

When Gender (Sometimes) Trumps Party
Citizen Attitudes toward Torture in the War against Terror

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Abstract

Americans remained engaged in a contentious debate: whether the US government should engage in the torture of prisoners as a matter of explicit policy. Given the controversy that surrounds the issue and the number of surveys conducted, there has been surprisingly little scholarly work that seeks to explain not just the percentage of Americans who support torture, but exactly *which* citizens express that support. In this article, I analyze the correlates of support for torture in American public opinion, with particular attention to contextual variation in the relative impact of partisanship and gender. I analyze several different surveys over the period 2004-2011 and find that partisanship usually dominates as a correlate of torture support. However, both in 2004 and in early 2009, gender had a stronger influence on support for torture. I argue that the influence of gender was heightened by the substantial publicity that accompanied the release of photographs from the Abu Ghraib prison in April 2004 and the attention to moral arguments against torture that resulted from the announcement of President Obama's executive order that banned torture in January 2009. The implications for the study of torture and gender politics are discussed together with some observations about torture as a political issue.

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“In the battle between facts and partisanship, partisanship always wins” (Berinsky 2009, 124).

Introduction

More than ten years into the “war against terror,” Americans remained engaged in a contentious debate: whether the US government should engage in the torture of prisoners as a matter of explicit policy. The debate takes several forms—pragmatic, moral, and legal—but in this paper I focus on an empirical question: the correlates of citizen support for torture. Given the controversy that surrounds the issue and the number of surveys conducted, there has been surprisingly little scholarly work on this question. In particular, there have been only a few works that seek to explain not just what percentage of Americans support torture, but exactly *which* citizens express that support.

In this paper, I add to the discussion by focusing on four important questions. First, in the following section, I ask what theory and prior research tell us about the likely fault lines of citizen support for torture, emphasizing the dominance of partisanship in the literature on public support for security policy more generally. Nonetheless, I also hypothesize that gender should

have a strong influence on attitudes toward torture. Following this review, I briefly summarize and evaluate the evolution of citizen support for torture in a number of opinion surveys conducted between 2001 and 2011. Third, I present an analysis of the two most plausible explanations for variations in opinions on torture –partisan attachment and gender difference— and I find that gender is more important than partisanship under very specific circumstances, although partisanship dominates in most circumstances. I conclude with some observations about the politics of torture policy along with suggestions for future research.

Who Supports Torture? Hypotheses on Partisanship and Gender

Given the controversy that surrounds the issue and the substantial amount of polling that has been conducted to measure citizen views, there is surprisingly little scholarly work that seeks to explain which citizens most favor torture. Casting the net more broadly, however, three bodies of theory and evidence provide guidance on the matter. In each case, theory and evidence indicate that citizen attitudes will be structured above all by partisan attachments. Nonetheless, both theory and prior evidence also suggest that gender is likely to be a significant factor as well, sometimes approaching and perhaps superseding partisanship as a correlate of attitudes toward torture.

Peace, War, and Partisanship. The scholarly literature on citizen attitudes toward foreign policy, national security, and war is dominated by the overwhelming importance of partisanship as the strongest determinant of opinions. As early as 1978, Barry Hughes highlighted this pattern in Americans' opinions of the Vietnam War. During the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, support for the war had been higher among Democrats than among Republicans, remaining upwards of 40 percent as late as 1968. When Richard M. Nixon took

office, support for the war among Democrats began to decline; during 1969, it dropped by about 10 percentage points. In Hughes' words, "A shift of opinion...occurred as a result of party identification of the president. Up to 1969, it was a Democratic president's war; then it became a Republican president's war..." (1978, 126-127; see also Berinsky 2009, 111-118).

The primacy of partisanship on national security issues has since become the consensus finding of scholars. Holsti's comprehensive review of public opinion on a large variety of foreign policy and national security issues finds that partisan identification is by far the most consistent correlate of opinions (2004; see also Jacobson 2008). The most trenchant interpretation of the political process underlying the importance of partisanship is contained in the work of Berinsky (2009). Following Zaller (1992), Berinsky argues that citizens actually know little of the factual circumstances that surround any particular national security issue. As a consequence, he downplays the importance of objective circumstances such as casualty rates, foreign policy objectives, or the relative success of a particular military operation. Lacking information on these facts, citizens look instead to their own partisanship and the cues of party leaders as they form opinions on issues of war and peace. In Berinsky's words "In the battle between facts and partisanship, partisanship always wins" (2009, 124).

The evidence for Berinsky's view is considerable, and it has important implications for the study of citizen attitudes toward torture. One might conceive of two models in the "battle between facts and partisanship." The first model should characterize the broader debate—a factual and terminological debate—that has surrounded the question of the morality, legality, and effectiveness of the mistreatment of prisoners. To some extent this has been a debate about facts and meaning, and it has pitted Republicans, who largely endorse "harsh interrogation," against Democrats, who largely oppose it. In such circumstances, we would expect the public to rely on

their partisan leanings or to follow the cues of party leaders as they appraise the debate about torture.

However, a second model recognizes that there are occasions when the glare of publicity surrounding a foreign policy event brings facts to the foreground and thus may override “normal” domestic cleavages. The well-known rally effect surrounding international crises is a case in point. For example, in 1991 and in the fall of 2001, both Presidents Bush enjoyed approval ratings above 90 percent as a result of international crisis and war. Of course, the reason for this is that international crises have a unifying effect, but the saturation publicity surrounding such events is the conduit through which domestic divisions are muted.

More recently, public evidence of the mistreatment of prisoners forced facts into the foreground, especially following the release of photographs from the Abu Ghraib prison in April 2004. Figure 1 displays two measures of the intensity of press coverage devoted to the Abu Ghraib revelations. I conducted a search of two news databases for the period 2002-2010: Lexis-Nexis for coverage in the *New York Times*, and the Vanderbilt Television News Archive for all network news broadcasts.¹ The search included the words “Abu Ghraib.” The figure provides a clear sense of the magnitude of press coverage of Abu Ghraib. There was a sudden spike to over one thousand news stories in print and broadcast media during 2004, followed by a decline in subsequent years. Moreover, most of these stories included explicit photographs of the abuse and interrogation techniques used against prisoners. In fact, in surveys by the Pew Center for the People and the Press, over 75 percent of Americans reported that they had seen the pictures from

¹ The Vanderbilt Archive is available at <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>. The last access for my search was April 1, 2013.

