Mueller (1970, 1973).¹ Mueller suggested that international events elicit a patriotic response from the public, who subsequently rally behind the President to show a united front to international adversaries. According to Mueller, a potential rally event must satisfy three characteristics: it “(1) is international and (2) involves the United States and particularly the president directly; and it must be (3) specific, dramatic, and sharply focused” (1973, 209). Rally events must be international because dramatic domestic events can just as easily be divisive as unifying; they must include the United States directly because it is unlikely that the public will be aware of, or have much interest in, conflicts primarily between other countries; they must be specific, dramatic, and sharply focused to ensure that the public is both aware of and interested in an event.

Mueller compiled 34 rally points spanning the administrations of Truman and Johnson and falling into six categories, including sudden American military intervention, major military developments in ongoing wars, major diplomatic events, dramatic technological developments, meetings between the President and the head of the Soviet Union, and Presi-

¹ Mueller in turn cites earlier work by Richard Neustadt, Tom Wicker, Nelson Polsby, and others suggesting the possibility of a link between presidential popularity and international crises.
Mueller initially attempted to make a distinction between “good” and “bad” rally events. A “good” rally event represented a policy success (such as the successful resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis) and was thus thought likely to elicit public support. In contrast, policy failures (such as the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion) were dubbed “bad” rally events, and expected to yield a brief surge in opinion followed by a steep decline. However, in one of the most dramatic and influential findings of the early rally literature, Mueller found no statistically significant difference between “good” and “bad” rally events. Rallies appeared to be “knee jerk” reactions to dramatic international events. Mueller ultimately concluded that rally events caused surges in Presidential popularity of from five to six points, and lasted for substantial periods of time.

Samuel Kernell (1978) elaborated and refined Mueller’s model of Presidential popularity. To focus on international events, Kernell eliminated Presidential inaugurations as rally events. Other processes, such as a “halo” or “honeymoon” effect, are likely to be operating during the first few months of a President’s term, and including such events as rallies may lead to spuriously high estimates of any rally effects arising from international disputes. Kernell also assumed that rally events, after an initial spike, had a gradually diminishing effect on Presidential popularity up to only five months, after which their effect was negligible. Even with these restrictions, Kernell again found that rally events increase Presidential popularity, but also that the effect depended heavily upon the President’s previous popularity and the salience of the international event.

While making minor refinements to Mueller’s argument and methodology, Kernell and other “first wave” research (Lee 1977; MacKuen 1983; Sigelman and Conover 1981) broadly supported Nelson Polsby’s earlier intuition that “the short-run popular response to a president during an international crisis is favorable, regardless of the wisdom of the policies he pursues” (Polsby 1971). In general, the first wave of literature concluded that rally effects were automatic, relatively uniform, substantial in size, and largely unrelated to policy success or failure.
Refinements of the Rally Thesis

More recently, the rally thesis has been significantly refined and qualified. In contrast to early research, the more recent literature finds that rallies in response to military crises are generally small, highly variable in their effects, and are contingent upon a number of contextual factors (Baker and Oneal 2001; Brody 1984; Brody and Shapiro 1989; Brody 1991; Jentelson 1992; Jentelson and Britton 1998; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995). Among other criticisms, recent authors argue that the early literature suffered from biased case selection that almost guaranteed the presence of a large rally by focusing on events known to have garnered widespread attention and strong reactions.

Seeking to explain variance in the size and duration of rallies, Brody and Shapiro (1989) investigate 65 events in their reconsideration of the rally phenomena. Forty-one of these cases were taken from Kernell (1978), and the data set was expanded to extend through the Reagan administrations. In contrast to the first generation literature, Brody and Shapiro found that 23 rally events, or 35% of the total, actually resulted in a decline in presidential approval. They argue that opinion leadership accounts for the observed variance.

Immediately following an international incident, the government has a relative monopoly on information, and as a result opposition leaders are unable to criticize effectively the government for fear of appearing uninformed. Instead, they remain silent, or even offer cautious support, temporarily short-circuiting the partisan debate that normally characterizes democratic politics. As a result, “the press and television accounts of the ‘politics’ surrounding the event will be unusually full of bipartisan support for the president’s actions” (Brody and Shapiro 1989). The public therefore forms their initial opinions based almost solely on information coming from the president or his administration, and from cautiously supportive opposition leaders. When presented with such a high degree of elite unity, the public rallies behind the president.
However, as the administration’s information monopoly erodes with time and more information becomes available, opposition leaders will begin to criticize the president’s performance during a crisis if the policies appear questionable. The public accordingly updates their opinions based upon conflicting information coming from the administration and the opposition, and their initial support evaporates, perhaps even falling back below pre-crisis levels (Brody 1984; Brody and Shapiro 1989).

Jentelson (Jentelson 1992; Jentelson and Britton 1998) also argues that contextual factors shape public opinion, focusing on the principal policy objective for which force is used. According to Jentleson, the “key distinction is between force used to coerce foreign policy restraint by an adversary engaged in aggressive actions against the United States or its interests, and force used to engineer internal political change within another country whether in support of an existing government considered an ally or seeking to overthrow a government considered an adversary” (1992, 50) The public is expected to support foreign policy restraint, but to be wary of efforts to force internal political change in foreign countries.²

Jentleson does not directly measure Presidential approval; instead, he measures support directly for military operations. Controlling for a halo effect following a rapid victory, Jentleson finds that foreign policy restraint is far more popular than internal political change.³ Moreover, despite the fact that the public is thought to base their foreign policy views on a limited amount of information, Jentleson (1992) finds that “Americans do appear to have a much more pragmatic sense of strategy than they are given credit for - an approach to the world that is actually ‘pretty prudent’ when it comes to military force.” Although not directly a study of the rally effect, the implications of Jentleson’s analysis are clear: when gauging potential rally responses to the use of force abroad, the type of event matters.

² In his initial study, Jentleson investigated eight uses of limited military force during the 1980’s, including the deployment of marines to Lebanon, the invasion of Grenada, the bombing of Libya, reflagging and naval operations in the Persian Gulf, the invasion of Panama, and military aid to rebels in Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and El Salvador. Jentelson considered the Gulf War also, recognizing that it was a considerably more serious use of force than the other episodes he surveyed.
³ These findings were replicated in a follow-up study covering several later uses of military force (Jentelson and Britton 1998).
In contrast to Jentleson’s qualitative analysis of a small number of episodes, Lian and Oneal (1993) analyzed 102 major uses of force from 1950 to 1984, as identified by Belchman and Kaplan (1978) and Zelikow (1987). The mean rally effect for the 102 cases is zero, even within the President’s own party. In only 37% of the cases did the President actually enjoy a rally. Larger rallies were associated with prominent coverage in the New York Times, a high level of crisis severity, and low levels of popularity prior to the use of force. Approval actually tended drop when crises occurred during ongoing wars and periods of post war disillusionment. Public statements from the President or members of his cabinet showed no discernible effect on the rally.4

Building on this analysis, Oneal and Bryan (1995) investigated 41 foreign policy crises over the period 1950-1985, as identified by the International Crisis Behavior Project (ICB) (Brecher, Wilkenfeld, and Moser 1988). The average rally effect was again small -- only 1.4% -- and in 37% of the cases the President’s popularity actually declined. Coverage in the New York Times, and an ongoing war, proved to be the most significant factors governing the rally effect. After controlling for the effects of an ongoing war, headline coverage in the New York Times increased the rally by eight points; conversely, after controlling for media coverage, an ongoing war reduced the rally by four points. Coverage in the New York Times is in turn affected by the nature of the President’s response, Soviet involvement, and statements from both the administration and the opposition. Neither statements from the administration or the opposition, nor any measure of crisis severity, was found to influence the rally effect.

Baker and Oneal (2001) conducted the most comprehensive and systematic investigation to date of the rally effect in the United States. Using the Militarized Interstate Dispute

4 Lian and Oneal also separately examine a much smaller subset of more prominent and serious disputes, drawing on 36 foreign policy crises identified by the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) project (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1988). Even with a limited number of prominent cases, the mean rally effect is still only one percent, and along with the increase in the average rally effect also comes an increase in the rally variance.
(MID) data set, they investigated 193 militarized disputes spanning the time period 1933 to 1992. They found that the mean rally effect was essentially zero, and that when rallies did occur, they were generally small and contingent upon a number of contextual factors. Specifically, larger rallies were associated with prominent media coverage, higher levels of hostility, public statements from the president and cabinet, bipartisan support from the opposition, low levels of prior approval for the president, longer time to the next election, and disputes in which the United States was both the originator and revisionist. Decreases in approval were associated with criticism from the opposition and involvement in ongoing wars.

Previous Research on British Rally Effects

The small amount of research on rally effects in the United Kingdom in many ways resembles the “first generation” rally literature in the United States. Paralleling Mueller’s pioneering study in many ways, Lanoue and Headrick (1994) construct a model of party popularity spanning the period 1953-1987. Along with economic performance variables, they include the Falklands War and a handful of rally events, including the resignation of Winston Churchill, the Suez Crisis, and the attempted assassination of Margaret Thatcher in 1984.

Lanoue and Headrick (1994) note that, since the 1960’s, the popularity of the prime minister has become an increasingly important determinant of the popularity of the party. This is the result of a de-alignment process in which the parties weakened and the public increasingly focused on the prime minister to evaluate the governing party. Accordingly, they reason that non-economic factors (such as wars and rally events) should exert a direct influence on the popularity of the prime minister, but operate only indirectly on party popularity through the prime minister. Their results proved inconclusive for the effects of non-economic variables, producing rather weak evidence of a rally effect in the United Kingdom.
Rectifying short-comings in their previous analysis, Lanoue and Headrick (1998) once again attempt to measure the effect of non-economic variables on party and prime minister popularity. They focus exclusively on the period of de-alignment and the rise of the “presidential” prime minister by modeling the thirty-year period from 1964-1994. Their new model once again includes the Falklands War, but also includes an expanded list of rally events including the Persian Gulf War, the attempted assassination of Margaret Thatcher in 1984, and the IRA mortar attack on Number 10 Downing Street in 1991. With these modifications, Lanoue and Headrick (1998) conclude that non-economic factors such as rally events influence party popularity indirectly through the popularity of the prime minister. Measuring the effect of rally events directly through the prime minister, they find that the Falklands War and other events increase the prime minister’s popularity by between six and eight points.

The remaining rally literature in the United Kingdom deals extensively (and exclusively) with the Falklands War. While most authors agree that a rally occurred, there is much debate surrounding the size and duration of the rally, as well as the relative effect of economic and international variables on the popularity of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative party.

Norpoth (1987a, 1987b) concluded that the Falklands War of 1982 earned Mrs. Thatcher and the Conservative party a significant rally of eleven percentage points. According to Norpoth, the rally decayed slowly, so that even a year later, during the 1983 general elections, it earned the Conservative party an additional five percentage points. Norpoth also investigated the effect of macroeconomic factors on popularity, concluding that high unemployment had substantial negative effects, whereas inflation was largely insignificant. Despite the effects of macroeconomic variables, Norpoth ultimately concludes that it was the
Falklands War that caused a surge in Conservative popularity that lasted through until the 1983 elections, greatly aiding Thatcher’s effort to win re-election.

In sharp contrast to the analysis of Norpoth, Sanders, Ward, and Marsh (1987) conclude that macroeconomic factors, and not the Falklands War, were at the root of the surge in Conservative popularity. They argue that prior to the outbreak of war, Conservative popularity was already on the upswing as a result of improving personal economic expectations, and that the large boost in Conservative popularity coinciding with the Falklands War would have occurred even in its absence. They conclude that the Falklands rally was actually only worth three percentage points, and lasted for only three months. These conclusions have not gone uncontested, however. Questioning Sanders et. al.’s operationalizations of economic variables as well as their use of stepwise regression, Clarke, Mishler, and Whitely (1990) base their analysis on Box-Jenkins time series methods and include arguably more appropriate economic variables. They find that even taking into account sizeable and significant economic effects, the Falklands rally was significant and long lasting.

On a slightly different tack, Morgan and Anderson (1999) make the assumption that rally ‘round the flag effects do occur in the United Kingdom their point of departure, and seek to test a refined version of the diversionary theory of conflict. Emphasizing the British tradition of government by cabinet, Morgan and Anderson focus on the cabinet as the primary decision maker, arguing that diversionary behavior is likely when the government itself enjoys adequate approval but approval ratings for the party are low. Using the MID data set, they ultimately conclude that diversionary behavior does indeed exist in the United Kingdom, and that governments opportunistically attempt to take advantage of (presumed) rally effects.

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5 Obviously government and party approval are strongly correlated, as Morgan and Anderson acknowledge.
Limitations of the UK Rally Literature

The literature on “rally ‘round the flag” effects in the United Kingdom suffers from three limitations: a small number of cases, biased case selection, and a failure to take into account recent refinements in work on the rally effect. First, studies limit themselves to a handful of cases: the largest number of rally events investigated in any one study is very small (only four cases). Such a limited number of cases provide poor evidence of a generalized pattern and limit our ability to study its potential mechanisms. Moreover, many of the case selection rules repeat the vague standards that plagued early studies of the rally effect in the United States (for example, by including Winston Churchill’s resignation, whereas the rally effect focuses on international events). Secondly, the rally events investigated are almost exclusively wars or events known to have generated strong public reactions. A great deal of research has (understandably) centered on the Falklands War, and Lanoue and Headrick (1998) include the Gulf War among their list of rally events. However, it is generally accepted that wars are capable of producing rallies (at least at their outset), and it is therefore not surprising to find that the Falklands War, or the Gulf War, produced observable gains in popularity: focusing only on wars creates a bias towards finding large and significant rally effects. What remains to be investigated is whether the public will rally behind militarized disputes short of war, how large these rallies are, and what factors they are contingent upon. Finally, research on rallies in the United Kingdom has failed to take into account recent refinements in the study of rally effects in the United States. Whereas recent studies of rallies in the US emphasize the importance of opinion leadership (Brody and Shapiro), the type of incident (Jentelson), and contextual factors such as severity of dispute or prominence of media coverage (Oneal and co-authors), studies of the United Kingdom have not moved beyond “first wave” characterizations of the rally effect.
To investigate systematically the rally effect and its potential mechanisms in the United Kingdom, we will consider all of the Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs), as defined by the Correlates of War project (COW), involving the UK from 1950-2001, a total of 76 MIDs. A Militarized Interstate Dispute is defined as “united historical cases of conflict in which the threat, display or use of military force short of war by one member state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state” (Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996). The latest update of the MID data set (Ghosn and Palmer, 2003) covers the years 1816-2001, and contains data on more than 2,000 militarized disputes. For each dispute, relevant data such as the participants, the start date, and the hostility level is provided.