Abu Ghraib (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2004). In these circumstances, the influence of partisanship should be weakened, if only because no political party is likely to openly endorse the brutality so plainly visible in the press (just as they are unlikely to question the President during a widely publicized international crisis).

Gender difference on national security issues and torture. If ever there were an issue on which gender difference should be prominent, the issue of torture would seem to be it. After all, torture is not a nuanced instrument of policy. It involves the deliberate imposition of physical violence on restrained individuals, and there is substantial evidence that it is the use of violence that most differentiates women from men on issues of national security. For example, scholars have consistently shown that women are less likely to endorse the use or escalation of military force in a variety of circumstances (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986; Conover and Sapiro 1993; Brandes 1994; Nincic and Nincic 2002; Crowder-Meyer 2007). This gender difference has been documented during most military conflicts involving the United States since World War II (Burriss 2008; Berinsky 2009, 52-55; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2009). Furthermore, in some studies, gender is *the* single most important correlate of attitudes toward the use of military force (Wilcox, Ferrara, and Allsop 1993). There is also some evidence that it is concern for human life that lowers women's support for war and the use of military force and that women are more likely to express anger and revulsion at the prospect of violence (Conover and Sapiro 1993). Finally, it is notable that women may be *more* likely to support military intervention on humanitarian grounds, presumably because such interventions are designed explicitly to mitigate the human suffering caused by violence (Brooks and Valentino 2011).

It remains unclear whether the ultimate origins of these gender differences are to be found in biology, the differential socialization of men and women, or some combination of

factors (Conover and Sapiro 1993; Goldstein 2001; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2009), but there is little doubt that women are less likely to endorse the employment of violence for any purpose. The implications for citizen attitudes toward torture are clear. Women should be less supportive, and gender differences should be magnified to the extent that the political context or the wordings of survey questions explicitly portray the techniques of physical violence employed in the torture of prisoners. Two studies of citizen opinions of torture support this hypothesis. In a study by Haider-Markel and Vieux, partisanship is indeed a strong correlate of support for torture. Nonetheless, the authors find that —on some extreme techniques, such as electric shock, sexual humiliation, or threatening to shoot [the prisoner], *partisan orientation toward the Republican Party did not increase female support*” (Haider-Markel and Vieux 2008, 27; italics added). In other words, the impact of gender is strongest when torture techniques are referenced explicitly. In a second study, Mayer and Armor found that both partisanship and gender were strong correlates of support for torture in general and specific torture techniques in particular, but the substantive impact of gender was highest on the dependent variables measuring specific torture techniques (2012, 443-444). Further, reviewing the mild upward trend in support for torture from 2004 to 2009, the authors conclude that “the policy of the government on interrogations and the public’s opinion about that policy are unrelated” (2012, 445), but it may be that change is more visible within specific sectors of public opinion.

Other studies of support for torture are an eclectic mix. Nincic and Ramos find that support for torture is a function of two competing imperatives: a consequentialist consideration (torture may save lives) and a moral imperative (torture is simply wrong). Partisanship is an insignificant influence in this specification, presumably because it —is already accounted for in different stances toward the various arguments for or against torture,” but the impact of gender

was not tested (2011, 245). In a second study, Ramos and Nincic found that both gender and partisanship conditioned support for torture (2011). Finally, Liberman (2013) finds that support for torture (and the death penalty) are strongly related to the desire for retribution even after controlling for partisanship and gender (which are also strong correlates of support). However, the generalizability of his results may be in question because the sample was composed of college students, and we will see below that younger people are in fact more supportive of torture than older. Nonetheless, it is notable that the impact of gender is more significant than partisanship in Liberman's results (2013, 298).

Gender, Threat, Anxiety, and War. Research on support for the punishment of criminals and for steps to limit the likelihood of a terrorist attack produce a common pattern. Not surprisingly, the fear of crime is correlated with support for punitive measures against criminals, just as the perceived threat of a terrorist attack increases support for the limitation of civil liberties and for retaliation against alleged terrorists (Hurwitz and Smithey 1998; Huddy, Feldman, Taber and Lahav 2005; Davis and Silver 2004; Berinsky 2009). However, there is another pattern that has important implications for the study of citizen attitudes toward torture: the question of *how to respond* to the threat of crime or terrorism is highly gendered (for a thorough review of this literature, see Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2009). For example, in one study, women were significantly more likely to feel unsafe in their neighborhoods, but they were *not* more likely to endorse stronger punitive measures as a result (Hurwitz and Smithey 1998). Similarly, although women in the US were significantly more likely to perceive a danger of further terrorist attack following the events of September 11, 2001, they were less supportive of the action that was taken in response—the war in Afghanistan (Huddy, Feldman, Taber and Lahav 2005; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2009). In sum, two patterns of relevance to attitudes toward torture are

evident: women are more likely to perceive threats, but they are less likely to favor punitive responses to that threat. This obviously translates into the hypothesis that, even in the presence of increased threat of terrorist attack, women will be less likely to endorse torture as a response to that threat.

Measuring Support for Torture

Before turning to an analysis of partisanship, gender, and other factors that influence attitudes toward torture, it is useful to review the specific question wording that has been used by survey organizations to study the matter. Table 1 provides a summary of questions posed by several prominent survey organizations.² The Pew Center for the People and the Press has inquired since 2004 if torture ~~—~~against *suspected terrorists to gain important information* [can be] frequently, sometimes, rarely, or never justified.” Gallup has asked if respondents would be ~~—~~willing [or not willing] to have the U.S. government torture *known terrorists if they know details about future terrorist attacks.*” The ABC News/*Washington Post* surveys asked if respondents ~~—~~regard the use of torture *against people suspected of involvement in terrorism* acceptable [or] unacceptable.” The same organization also posed a blunt question asking if respondents supported or opposed President Obama’s executive order of January 2009 that banned the use of torture by the US government. Finally, several questions probe attitudes towards the treatment of prisoners using words other than ~~—~~torture,” including the term ~~—~~physical abuse short of torture” (ABC/*Washington Post*) and ~~—~~harsh interrogation techniques” (Gallup).

² Complete question wording and detailed responses for each of these questions are listed in Gronke *et. al.* (2010).