Since the start dates provided by the MID data set were often inappropriate for our purposes, we have recoded several of them. For those disputes that began suddenly, or lasted less than a month, the original start date was used. However, for those disputes that developed gradually, or lasted long periods of time, a new start date was needed. Disputes in which force is ultimately used may develop gradually over the course of several weeks or months with an escalating chain of events beginning with threats and a gradual increase in tensions. These disputes have been recoded to coincide with the first use of force. For example, the Falklands War was recoded to coincide with the Argentine invasion on April 2nd, in contrast to the MID coding which marks the start date with a series of threats that began on March 1st. Other disputes never escalate to violence, but nevertheless can mature over long periods of time. These disputes have been recoded to coincide with the point at which the highest level of hostility was reached, such as a deployment of warships.

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6 The latest version, 3.0, of the MID dataset records UK involvement in 87 disputes from 1950 to 2001. Due to various data limitations, the largest sub-sample we are able to analyze is 76.
7 For a detailed analysis of the MID data set see Jones, Bremer, and Singer (1996).
Measuring Approval of British Governments and Polling Data

In various forms, monthly approval ratings are available across the period 1950 – 2001. We compiled polling data from the Gallup Political Index (later to become the Gallup Political and Economic Index) and from King, Wybrow, and Gallup (2001). Gallup conducts monthly surveys in the United Kingdom, targeting roughly one to two thousand respondents over the period of one week. Starting in 1986, Gallup began the Gallup 9000 (later renamed the Gallup Index), in which each poll targeted roughly 9,000 respondents over the period of one month. Gallup did, however, continue their weekly polls as well. For our purposes, polls conducted over the period of one week are far more useful than those conducted over the period of one month. Accordingly, weekly polls were used to calculate every rally except for rare occasions when only Gallup 9000 data was available.

In a parliamentary system, there are potentially three different relevant actors when considering rally effects: the prime minister, the government, and the ruling party. The approval rating of the ruling party was determined by the Voting Intentions C-Series question that reads, “If there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for? If don’t know: Which party are you most inclined to vote for?” with the choices being “Conservative, Labour, Liberal, or Other.” The approval rating of the government was determined by the percentage of respondents who answered “Approve” to the question “Do you approve or disapprove of the Government’s record to date?” For the Prime Minister, the approval rating was determined by the percentage of respondents who answered “Satisfied” to the question “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with (the incumbent) as Prime Minister?”

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8 The relative utility of each will be discussed below.
9 Despite the forced choice nature of the question, some respondents still answer “Don’t Know,” and percentages are recalculated to sum to 100% after the removal of these “Don’t Knows.”
Which of these questions is most appropriate for studying the rally effect? The British tradition of government by cabinet suggests that the government may be the relevant decision maker in the United Kingdom, and not the prime minister. Whereas presidents in the United States exercise near autonomy when it comes to the use of military force, the parliamentary system constrains the prime minister to collective decisions made jointly with the cabinet. There is, however, substantial evidence that the role of the prime minister has become “presidentialized” over the past decades, and that this change pre-dates the popularly cited transformation starting with Margaret Thatcher. Lanoue and Headrick (1994) note that since the 1960’s, the popularity of the prime minister has become increasingly linked to the popularity of the party, representing a “presidentialization” of the prime minister’s role. Of equal importance, it appears that non-economic variables (such as wars and rally events) influence the popularity of the prime minister directly, but influence the popularity of the governing party only indirectly through the popularity of the prime minister (Lanoue and Headrick 1998). These results seem to indicate that it is reasonable to assume that the public directly evaluates the Prime Minister during militarized conflicts and international crises.

Using governing party support as a rally indicator poses an additional problem, arising from the very nature of the question used to evaluate governing party support. While the approval of the prime minister and the government are evaluated directly by the above-mentioned questions, the voting intentions question used to assess party support addresses ideology more than support for the government. While the questions may be related, there is a difference between asking whether a respondent is pleased with the performance of the prime minister (or the government) and asking which party a respondent would vote for in the next election. It is plausible (indeed very likely) that a member of the Labour party could be satisfied with the performance of a Conservative prime minister during a conflict, but at
the same time still intend to vote Labour at the next general election, or vice versa. Therefore, the Gallup question about party support does not directly tap changes in popular support for the prime minister and government in response to international events.

Accordingly, we argue that the Prime Minister, and possibly the government, is the most appropriate actor with which to model the rally effect. Despite the problems with using governing party support, we also explored it because the voting intentions question is the only one asked regularly throughout the 1950’s, and since close to 30 disputes occurred during this time period it will be advantageous to keep this measurement of approval. We therefore compiled three data sets corresponding to the three different actors, although we only present results using our preferred measure: approval of the prime minister.\(^\text{10}\)

To calculate the rally associated with each MID, the last poll conducted before the dispute was subtracted from the first poll conducted after the start of the dispute. Unfortunately, for many polls conducted in the 1950’s, the exact polling dates were not reported.\(^\text{11}\) Since we could not be certain if a given poll was conducted before or after the dispute began in its respective month, the rally was conservatively calculated by subtracting the month before the dispute began from the month after the dispute began. If a dispute began in the middle of the five-day polling period, the approval rating of the month before was subtracted from the approval rating of the month after.

**Rally Effects in the United Kingdom: A First Cut**

Table 1 reports summary statistics describing rally effects in the United Kingdom be-

\(^\text{10}\) Results using the other two indicators are substantively similar but less significant. These companion results are available upon request. Focusing on the prime minister reduces the number of disputes available to analyze since the PM approval question was not asked regularly in the 1950s. In the results reported below we analyze the 50 disputes for which relevant information on all of our variables is available.

\(^\text{11}\) Moreover, the prime minister approval question was not asked with any regularity in the 1950s and early 1960s, leaving us unable to calculate rallies on that measure for about two dozen disputes.
between 1950 and 2001, first for all rallies and then for each individual prime minister. The mean rally effect (0.6%) is small, although there is considerable variance, with rallies ranging from an increase of 18 to a decline of 14. Even amongst individual prime ministers, the mean rally effect is very small for all those who experienced more than one rally event, with only Harold Wilson and Tony Blair enjoying notably positive averages rally (of two points and nearly four respectively). The prime minister’s approval increased after only 21 of 50 disputes, or just 42% of the time. These results are consistent with recent findings in the United States, and very comparable to the mean rally effects for American Presidents as calculated by Lian and Oneal (1993), Oneal and Bryan (1995), and Baker and Oneal (2001).

--- Table 1 about here ---

Despite the fact that rallies are generally small, there is significant variance across episodes, with some yielding big boosts and some resulting in precipitous declines in leadership approval. Clearly a number of factors beyond reflexive patriotic reactions are at work in shaping the public’s response to the use of force. Following recent refinements in the rally literature, we expect that contextual factors best account for the observed variance. We now turn to the effects of contextual factors such as the hostility level, prominence of media coverage, statements from the government and the opposition, and the nature of conflicts (Cold War, colonial disputes, and multilateral).