I dwell on the wording of these questions for an obvious reason: the percentage that endorses torture depends on the wording employed. Several features of the data in Table 1 stand out. First, if we ponder the question of just how many Americans support the use of torture, then the percentages reported here—an average of 42 percent over every question in Table 1—is likely to represent a maximum. The reason is that all of these questions prime respondents strongly by using terms such as “suspected terrorists” or indeed “known terrorists.” One question actually posits that the technique will “gain important information” (Pew), and another inquires about “known terrorists if they know details about future terrorist attacks” (Gallup). It seems plausible that the use of these words primes respondents toward the harsh end of the responses, a conclusion supported by the research of Haider-Markel and Vieux, who find that support for torture is increased in framing scenarios in which respondents are informed that interrogation will yield information about possible terrorist attacks (2008, 15; see also Nincic and Ramos 2011). Put differently, it seems plausible that lower percentages supporting torture would emerge were surveys to refer to “prisoners,” “those detained on the battlefield,” or merely to “suspects.”

Second, variations in wording also produce systematic differences in endorsement of torture. The questions by the Pew Center, which ask if torture can be “justified,” seem to offer a pragmatic rationale for supporting torture—presumably “justified” on some unnamed grounds, but it is hard to imagine grounds other than national security (especially since the question also explicitly adds “to gain important information...”). If this interpretation is correct, it helps to explain why the Pew question elicits higher average endorsement of torture than do other questions (46 percent). In contrast, the Gallup question personalizes the issue by asking if “you would be willing...to have the U.S. government torture known terrorists.” The average to this

question is much lower. The questions posed by the *ABC/Washington Post* contain a moral overtone –do you regard torture as –acceptable”–and this question returns the lowest percentage endorsing torture. Finally, if the question avoids the use of the word –torture” altogether, endorsement is higher than in any variant of the questions that mention torture directly. Both –harsh interrogation techniques” (Gallup) and –physical abuse short of torture” (*ABC/Post*) yield responses that are higher than any other question in Table 1.

A summary of the data in Table 1 would be that the endorsement of torture by American citizens averages about 40-45 percent, depending upon whether the question emphasizes the pragmatic justifiability of the practice or the issue of personal or moral acceptability.³ Still, the question wordings in Table 1 all represent abstract descriptions of the practice of torture with strong cues suggesting that the practice will provide information that will in fact prevent future acts of terrorism. Further, the term –torture” refers to a general class of acts without mentioning any specific technique employed against an individual. In some cases (–harsh interrogation”), the words are euphemisms for torture. If we turn instead to surveys that mention these specific interrogation techniques (such as enforced nudity, sexual or religious humiliation, stress positions, violent beatings, or denial of nourishment, among others), the results demonstrate far less public support than does the more general invocation of the word –torture.” Indeed, the evidence shows unequivocally that citizens oppose these specific acts of torture (Haider-Markel and Vieux 2008; Gronke *et. al.* 2010; Mayor and Armor 2012).

³ The same conclusion is reached by others who have compared the wording of different questions on torture: Mayor and Armor (2012) and Ramos and Nincic (2011).

Taken together, individual surveys and scholarship on torture have important implications, both for politics and for scholarly research on support for torture. Politically, the level of public support for torture is clearly a function of the terminology that frames the debate. The implication for research is equally clear. To the extent that the term “torture” is open to definitional and factual debate, the definitional vacuum is likely to be filled by the cues provided by partisanship and by political actors. As I suggested above, this is likely to be true unless circumstances and press coverage combine in such a way that “facts” unequivocally overwhelm partisan cues by bringing the graphic details of prisoner abuse to the fore. In the latter case, other variables may influence attitudes toward torture, and the literature suggests that gender is likely to be a significant influence.

The Relative Influence of Partisanship and Gender

I noted above that previous theory and research would suggest that support for torture will be structured first and foremost by partisanship, although there is some suggestion in the literature that gender is likely to be a significant influence on attitudes, and of course one would expect perceptions of the terrorist threat to condition support for torture. In this and the following section, I assess these associations.

I begin in the top half of Figure 2, which shows the breakdown by party identification of opinions from the surveys conducted by the Pew Center, the most numerous available over time.⁴ The data confirm the importance of partisanship: in all years but 2004, Republicans are more likely to respond that torture is “frequently or sometimes justified.” Indeed, with the exception of 2004, there has always been a majority of Republicans expressing this view. In contrast, fewer

⁴ Here and elsewhere, party identification includes leaned identifiers unless otherwise noted.

than 40 percent of Democrats express support for torture, and Independents find themselves in the middle (although closer to Democrats than Republicans). We will see below that this partisan structuring also characterizes opinions of torture in other question wordings. In summary, whatever the pragmatic and moral complexities that attend the issue, torture has been a partisan issue in most years.

An additional feature of the data in Figure 1 is the change in Republican attitudes and to a lesser extent those of Independents. In July 2004, just after the Abu Ghraib revelations in April, Republican support for torture was lower relative to later levels. However, the impact of Abu Ghraib wore off quickly among Republicans (and a bit later and less noticeably among Independents). In fact, beginning in 2005, Republican support increased in almost every year through 2011. The total increase from 2004 through 2011 was 19 percentage points. Support for torture among Democrats and Independents increased slightly through 2011, but the change is insignificant given sampling error. In sum, although partisanship structured views of torture only weakly in 2004, the polarization between the parties subsequently increased over time.

As a result, by the end of the Bush administration the gap between the parties was larger than it had ever been, and the gap persisted into the Obama administration. As the bottom of Figure 2 shows, however, the widening of the partisan gap after 2004 can be substantially traced to change in the views of *Republican women*. In fact, in 2004, the opinions of Republican women were closer to citizens in the Democratic Party than to those of male Republicans. However, in 2005 the partisan gap widened as women in the Republican Party increased their support for torture to a level slightly above that of men in the Republican Party. Put differently, in 2004 women in the Republican Party were significantly less likely to support torture than Republican men, a view they shared with Democrats of both genders. By 2005, the difference

had evaporated. Gender trumped partisanship, but only for one year in this formulation of the question by the Pew Center.

Other question formats demonstrate the same pattern. Table 2 displays support for torture in two different question formats, broken down by gender and partisan identification. The first entry is the Pew result from July 2004 that was displayed in Figure 2, showing that Republican women were closer to Democrats in responding that torture was “frequently or sometimes justifiable” (Democrat men = 44 percent and Republican women = 46 percent). Subsequent entries in the table show that Republican women were significantly less likely to say that torture was an “acceptable part of the US campaign against terrorism” (ABC/*Washington Post*). Indeed, the Republican gender difference is yawning in both May 2004 (-27 percentage points) and December 2005 (-23). Once again gender trumps party, as Republican women are much closer in their views to Democrats of both genders than to Republican men.