**Hostility Level**

The MID data set defines five different levels of hostility; no militarized action, threat to use force, display of force, use of force, and war. Clearly, some disputes pose a more serious threat to the United Kingdom’s core interests than others, and accordingly we

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13 Tony Blair’s high average is due to the post 9/11 rally; excluding it, his average rally is only 0.25.
expect to see smaller rally events associated with low intensity conflicts (such as the Cod Wars), as opposed to actual wars such as the Falklands. We expect only those conflicts that sufficiently threaten the United Kingdom and its interests to produce sizeable rallies. To assess the effect of hostility levels on the rally, the variable HOSTILITY was created from the MID data, recording the hostility level of the dispute on the five-point scale described above.

--- Figure 1 about here ---

Figure 1 compares the mean rally associated with each of the three highest levels of hostility. Displays of force prove incapable of significantly arousing public support, and the mean rally effect for these levels of hostility is actually negative. Low level uses of force evoke no discernible rally, with a mean increase close to zero. In contrast, wars are capable of eliciting large rallies, averaging seven percentage points; however, such large-scale conflicts are rare. During the period 1950-1992, the United Kingdom went to war only four times. (Our data does not include the Korean War because monthly polls evaluating the prime minister do not exist for the start of the conflict).

**Cold War Conflict**

While dispute hostility level is a useful measure of the threat to the United Kingdom, the power status of the opposing country is an important factor as well. A use of force from Spain or Liberia may not convey the same sense of danger and risk as even a display of force from the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. To investigate the effect of the power status of the opposing country, the variable COLD WAR was created, taking on a value of 1.

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14 In addition, this initial boost should be weighed against the fact that in democracies support for wars -- and governments waging them -- tends to wane if hostilities are prolonged (Mueller 1973; Reiter and Stam 2002).
if the Soviet Union was involved in a dispute and 0 if it was not. Soviet involvement was taken directly from the MID data set.\textsuperscript{15}

--- Table 2 about here ---

Table 2 compares the mean rally effect when the Soviet Union was, and was not, involved in a dispute. The mean rally effect for both Cold War and non-Cold War disputes is close to zero, although non-Cold War disputes evoke an average rally about 0.9\% points greater.\textsuperscript{16} Soviet involvement appears to exert little influence over the public, and Cold War disputes were no more likely to evoke a rally than were non-Cold War crises.

\textit{Prominence of Media Coverage}

A great deal of past research has shown the influence of the media on potential rallies ((Baker and Oneal 2001; Brody 1984, 1991; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995). If an event is to generate a rally, the public has to know about it, and without prominent media coverage this is unlikely to be the case. In the United States, coverage in the New York Times (NYT) has proven a good proxy for an issue’s prominence in other forms of media (Baker and Oneal 2001; Ostrom and Simon 1985), and front page coverage in the NYT is in turn associated with larger rallies (Baker and Oneal 2001; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995). To investigate the role media prominence plays in generating rallies associated with particular disputes in the United Kingdom, we use the London Times in the same way that studies of the United States have used the NYT, assuming that the London Times is a rough and ready proxy for the level of coverage in other forms of British media. We created a variable dubbed MEDIA, which takes on a value of 2 if a dispute was reported in a head-

\textsuperscript{15} Three disputes in which the Soviet Union was not listed as a participant were coded as COLD WAR disputes because of their seriousness and close connection to Cold War flashpoints. These disputes included the Korean War, the Iraqi Revolution, and the seizure of a British passenger jet by Albania.

\textsuperscript{16} This difference is not statistically significant ($p=.64$).
line on the front page, 1 if it was reported on the front page but not in a headline, and 0 if it was not reported on the front page. An article title was considered a headline if it was reported across the top of the page, or beneath a related photograph placed at the top of the page (Baker and Oneal 2001).\footnote{Prior to May of 1966, the front page of the London Times did not report any news, and instead contained personal ads, advertisements, and announcements. Newsworthy information was reported in the Home News Section, the Parliament Section, and the Imperial and Foreign News Section (later to become Overseas News). A surrogate “front page” was needed for this sixteen year time period, and after careful examination one was found. The first page following the Imperial and Foreign News Section in many ways represents what a front page should be. Prominent stories from every section were reported on this one page, making it the closest thing to a front page. This page is not named in the index, and its location varies, but it always immediately follows the Imperial and Foreign News Section, and always features the most prominent stories of the day.}

Table 3 compares the mean rally effect associated with varying levels of media coverage. Media coverage alone appears to have no discernable effect on the size of rallies. For events that did receive prominent coverage in the Times, the mean rally effect is always near zero, regardless of the story’s prominence on the front page. Surprisingly, disputes that were not reported on the front page have greater mean rallies (of approximately one) - however this effect too is small and the difference is statistically insignificant.\footnote{Comparing disputes that appeared on the front page with those that did not yields $p=0.89$; comparing disputes garnering headline coverage with all others produces $p=0.50$.}

**Statements from the Government**

Government leaders may try to shape media coverage by prominently commenting on a dispute, and by doing so attempt to influence public opinion and in effect generate a rally behind their handling of a dispute. Statements from governmental leaders also serve as an alternate indicator of the severity of a dispute: small-scale conflicts are unlikely to illicit statements from the government. Prior research on the United States, using the front page of the NYT, has shown mixed results as to whether the President or the Cabinet can induce a
larger rally by commenting on a crisis and promoting their handling of it (Baker and Oneal 2001; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995). To investigate the effect of statements from the government in the United Kingdom, the variable STATEMENT was created, taking on a value of 2 if the prime minister made a statement reported on the front page of the *London Times*, 1 if a member of the cabinet made a statement reported on the front page, and 0 if no statement by a cabinet-level official was reported. To qualify as a statement, the comment must be a direct quote and attributed directly to either the prime minister or a member of the cabinet.

The mean rally effects associated with statements from the government are reported in Table 3. Statements from the Prime Minister are associated with slightly larger rallies -- on average of nearly two percent -- whereas those disputes in which no statements are reported receive mean rallies of less than half a percent. Surprisingly, statements from the cabinet are associated with mean rallies of negative five points, suggesting the possibility that cabinet ministers are tasked with dealing with unpopular crises. However, this mean is based on only four disputes, one of which was a 14-point decline in approval during the Iranian Oil Nationalization. Because of the notable difference between disputes in which the prime minister made a public statement and those where he did not, we created a new dummy variable dubbed PMSTATEMENT. As suggested by Table 3, disputes during which the prime minister made a statement received significantly greater rallies ($p=.04$).

*Statements from the Opposition*

Previous research on the United States has shown that bipartisan support can have a strong impact on the size or even the presence of a rally (Brody 1984, 1991; Brody and Shapiro 1989). Immediately following an international incident, the government has a rela-
tive monopoly on information, and as a result opposition leaders will be unable to criticize effectively the government for fear of appearing uninformed. Instead, they remain silent, or even offer cautious support. The public therefore forms their opinions based almost solely on information coming from the President or his administration, and from cautiously supportive opposition leaders. In this context, public criticism from opposition leaders is likely to be particularly telling, and to dampen any incipient rallies.

Whereas qualitative case studies have offered some support for this opinion leadership dynamic (Brody and Shapiro 1989), quantitative research, using the front page of the NYT, has produced mixed results as to whether statements from the opposition (or their absence) influence the rally effect (Baker and Oneal 2001; Lian and Oneal 1993; Oneal and Bryan 1995). To assess this argument in the context of the United Kingdom, we created a variable dubbed OPPOSITION, taking on a value of 1 if the opposition issued a statement of support that was reported on the front page of the London Times, 0 if the opposition was silent or made mixed statements, and –1 if the opposition was critical.

Statements from the opposition were recorded only if they originated from the Shadow Cabinet or the party leadership, as defined by Butler and Butler (Butler and Butler 2000). This convention was adopted to eliminate statements from radical elements within the party. To qualify as a statement, the comment must be reported as a direct quote attributed to a member of the Shadow Cabinet or the party leadership. Motions tabled in Parliament by the Shadow Cabinet or party leadership were recorded as statements if the motion was reported as a direct quote, and the sponsors of the motion were directly named.

Table 3 records the mean rally effect associated with statements from the opposition. When the opposition is silent or mixed the mean rally is zero; however, the mean rally is
5.5% points when they are supportive.\textsuperscript{19} Comparing disputes in which the opposition supported the government with all others indicates that bipartisan support was associated with significantly larger rallies ($p=.01$).\textsuperscript{20} Surprisingly, however, opposition criticism is associated with an average positive rally of four points; this result, however, is the product of the large (but ultimately short-lived) rally of ten points during the Sinai War. However, perhaps the most important thing to note about Table 3 is that the opposition seldom took a strong public stance: the opposition was silent too much of the time to gauge adequately their effect. Given the government’s relatively greater monopoly on sensitive information in the United Kingdom relative to the United States, opposition politicians may simply lack the information necessary to engage the government successfully when disputes are ongoing, potentially muting this mechanism that has been so prominent in recent studies of the rally effect in the US.

\textit{Type of Event: Colonial Issues and Multilateral Action}

A large portion of the United Kingdom’s history was defined by the creation and maintenance of a vast empire. In the wake of World War II the United Kingdom’s power status declined markedly, and many territories moved towards independence. Nevertheless, colonial relationships remained important in British foreign policy for decades to come, as evidenced by disputes over the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, and British Honduras (Belize).

We expect the public to respond relatively unfavorably to disputes involving colonial issues. In the post-colonial era, the public is likely to view such disputes as improper interference in the sovereignty of another country, paralleling Jentelson’s category of interference

\footnote{\textsuperscript{19} Dropping the events of 2001 reduces this figure to 3.0\%.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{20} Deleting the 9/11 case from the sample reduces this to $p=.12$. The reverse is not true: creating a variable tapping only disputes where the opposition opposed the government does not uncover any significant differences ($p=.23$).}
in the domestic affairs of another country (Jentelson 1992). To assess this expectation, we created a variable (COLONIAL) that takes on a value of 1 if the dispute directly involved the sovereignty of a colony or former colony, commonwealth, or protectorate, or otherwise involved what could be described as a colonial actor, and 0 if no colonial issues or actors were present.

--- Figure 2 about here ---

Figure 2 compares the mean rally effect and the presence or absence of colonial issues. When a colonial issue is present, the mean rally effect is slightly negative, whereas when non-colonial issues are at stake the mean rally is slightly positive. While the observed relationship is in the expected direction, the difference is relatively small, not statistically significant ($p=.35$). Crises involving colonial issues seem slightly less likely to generate rallies among the British public, although the effect is not pronounced.

The British public’s strong preference for multilateral action in the run-up to the recent war with Iraq reminds us that whether a dispute is multilateral or bilateral may affect the size of any rally. Disputes in which the United Kingdom acts in concert with NATO (or a comparable coalition) are likely to be perceived by the public as more justified by the nature of the multilateral backing. Accordingly, we expect these disputes to generate larger rallies. The variable MULTILATERAL was created, taking on a value of 1 if the United Kingdom was part of a multilateral action, and 0 if it was not. We define an action as multilateral if it involves one or more members of NATO on the same side as the UK.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21} Simply defining an action as multilateral if the United Kingdom was allied with one or more states proved problematic. Often-times the United Kingdom joined a preexisting dispute between two states, and technically speaking such a dispute was multilateral in the sense that the United Kingdom was allied with one or more states. However, the United Kingdom’s intervention in the dispute could best be characterized as unilateral, and the public is likely to perceive it as such. This contrasts with actions in which the United Kingdom acts jointly with its NATO allies from the outset towards interventionist or defensive aims. We therefore adopt the requirement of joint action with one or more NATO allies for multilateral action.
Figure 3 compares the mean rally effect for unilateral and multilateral actions. Multilateral actions receive average rallies of 2.5 percent, whereas unilateral actions receive no reliable rally effect (with an average drop in approval of over half a percent); this difference is easily statistically significant ($p = .01$). Clearly the British public’s attitude towards multilateral action in the recent Iraq war is no aberration, nor is it a recent development: action taken jointly with one or more NATO allies generates greater rallies on average than those lacking such broad backing.

**A Second Cut at Rallies in the UK: Regression Analyses**

Preliminary analysis indicates that larger rallies are associated with higher levels of hostility, disputes over non-colonial issues, and multilateral action. Level of media coverage, statements from the government and opposition, and Cold War conflicts are not obviously related to the size of rallies. In this section we turn to multivariate regression analysis to explore further the sources of rallies in the United Kingdom.

Several additional variables are added for the regression analysis. The MID data set codes both dispute originators and whether a state sought revisionist aims. A state is considered to have originated a dispute if it was a participant during the first day of the conflict. The variable ORIGINATOR takes on a value of 1 if the United Kingdom was a participant during the first day of a dispute, and 0 when it was not. Larger rallies are expected when the United Kingdom originated the dispute, since it can be expected to play a more central role in the conflict. A state is considered revisionist if it is dissatisfied with the status quo. Specifically, MID codes a state as revisionist if it is: “1) making claims to territory, 2) attempting to overthrow a regime, or 3) declaring its intention not to abide by another state’s policy”
(Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996). The variable REVISIONIST takes on a value of 1 if the United Kingdom was revisionist and 0 if it was not. We expect the public to respond negatively to disputes in which the United Kingdom is revisionist.

Prior research on the United States has shown that the pre-crisis popularity of the president influences the rally effect (Baker and Oneal 2001; Lian and Oneal 1993; Kernell 1978). No matter how popular the incumbent government, a core of strong partisan supporters of the opposition will always be dissatisfied. As a result, the higher a government’s approval rating, the more difficult it is to make further gains, since these would have to come from committed supporters of opposition parties. Unpopular governments, on the other hand, may find it relatively easy to regain support from unsatisfied members of their party, who for whatever reason are momentarily dissatisfied with the government’s performance, or to win over uncommitted swing voters. To measure the influence of the Prime Minister’s previous popularity, the variable PMPRE was created, taking on the value of the Prime Minister’s approval rating before the dispute occurred.