A different set of surveys during the first half of 2009 reveal an interesting pattern of change (Figure 3). In January 2009, after President Obama had taken office and announced a ban on torture, 65 percent of Republican men disagreed and responded that torture should be considered under some circumstances. However, Republican women were significantly less likely to express this position. Their views were closer to male Democrats than to men in the Republican Party. As the months passed, however, the pattern evaporated. In April, female Republicans were still less supportive of torture than their male counterparts, but both genders had increased their support for torture, and the party gap grew. By June, the Republican gender difference was gone altogether. Between January and June of 2009, the support of Republican women for torture “in some circumstances” had grown by 26 percentage points, while that of Republican men had changed only marginally. Among Democrats of both genders, opposition to

Obama's ban on torture actually declined. In summary, views of Obama's torture ban had been polarized by both party and gender in January. By June, polarization was solely a partisan phenomenon, a result of substantial change in the views of Republican women.

What explains the shift? One plausible hypothesis is that Republican women had already become disenchanted not only with President Bush's policies on torture, but perhaps also with his performance generally or with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this interpretation, President Obama benefitted from this disenchantment early in his term as well (he was elected in 2008 with a 13 percentage point advantage among women). If so, we would expect to find a similar Republican gender divide in general approval ratings of both President Bush and President Obama in early 2009.

This was not the case. In 2004 and 2005, both Republican men and women strongly approved President Bush in precisely the same surveys in which opinions of torture were ascertained (see Table 3). Any difference between them was neither consistent nor statistically meaningful. Similarly, approval ratings in the first half of 2009 show that Obama's honeymoon with Republicans was short-lived, and the polarization that took place as Republicans withdrew their approval through June occurred almost equally among Republican men and women – there are no meaningful differences between the two.⁵ In summary, Presidential approval that was

⁵ None of the crosstabulations in Table 3 come close to statistical significance, with the exception of June 2009, when women are modestly more favorable toward Obama among Democrats (prob <.09) and Republicans (prob <.08).

measured at precisely the same time as the questions on torture shown in Table 2 *demonstrate that the gender divide within the Republican Party was unique to the torture issue.*⁶

This returns us to the task of explaining the Republican gender divide that appears –but later fades—in the Pew Center surveys for 2004 (Figure 2) and the ABC/*Washington Post* surveys during early 2009 (Figure 3). Although it involves speculation, the data suggest a pattern in which views that are normally polarized by party among both women and men were jolted by the salience and graphically troubling nature of the torture issue. Although we do not have readings on the Pew Center questions before 2004, the wide gender differences among Republicans suggest that the revelations and the saturation visibility of the images from Abu Ghraib had a disproportionate effect on Republican women. Thereafter, the coverage of the issue declined, and discussion of the issue of torture was transformed from one that was dominated by ugly images on the television screen to a highly partisan one in which the Bush administration debated the meaning of the term “torture,” defended its interrogation tactics, and argued that it had not tortured at all. To judge from the survey results in Figure 2, the administration’s argument had the effect of mobilizing support among all Republicans –but particularly among Republican women.

The dynamic during early 2009 was arguably similar. Obama’s inauguration and his announcement of a ban on torture in January focused public attention on the issue, but by April Obama’s announcement was overshadowed by a partisan debate about the release of the so-

⁶ Nor is it the case that Republican women were more critical of Bush’s national security policies specifically. For example, there is no gender difference among Republicans on the question of Bush’s handling of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

called “torture memos” that had been prepared in the Department of Justice during the Bush administration (the memos were released on April 16, 2009). Also in April, former Vice-President Cheney and President Obama engaged in a public debate about torture, with Cheney defending the former administration’s actions and charging that the Obama administration’s policies had weakened the country’s defenses. Obama argued that the country had lost its “moral bearing” by torturing.⁷

Figure 4 traces the evolution of press coverage of the debate between Obama and Cheney. As I did earlier for Abu Ghraib, I conducted a Lexis-Nexis search with two search terms: “Obama torture” and “Cheney torture,” with the search configured to return results in which both words appeared in the same sentence of all print news sources.⁸ The figure shows that President Obama monopolized news reports about torture after the announcement of his ban in January, and we have seen that Republican women substantially supported his position at that time. However, the figure also shows the emerging coverage of former Vice President Cheney’s critique of Obama’s torture ban during May and June, a period during which Republican sentiment moved against the President’s ban --movement that was particularly strong among Republican women. Once again, in early 2009 gender had trumped party --but not for long.

⁷ Remarks by the President to CIA employees at CIA Headquarters, April 20, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-to-CIA-employees-at-CIA-Headquarters/. Cheney’s charges are discussed in Liz Haloran, “Obama, Cheney Face Off on Torture,” *National Public Radio*, May 21, 2009 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104391451>.

⁸ I conducted the same search for the appearance of “Obama/Cheney” and “torture” anywhere in the news article, and the resulting trends look very much like those in Figure 4.

Modeling Support for Torture: Threat, Gender and Partisanship

The foregoing analysis suggests that under some circumstances gender can be more important than partisanship in determining attitudes toward torture. However, the analysis took place in the absence of controls for external threat and other variables that might influence attitudes toward torture. In this section, I assess the relative importance of gender, party, and other variables in multivariate regression models. I begin in columns 1 and 2 of Table 4 with the surveys by ABC/Washington Post in May 2004 and the Pew survey for July 2004 because these surveys include a variable measuring the perceived threat of a terrorist attack, while most other surveys do not. The results are logistic regression coefficients in which the dependent variable takes the value of 1 if torture is considered “acceptable” (column 1) or if torture is considered “frequently or sometimes justified” (column 2). Following the analysis presented above, the predictors of primary theoretical interest are gender (female =1) and partisanship (with dummy variables for Republican and Democrat identifiers, leaving Independents as the reference category). For the ABC/Washington Post survey in the first column, the terror threat variable is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent chose “The U.S. campaign against terrorism” as the most important issue in the upcoming president election. The threat variable for the Pew survey in the second column takes four values in response to a question that asks about the degree of worry that “there will soon be another terrorist attack” (1 not at all worried through 4 very worried). Other specified predictors follow the findings of previous research, in which age, race and ethnicity, and region are sometimes significant correlates of attitudes towards torture.

Table 4 shows the regression results. As my earlier analysis suggested, gender dominates partisanship in both surveys in 2004. Women are significantly less supportive of torture in both. In fact, aside from the age of the respondents, gender is the only variable that is significant in both equations. Partisanship is not significant in either equation, and ideology in only one (column 1). Perception of the terror treat is significant in only one of the 2004 equations.