We also assess the effect of the partisanship of the governing party. Conservative Party governments are often popularly characterized by support for a strong defense and for a conservative fiscal policy. Labour Party governments are best characterized by their more interventionist economic leanings, and perhaps a more pacific foreign policy orientation. The variable PARTY was created, taking on a value of 0 when Labour was in power and 1 when the Conservatives occupied No. 10. Conservative governments are expected to receive slightly higher rallies since strong actions presumably play well to their core supporters.

We also include a dummy variable to control for a “halo” or “honeymoon” effect occurring after a new prime minister takes office. If an election moved a new party into power,

22 The MID coding of revisionism is very similar to Jentelson’s definition of interventionist actions, although the former is somewhat broader.
and the polls bracketing the dispute spanned the election, the dispute was removed from consideration because two completely different governments were being evaluated. However, if the polls bracketing the dispute spanned an election, and the incumbent party won, the dispute remained and the variable NEWGOV took on a value of 1. NEWGOV also took on the value of 1 if a poll used to calculate the rally occurred during the first three months of a particular government. NEWGOV takes on the value of 0 for all other disputes.

Finally, it has been well established that economic performance is a powerful driver of British government popularity. To control for this, we experimented with variables measuring unemployment, inflation, and economic growth. In the regressions below, we include only the change in unemployment from the previous year’s level; it proved the most successful of the variables tapping economic performance.23

-- Table 4 about here --

We first group these twelve variables into four thematic groups and report those regression results in Table 4. The first group looks at the nature of the UK’s involvement in a dispute: the highest hostility level reached by the UK, whether it was an originator, and whether it was the revisionist state in the dispute.24 Rallies were larger the more severe the dispute (as measured by a higher hostility level) and smaller when the UK was the revisionist actor. Whether or not the UK was an originator has no discernible effect on the size of a rally.25 Turning to the type of dispute, disputes in which the UK participated as part of a multilateral coalition received significantly greater rallies (in both the statistical and substan-

23 Change in unemployment seems more likely to be relevant across the entire time period than level of unemployment. An unemployment rate of 2% in the UK meant very different things in 1960 than in 1990, but whether unemployment is headed upwards or downwards is always likely to affect citizens’ subjective impressions of economic performance.

24 For each regression, we conducted a Breusch-Pagan test for heteroskedasticity. In every regression reported in Table 4 the null hypothesis of homoskedasticity was not rejected (p’s = 0.20, 0.15, 0.28, and 0.39 for the four regression).

25 Correlations among these three variables are low, with the greatest being that between hostility and originator (r=-.20).
tive sense: a multilateral dispute produced an average rally over 5 points larger than one that was bilateral, and the coefficient is significant at better than the 1% level), whereas Cold War disputes were associated with smaller rallies; whether or not the issue was colonial had no discernible impact.\textsuperscript{26} The third column highlights the media variables. Surprisingly, only a statement by the prime minister has a significant impact: when the prime minister comments on a dispute the rally is about 4 points larger, and this effect is significant at the 5% level. On the other hand, neither prominence of media coverage nor opposition stance has a discernible influence over the size of an ensuing rally, although the coefficient on the opposition variable is positive as anticipated.\textsuperscript{27} Finally, two of the three variables tapping electoral politics are significant. Prime ministers already enjoying robust popularity received notably smaller rallies, whereas crises are likely to burnish further the halo of new governments. In contrast, whether the PM hailed from the Conservative or Labour party seems irrelevant when it comes to rally round the flag effects.

Building on these results, Table 5 reports four models drawing on the entire battery of variables.\textsuperscript{28} The first model combines all the variables, while the second drops highly collinear variables that have proven insignificant in previous regressions. After considering the full dataset, we then restrict the sample to the post-1965 period, for two reasons. First, the \textit{London Times} changes its format early in 1966, and we have greater confidence in our coding of the media prominence variables after this date. Second, the era of prime ministerial predominance in British politics began sometime in the mid 1960s (Lanoue and Headrick 1994, 1998), making our focus on PM approval ratings more appropriate after that time.

\textsuperscript{26} Not surprisingly, multilateral and Cold War disputes are somewhat correlated ($r=.38$). Nonetheless, dropping either variable made no major difference for the coefficient or the significance level of the other.\textsuperscript{27} Media prominence and PM statement are moderately highly correlated ($r=0.57$). However, dropping each in turn makes little difference for the coefficient or significance level of the other.\textsuperscript{28} For each regression, we conducted a Breusch-Pagan test for heteroskedasticity. For these models, the null hypothesis of homoskedasticity was rejected; we thus report robust (White) standard errors in the Table 5.
For the entire period, seven variables are consistently statistically and substantively significant. Each step up a rung of the hostility ladder (ranging from two to five) is worth an extra 3 points in rally size: the more serious is a dispute, the larger the predicted rally effect. However, the British public reacts negatively when the UK is the revisionist state in a dispute: using force to coerce a change reduces the predicted rally by nearly 4 points. Paralleling Jentelson’s finding for the United States, the British public appears to be somewhat prudent, and wary of taking action to engineer change as opposed to restraining aggression. When the United Kingdom has allies on its side of a dispute, however, larger rallies are forthcoming: the predicted rally is around 5 points larger. Somewhat surprisingly, the Tories seem to receive smaller rallies, all else being equal, than do Labour prime ministers. As expected, very popular prime ministers have greater difficulties mustering a rally, as each additional point of approval reduces the predicted rally by 0.12%. Honeymoons enjoyed by new governments are notably sweeter if they encounter trouble abroad, with a new government enjoying a predicted rally 5 or so points larger than an established one. Finally, poor economic conditions, as proxied by rising unemployment rates, are associated with smaller rallies: each 1% increase in unemployment reduces a predicted rally by about 1.4% points.

The picture becomes even clearer when we restrict the sample to the post-1966 period of prime ministerial dominance. In the reduced model, significance levels are generally higher and every variable is now significant with the exception of PM statement and opposition support, although the latter now has the expected positive sign. Consistent with an interpretation of the British public as “pretty prudent,” larger rallies occur when the UK is not the revisionist state, action is multilateral, and hostility levels are higher. Higher levels of media

--- Table 5 about here ---

29 As part of a series of robustness checks, we restricted our sample to sub-war disputes (hostility less than 5); see discussion below.
coverage are not associated with larger rallies. While this result is somewhat surprising, we note that level of media coverage is correlated with hostility level. It may be that once hostility is controlled for, higher levels of media coverage are mostly likely to arise in cases of policy failure. Similarly, in multivariate models the positive effect for PM statement washes out; this is probably due to its strong correlations with hostility level and multilateral action, both of which are strongly and positively related to larger rallies. Finally, the electoral politics battery of variables and unemployment are more significant in the post-1966 models. New prime ministers garner greater rallies, and the more popular is the PM, the smaller the rally from an international dispute. Despite having governed during the Falklands and Gulf wars -- both of which led to hefty rallies -- the Tories in general gain significantly smaller rallies from international disputes than do Labour leaders.

The consistent failure of the media variables -- those covering prominence, PM and government statements, and opposition reaction -- to prove significant is surprising in light of results for the United States. We note that prior to 1990, it was rare for the opposition to take a strong public stance or for the government to attempt assertively to drum up support during a crisis. Prior to 1990, the opposition party took a strong stance in only five disputes. The opposition was supportive in the 1958-1959 Berlin Deadline Crisis, the first Cod War, and the Falklands War; it was critical of government actions during the Sinai War and the dispute around Rhodesian Independence. The Sinai War is a large outlier: despite Labour’s harsh criticism of the government, the public initially rallied strongly behind Prime Minister Anthony Eden, a reaction undoubtedly attributable to the severity of the fighting, and one which did not last when Eden’s policies ultimately ended in disaster. The Sinai outlier, combined with the limited number of disputes in which the opposition took a stance, partially

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30 The correlations between PM statements and hostility level and multilateral action are .53 and .46, respectively.
accounts for the lack of a relationship: there are just too few instances to estimate the effect of elite dissent and unity in the United Kingdom with any precision, and we note that the relationship comes more to resemble that found in the United States over time (a point to which we return in the conclusion).

--- Table 6 about here ---

**Illustrations of Substantive Effects: Hypothetical Rallies**

We can illustrate the substantive significance of these results by looking at the predicted rallies for different combinations of values on key variables. Table 6 reports predicted rallies at different values for the hostility, revisionism, multilateralism, and prime minister popularity variables. The first two rows compare “best case” and “worst case” scenarios for rallies. When hostilities cross the war threshold, the UK is not revisionist and is acting with a multilateral coalition, with the PM suffering low popularity, the predicted rally is a sizeable 10.2 percent points. In contrast, if the threat level remains moderate, the UK is revisionist but acting alone, and the PM is already very popular, no rally is forthcoming: the model predicts a drop of 7.0 percent. The next two rows highlight the effects of varying PM popularity while holding the other variables constant. Holding all else equal, in the scenario depicted in rows three and four of Table 6 an unpopular PM can expect a boost of 3.7 percent from a militarized dispute, whereas an extremely popular one will lose 2.3 points. The final two rows illustrate the effect of switching from a unilateral revisionist to a multilateral non-revisionist: holding everything else constant, the former yields a predicted negative rally of 2.6 whereas in the latter scenario our model predicts a 5.6 percent rally.

**Robustness Checks**

31 The examples are calculated for a dispute in which the UK was an originator, Labour was in power, neither the prime minister nor opposition made a statement, and the government was not new. Change in unemployment was set at its average value.
We conducted several tests to assess the robustness of these results. To test for influential data points and outliers that might distort the regression coefficients we computed DFITS statistics and studentized residuals. Comparing absolute values of DFITS to a cutoff point of $2\sqrt{(k+1)/(n-k-1)}$ (Chatterjee and Hadi 1988) reveals no more than three potentially influential data points at most in each equation.\footnote{For the first model reported in Table 5, for example, there were three potential outliers: the Sinai War of 1956 (rally of 10 points), the 1965 dispute about Rhodesian Independence (rally of 0 points), and the events surrounding Afghanistan and 9/11 in 2001.} In no case did omitting either all of the suspect points together or each individually substantially alter the results, although some variables occasionally gained in significance levels whereas others dropped slightly.\footnote{In particular, hostility level, revisionism, multilateralism, and new government – the four variables that are significant at better than the 5\% level in all four models in Table 5 – are still always significant at better than the 5\% level even when dropping the three potentially influential data points. Variables for party and change in unemployment drop below the 10\% significance level in some models.} In particular, it is reassuring to note that the very large rally associated with 9/11 and subsequent military action in Afghanistan is not skewing the results. Additionally, we calculated studentized residuals for all of our models. Studentized residuals outside the range $|t_i| > 2$ are no more common than the 5\% of observations which we would expect to arise purely by chance,\footnote{The model report in the first row of Table 5, for example, has three observations with studentized residuals greater than 2, or 6\% of observations.} and deleting these observations made no substantial difference in results.

Finally, we also experimented with truncating the sample in two different ways: by deleting the first and last decades of our sample, and by eliminating all war observations. Slicing off the extremes of our time period had little effect, although deleting the post-1990 era did reduce the effects of the hostility level and change in unemployment variables somewhat.\footnote{The hostility variable dropped from significance levels better than 5\% to better than 10\%; unemployment dropped to better than 10\% or out of significance, depending on the model.} Dropping the war observations left coefficients on all variables relatively unchanged, with the exception of hostility level itself. With only the truncated range, hostility level was no longer significant in the models spanning 1950 to 2001; however, it was still significant at
the 10% level for the post-1965 era. Overall, the results appear quite robust, and the pattern of findings is not driven solely by the handful of war observations: these rally dynamics also hold for sub-war disputes.

**Conclusion**

Are “rally ‘round the flag effects” a generic trait of democracies, or just a peculiar product of America’s political culture and super-power status? Do the same contextual factors that shape rally effects in the United States also explain responses to international disputes in other democracies such as the United Kingdom? Is there an easily exploitable rally effect in the UK to tempt governments towards diversionary actions? By focusing too narrowly on the United States, the rally effect literature has limited our ability to answer these questions. To rectify this shortcoming, we have undertaken the most comprehensive study to date of rally effects in the United Kingdom. Turning to the UK has two advantages. First, by studying another democracy with parliamentary political institutions, we gain insight into what extent rally effects are a generic feature of electoral politics instead of a peculiar feature of the political institutions, geo-political position, or political institutions of one particular country. Second, the small literature on rally effects in the UK has yet to absorb recent revisions of the rally thesis. By extending these insights emphasizing the highly contextual nature of rally effects to the United Kingdom we can both improve our understanding of rally effects in the UK and assess the generalizability of the these mechanisms.

Our findings indicate that the rally ‘round the flag is clearly operating in the United Kingdom, although in ways that are both similar and dissimilar to the United States. Responses of the British public to international tensions are neither automatic reflexes of patriotism nor mediated echoes of opinion leadership, but instead a discerning judgment of
the nature of the dispute. As the United States, the mean rally effect in the United Kingdom is essentially zero, and many disputes are actually accompanied by decreases in approval: clearly, there is no automatic, sizeable, and reflexive rally effect in the UK. Instead, rallies are highly variable and context-dependent. When disputes reach higher hostility levels, the United Kingdom is not a revisionist actor, and action is taken multilaterally, sizeable rallies are likely to be forthcoming. Popular Prime Ministers, on the other hand, gain little politically from disputes, but unpopular leaders may reap a welcome boost in approval.

Perhaps our most puzzling results are the failure to find the sizeable effects for media coverage and bipartisan support that have proven so important to understanding rally effects in the United States. However, until recently it was very rare for the opposition to take a strong public stance on the government’s handling of international disputes. Prior to 1990, our coding of the London Times found only five cases in which the opposition expressed either strong opposition or support. Yet after 1990, the opposition has sounded in with notably greater frequency. We draw three speculative conclusions from this pattern. First, the clear periodization suggests a “Cold War” norm of leaving foreign policy to the government during crises may have subdued the normal rough-and-tumble of partisan competition in the period around a dispute. Second, the government’s greater monopoly of sensitive information in the United Kingdom may sharply limit the opposition’s ability to challenge it publicly during a crisis, thus short-circuiting the opinion leadership mechanisms invoked to explain rally dynamics in the United States. Third, in general our results both become stronger and more like those for the U.S. over time, just as British politics has advanced further into an era of prime ministerial dominance. In the later periods, the results for bipartisan support parallel those found in the United States, although the small number of observations means the coefficients cannot be estimated with much precision. However, based on these trends we
would speculate that rally effects in the United Kingdom will continue to become more and more like those in the United States, and that the dynamics of opposition support and dissent will have a greater impact on the prime minister’s approval in future disputes. We cautiously suggest that electoral institutions that channel popular attention to a single leader or executive are much more likely to spawn ‘rally effects than those that diffuse responsibility for policy across a wider range of actors and institutions: the more “presidentialized” a political system becomes, the more likely are rally effects to emerge. Clearly, further efforts to extend the study of rally effects to other democracies and to build a cross-nationally comparable set of results would be valuable.