Surprisingly, the age of the respondent is a consistently significant, negative influence on attitudes towards torture: older respondents support torture less. It is surprising because it is a factor that has received little attention in previous theory and research. Space precludes an extended discussion here, but it is worth noting that, based on preliminary analysis, the cutting point appears to occur for those older than approximately 45 years of age. Taking 2009 as the reference point, this means that torture is supported less by those born before 1964 and who matured politically before and during the mid-1970s. This might suggest that older respondents are more familiar with reports of atrocities during the Second World War or the Vietnam War, but this must remain speculation.

In any case, the regression results are consistent with the contextual interpretation that I offered above. In 2004, the Abu Ghraib scandal publicized torture with saturation coverage of graphic images, which I argue sensitized gender differences. Further, as columns 3 and 4 in Table 4 make clear, this pattern did *not* extend to evaluations of President Bush more generally. In fact, presidential approval in the same surveys were not influenced by gender at all but were dominated by ideology and partisanship.⁹

⁹ The same is true of approval of the President's handling of the war in Iraq, which are heavily dominated by ideology and partisanship and unaffected by gender.

The final column in Table 5 shows logistic regression results for the remaining Pew surveys on the justifiability of torture, specified with the same variables but lacking a measure of terror threat. Gender is a significant influence for this period, although its slope is milder than in 2004, but partisanship is also a strong influence—in the case of Republicans a stronger one judged by the magnitude of the slope. Thus, in comparison to 2004 when gender was the most important influence, for later years gender is just one among several significant influences, with Republican partisanship among the strongest. Gender trumped party in 2004, but not for long.

The evolution of this pattern is most clearly seen by comparing the combined marginal effects of gender and partisanship on the probability of supporting torture (Figure 5). That is, it shows the probability of responding that torture is “often or sometimes justified,” controlling for other variables in the regression.¹⁰ In May 2004, there are gender effects within both parties, as women are less likely to support torture. Gender is particularly important in May—Republican women are less likely to support torture than men in the Democratic Party. In July, Republican women are still less likely to support torture than men in their party, but they are approximately equal to male Democrats. In contrast, for the period 2005-2009, partisan polarization had taken hold and gender differences within the parties—though present—are much smaller and substantially overshadowed by partisanship.

Table 5 displays logistic regression results for the survey questions by ABC/Washington Post in 2009 that inquired if respondents agreed with President Obama’s executive order that banned torture, or if they thought that “there are cases in which the United States should consider torture against terrorism suspects.” The dependent variable takes the value of 1 if respondents

¹⁰ For this and the marginal effects reported below, the probabilities are calculated in Stata 12 by specifying the complete interaction of gender and party, followed by the “`—margins`” command.

responded “there are cases in which the United States should consider torture” and 0 otherwise. The specification of independent variables follows that of the previous table.

The results are similar to those in the immediately preceding table: in January 2009 and April 2009, women are significantly less supportive of torture, while partisanship is significant only in January –and only mildly so. However, by June, after several months of partisan debate about the torture ban and Obama’s release of the torture memos, the gender effect evaporated, while the partisan effect (Republican) grew both in the magnitude of the coefficient and its significance. Once again, gender had been a strong –indeed the strongest—influence on attitudes in January, but by June the gender effect was gone.

Figure 6 displays the combined marginal effects of gender and partisanship in the three 2009 surveys. That is, the figure shows the probability of responding that “there are cases in which the United States should consider torture against terrorism suspects.” The figure highlights the prominent gender effects within both parties in January and within the Republican Party in April. Over the six months covered by the surveys, however, partisanship asserted itself. Change among Democrats was slight, but among Republicans the debate about torture and the torture memos led to increasing support for torture, especially among Republican women. The net result by June of 2009 was that the probability of supporting torture was entirely a partisan matter. Consistent with the contextual interpretation that I have offered, the results confirm a pattern in which gender effects are sensitized when the issue is highly salient and the public discussion focuses on the graphic details or moral quality of torture as policy. However, as partisan debate comes to dominate the discourse, gender effects recede and partisanship —wins.”

Summary and Conclusions

Four principal conclusions emerge from the research reported here:

First, like other opinions on national security issues, opinions of torture are structured by partisanship, but this polarization is accompanied by substantial gender differences that at times equal or override partisanship. This was true, for example, in the aftermath of the release of the Abu Ghraib photos in 2004 and in the reaction to President Obama's ban on torture in 2009. At least initially in these two cases, support for torture was far less among all Democrats, but it was also lower among Republican women.

Second, the results reinforce an important argument made by Sapiro and Shames: that the effect of gender on political attitudes is context specific (2002). Many theories of gender difference on national security issues aspire to a universal or indeed essentialist explanation, but my results show that gender is important at specific times under specific circumstances. To be sure, the results are consistent with past findings that women are particularly averse to the employment of violence, but this is different from an attempt to theorize gender as an influence on all issues under all circumstances.

Third, as concerns the torture issue, variations in context mattered because they determined whether moral or consequentialist considerations were highlighted in the public narrative (to use the terminology of Nincic and Ramos 2011). After the Abu Ghraib disclosures and after President Obama's announcement of a torture ban, the public discussion of torture was dominated by moral revulsion (at the photographs) and moral reasoning. Indeed, Obama himself argued that the country had lost its —moral compass.” It seems plausible that it was this

variation in narratives that sensitized women's disproportionate aversion to violence as a policy instrument.

Finally, the findings described here help to explain what might otherwise be considered a puzzle: that candidate Obama did not emphasize his position on the torture issue in either of his presidential campaigns. On the one hand, this might seem odd, since we have seen that a critical stance on torture has some resonance beyond the Democratic Party –precisely the sort of issue on which a candidate might seek to capitalize. Yet we have also seen that, once a partisan debate on torture was joined, citizen opinions rapidly returned to their “normal” state of partisan polarization. Under these circumstances, the torture issue became one of many on which the parties were at loggerheads and perhaps offered no more prospect of advantage than any other.

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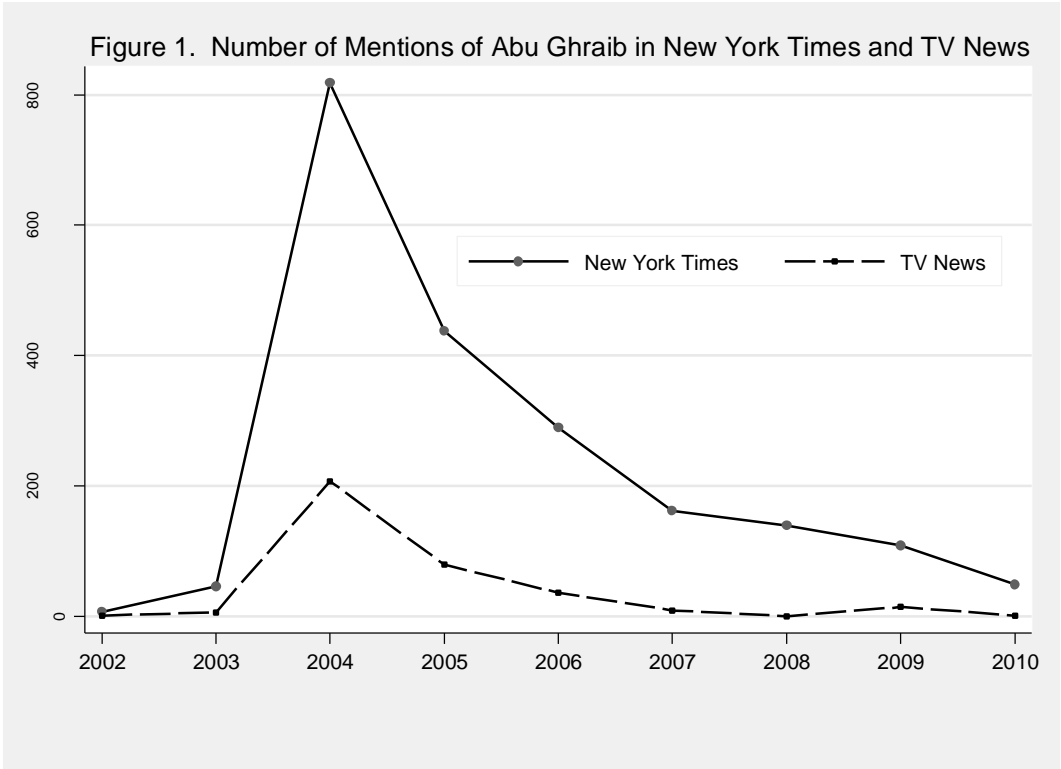


Table 1. Opinions of Torture in a Variety of Question Wordings

Pew: –Do you think the use of torture against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?” (2004-2011)

	Often or Sometimes Justified	Rarely or Never Justified
<i>Average</i>	46	50

Gallup: –Would you be willing -- or not willing -- to have the U.S. government....Torture known terrorists if they know details about future terrorist attacks in the U.S.” (2001, 2005)

	Willing	Not Willing
<i>Average</i>	41	56

ABC/WP: –Do you support this [Obama's] position *not to use torture*, or do you think there are cases in which the United States *should consider torture* against terrorism suspects?” (January 2009 – June 2009)

	Should consider torture	Support Obama (<i>not to torture</i>)
<i>Average</i>	45	45

ABC/WP: "Would you regard the use of torture against people suspected of involvement in terrorism as an acceptable or unacceptable part of the U.S. campaign against terrorism?" (2003 – 2005)

	Acceptable	Unacceptable
<i>Average</i>	31	66

ABC/WP: –What about *physical abuse that falls short of torture*?”

	Acceptable	Unacceptable
5/23/2004	48	50

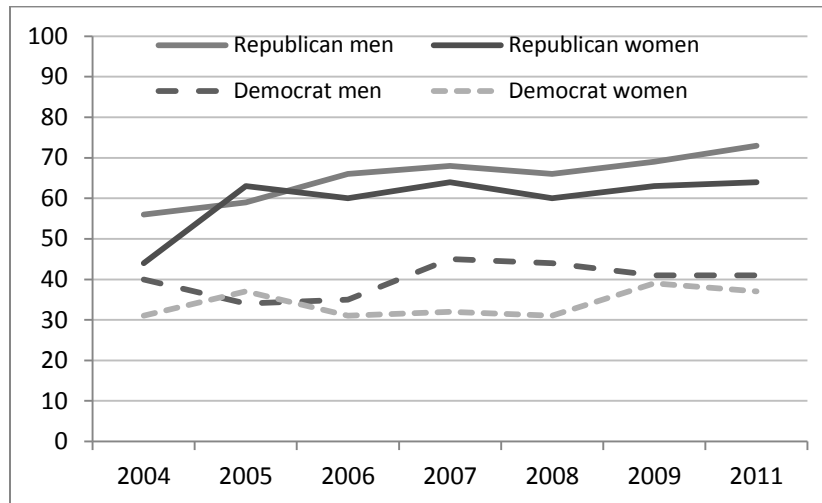
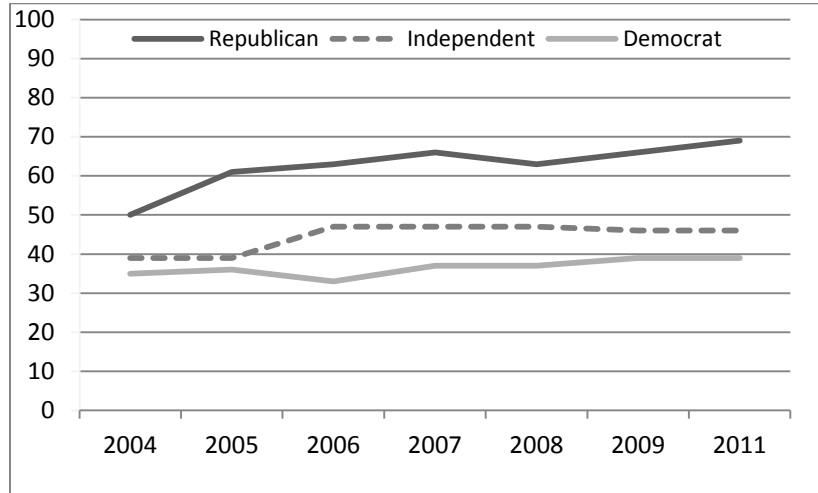
Gallup: –Based on what you know or have read, do you think the use of *harsh interrogation techniques* for terrorism suspects was justified or not justified?”

	Justified	Not Justified
4/25/2009	55	36

Note: Averages are shown to conserve space, but individual surveys confirm the patterns here. See Gronke et al. (2010) for the most complete listing of responses to individual surveys on torture.