Our findings are largely reassuring for proponents of the democratic peace. There is no automatic, reflexive tendency for the British public to reward governments for assertive foreign policy. Instead, our findings are consistent with the findings of recent studies suggesting that democratic publics, despite their woefully inadequate knowledge of the details of international affairs, nonetheless seem to arrive at quite reasonable and prudent assessments of foreign policy (Russett 1990; Shapiro and Page 1988). The British public’s response to international disputes appears discerning and contingent on context instead of an emotional patriotic reflex. And unlike in the United States, government efforts to draw attention to disputes do not appear to increase the likelihood of a rally. Given the weakness of our opinion leadership results, the precise mechanisms by which the British public arrives at apparently reasonable and discerning assessments requires further investigation, but there is certainly no uniform tendency towards an automatically favorable response to uses of force.

Finally, we conclude by linking our findings on rally effects to the diversionary theory of disputes and war. The question of whether politically exploitable rally effects exist in the United Kingdom is logically prior to asking whether governments behave in a diversion-
ary fashion; in our opinion, looking for diversionary behavior before investigating rally effects is putting the cart before the horse. The negative association between PM approval and the size of rallies certainly suggests that unpopular leaders may face temptations towards aggressive foreign policies. Yet the unpopularity of unilateral action and revisionist behavior, coupled with the ineffectiveness of statements from the government, place important limitations on possibilities for diversionary behavior. The highly contextual nature of rallies creates sharp constraints on the ability of British governments to create the “right kind” of dispute necessary to create a politically useful rally. Given the difficulties involved in engineering a positive rally, the results of previous studies concluding that diversionary behavior exists in the United Kingdom must be called into question (Morgan and Anderson 1999). With a mean rally effect of zero (and with about 40% resulting in a negative rally) and highly contextual causes of positive rallies, both the willingness and ability of governments to engage in militarized disputes for opportunistic purposes seems doubtful. Militarized conflicts pose as much danger as reward for any popularity-maximizing prime minister. Either prime ministers are largely inept, and engage in diversionary behavior despite the high risk and small reward, or previous research claiming the existence of diversionary behavior in the United Kingdom requires refinement and qualification.
Tables

TABLE 1
Rally Effects in the United Kingdom, 1950 – 2001

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<th>Prime Minister</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rally (%)</th>
<th>SD (%)</th>
<th>Minimum (%)</th>
<th>Maximum (%)</th>
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<td>12</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Blair</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>18</td>
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</table>

TABLE 2
Rally Effects and Cold War Disputes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Dispute</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rally (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Cold War</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.78</td>
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</table>
### TABLE 3
Media Prominence and Statements from the Government and Opposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prime Minister</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rally (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Coverage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Page</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Page, Not Headline</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Front Page</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Member Only</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Statements</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opposition Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Government</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Statement</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criticize Government</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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TABLE 4: Regression Models Grouped by Type of Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanatory Variables</th>
<th>Nature of UK’s involvement</th>
<th>Type of Dispute</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Electoral Politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hostility Level</td>
<td>3.17***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Originator</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.39)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisionist</td>
<td>-3.64**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.83)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.52)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td></td>
<td>-3.49*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.97)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilateral</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.20***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.72)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM Statement</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.12**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.83)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition Stance</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.74)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.68)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM Previous popularity</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.11*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Gov</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.50**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.69)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-10.89**</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(4.27)</td>
<td>(1.14)</td>
<td>(1.30)</td>
<td>(3.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: $N = 50$ for all models. Standard errors in parentheses. See text for explanation of variables. *$p \leq .10$. **$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$. $P$-values for two-tailed tests.
## TABLE 5: Full Regression Models, 1950 - 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanatory Variables</th>
<th>Complete Model</th>
<th>Reduced Model</th>
<th>Post 1965: Complete Model</th>
<th>Post 1965: Reduced Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hostility Level</td>
<td>3.18** (1.29)</td>
<td>2.86*** (1.06)</td>
<td>2.81** (1.14)</td>
<td>2.24** (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Originator</td>
<td>3.04 (2.57)</td>
<td>2.77 (2.12)</td>
<td>5.10** (1.97)</td>
<td>4.14** (1.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisionist</td>
<td>-3.78** (1.81)</td>
<td>-4.09** (1.90)</td>
<td>-3.59** (1.35)</td>
<td>-3.42** (1.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial</td>
<td>0.68 (1.49)</td>
<td>1.03 (1.04)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>-1.97 (1.99)</td>
<td>1.22 (1.44)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilateral</td>
<td>5.65** (2.23)</td>
<td>4.40** (1.86)</td>
<td>6.72*** (1.98)</td>
<td>5.88*** (1.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>0.15 (0.99)</td>
<td>0.96 (0.88)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM Statement</td>
<td>0.94 (2.56)</td>
<td>1.84 (2.05)</td>
<td>0.21 (2.02)</td>
<td>1.38 (1.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition Stance</td>
<td>-1.19 (2.34)</td>
<td>-1.15 (2.08)</td>
<td>1.73 (2.28)</td>
<td>2.73 (2.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>-2.83* (1.57)</td>
<td>-3.31** (1.41)</td>
<td>-2.94** (1.34)</td>
<td>-3.69** (1.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM Previous popularity</td>
<td>-0.12* (0.07)</td>
<td>-0.15** (0.06)</td>
<td>-0.12* (0.06)</td>
<td>-0.14** (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Gov</td>
<td>4.76*** (1.49)</td>
<td>5.19*** (1.29)</td>
<td>7.02*** (1.83)</td>
<td>6.86*** (1.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Unemployment</td>
<td>-1.39* (0.73)</td>
<td>-1.29** (0.57)</td>
<td>-1.87*** (0.56)</td>
<td>-1.31** (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-8.17 (7.99)</td>
<td>-4.89 (5.38)</td>
<td>-9.76 (7.13)</td>
<td>-4.41 (5.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** $N = 50$ for models spanning full time period; $N = 37$ for those restricted to post-1966 period. Robust standard errors in parentheses. See text for explanation of variables.  
*p ≤ .10. ** p ≤ .05. *** p ≤ .01. P-values for two-tailed tests.
TABLE 6:
Predicted Rallies at Different Levels of Explanatory Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hostility</th>
<th>Revisionist</th>
<th>Multilateral</th>
<th>Popularity</th>
<th>Predicted Rally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>-7.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1: Rally Effects and Hostility Level of Dispute
Figure 2: Rally Effects and Colonial Issues
Figure 3: Rally Effects and Multilateral Actions
References