Source: See Appendix for complete technical details for these and other surveys used in this paper.

Figure 2. Percentage of Respondents Who Say Torture is “Frequently or Sometimes Justified,” by Party Identification and by Gender and Party Identification



Note: Party identification includes “leaned” identifiers.

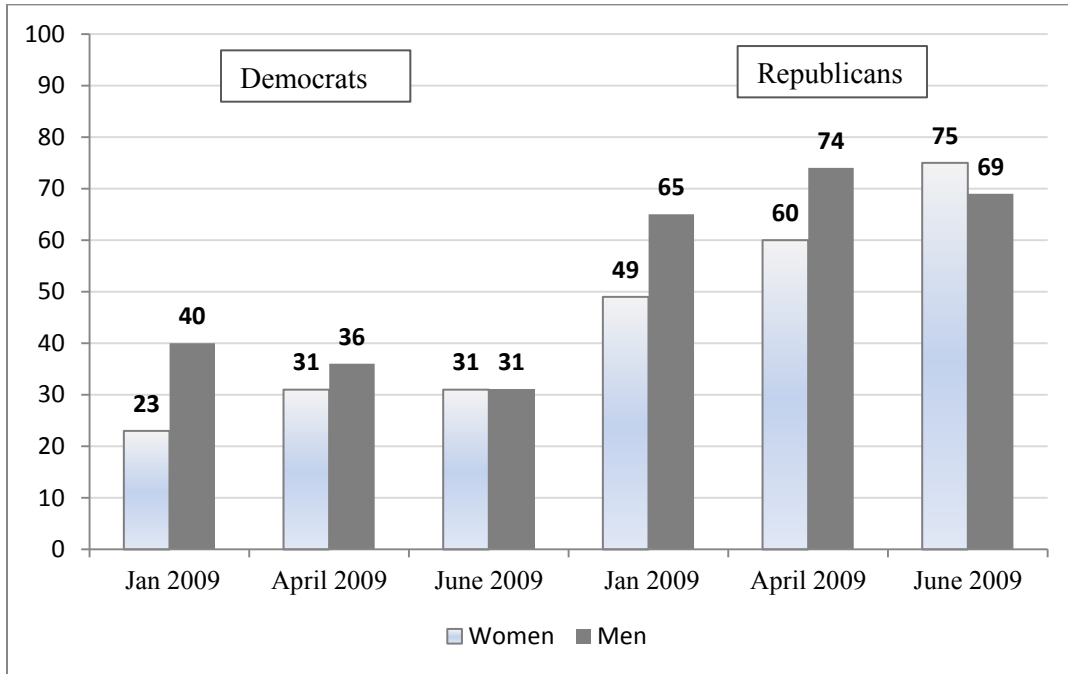
Source: Surveys by Pew Center for the People and the Press, as described further in the Appendix.

Table 2. Support for Torture by Party and Gender

	Men	Women	Difference	Chi-square	Sig	N
<i>Pew July 2004</i>						
<i>Torture is "frequently or sometimes justified"</i>						
Democrats	44	34	-10	7.16	.07	467
Republicans	56	46	-10	9.55	.02	406
<i>ABC/WP</i>						
<i>Torture is "acceptable"</i>						
May 2004						
Democrats	33	23	-10	6.22	.03	473
Republicans	60	33	-27	32.23	.00	422
December 2005						
Democrats	32	22	-10	6.17	.19	304
Republicans	52	29	-23	19.31	.00	320
Independents	35	23	-12	9.33	.08	323

Note: With the exception of December 2005, party identification includes leaned identifiers.

Figure 3. Percent who believe “there are cases in which the United States should consider torture against terrorism suspects” (oppose Obama ban on torture)



Source: ABC/Washington Post surveys (see Table 1 and Appendix 1)

Note: Includes leaned party identifiers. The gender difference among Democrats is significant only in January ($p = .00$). Among Republicans, it is significant in January ($p = .01$) and April ($p = .04$).

Table 3. Presidential Job Approval by Party and Gender: 2004, 2005, and 2009

	Men	Women	Gender Difference	N
President Bush				
Pew				
July 2004				
Democrats	12	12	0	491
Republicans	89	86	-3	419
ABC/WP				
May 2004				
Democrats	21	19	-2	511
Republicans	80	84	-4	401
December 2005				
Democrats	16	15	-1	325
Republicans	87	87	0	316
Independents	38	39	1	324
President Obama				
ABC/WP				
Jan 2009				
Democrats	94	90	-4	577
Republicans	60	66	6	364
April 2009				
Democrats	95	92	-3	564
Republicans	38	42	-4	398
June 2009				
Democrats	87	94	7	518
Republicans	32	24	-8	366

Note: With the exception of December 2005, party identification includes leaned identifiers.

Source: see Appendix

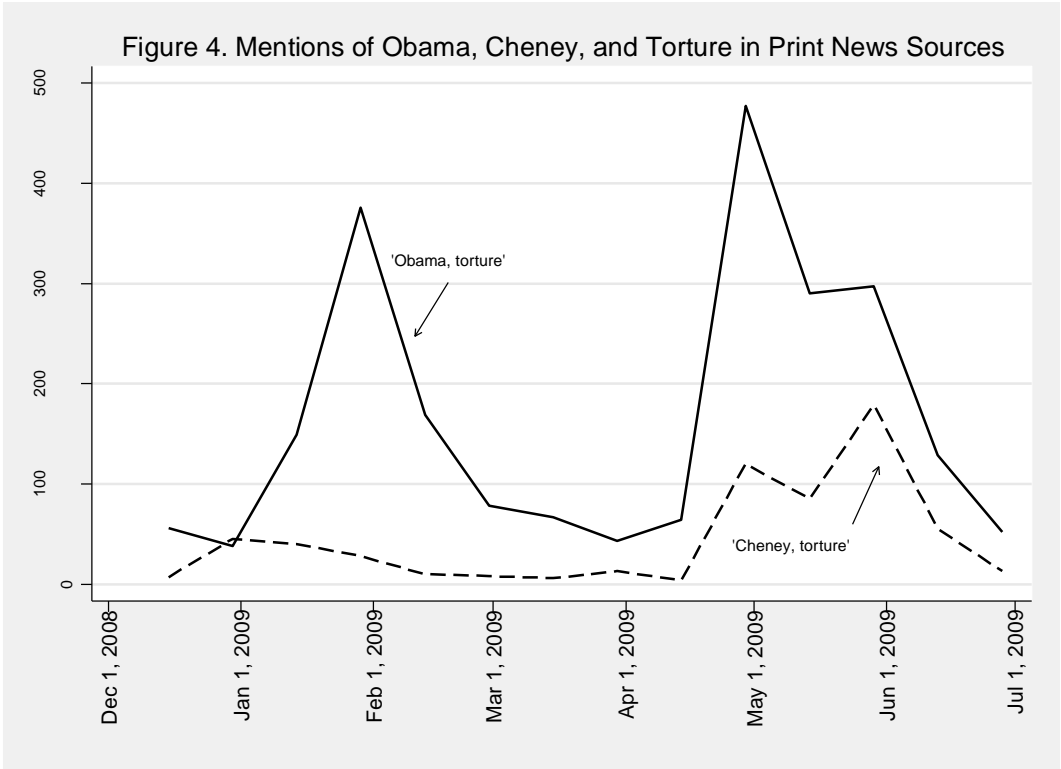


Table 4. Logistic Regression Analysis of Support for Torture

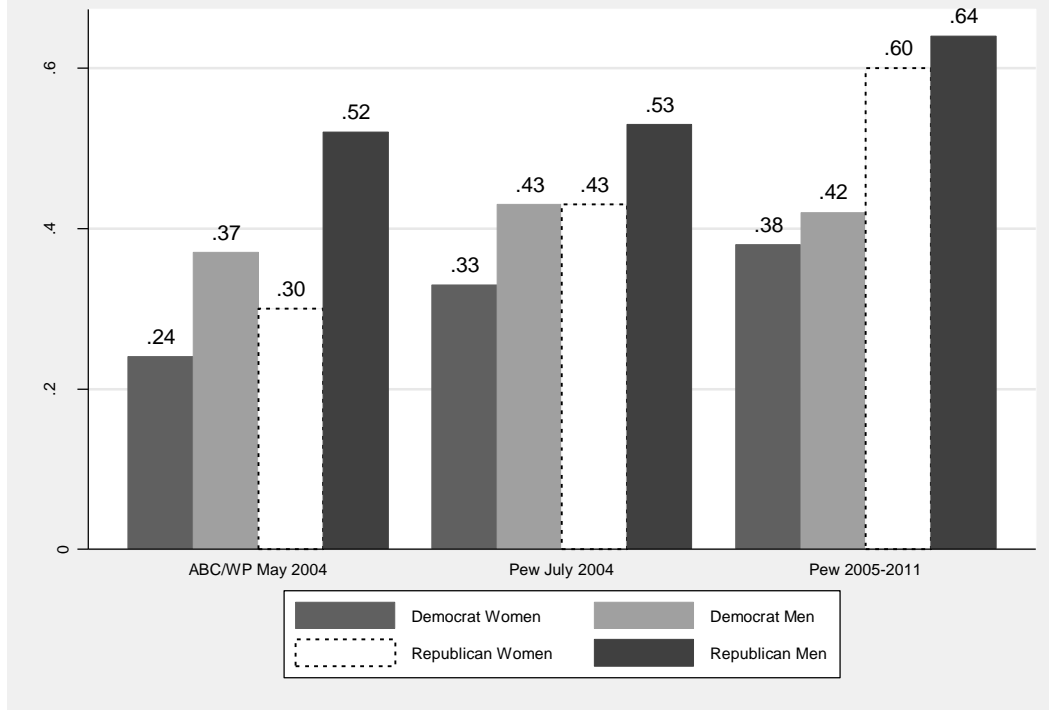
	1 Torture acceptable ABC/WP May 2004	2 Torture justified Pew July 2004	3 Bush Approval ABC/WP May 2004	4 Bush Approval Pew July 2004	5 Torture justified Pew 2005-2011
Threat	.748*** (.197)	.130 (.078)	1.363*** (.295)	-.169* (.068)	---
Ideology	.320** (.110)	.139 (.081)	.400** (.131)	.278*** (.077)	.322*** (.031)
Female	-.730*** (.143)	-.470*** (.140)	.191 (.178)	-.093 (.122)	-.227*** (.081)
Republican	.082 (.278)	.254 (.264)	1.379*** (.303)	.786*** (.219)	.704*** (.092)
Democrat	-.310 (.282)	-.165 (.255)	-1.503*** (.298)	-1.327*** (.241)	-.198* (.089)
Education	-.120 (.064)	-.112* (.044)	-.145 (.079)	-.054 (.039)	-.085*** (.016)
Age	-.018*** (.005)	-.015*** (.004)	-.013* (.006)	-.002 (.004)	-.009*** (.002)
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>					
Black	-.615* (.316)	-.138 (.230)	-.974* (.393)	-.934** (.295)	-.108 (.115)
Hispanic	.148 (.302)	.153 (.271)	-.228 (.359)	-.111 (.257)	-.065 (.019)
Other race	.401 (.292)	.345 (.340)	-.153 (.374)	-.065 (.303)	-.115 (.132)
Northeast	.051	.234	-.638**	.157	.016

	(.195)	(.200)	(.239)	(.175)	(.072)
South	-.004 (.161)	.323* (.156)	.275 (.202)	.193 (.135)	.304*** (.058)
Constant	.380 (.497)	.192 (.487)	.364 (.590)	-1.213** (.432)	-.536 (.186)
Pseudo R ²	.09	.05			.08
Observations	969	912	947	1836	6673

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Coefficients are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Columns 1 and 3: The dependent variable in column 1 is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if respondent thinks “the use of torture against people suspected of involvement in terrorism is acceptable.” In column 3, the dependent variable is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if respondent approves somewhat or strongly of President George W. Bush’s handling of his job. *Threat* is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if respondent chooses “The U.S. campaign against terrorism” as the most important issue in the 2004 election from a list of seven issues; *Ideology* takes three values: 1 Liberal 2 Moderate 3 Conservative; *Education* takes six values from 1 (less than eighth grade) through 6 (some postgraduate education); *Age* is actual age ascertained from respondent. All other independent variables are dummy variables constructed from respondent declaration of party identification and race or interviewer coding of gender and region. Columns 2, 4 and 5: *Threat* (column 2 only) takes 4 values in response to a question that asks about the degree of worry that “there will soon be another terrorist attack” (1 not at all worried through 4 very worried); *Ideology* takes five values from 1 (very liberal) through 3 (moderate) and 5 (very conservative); *Age* is actual age ascertained from respondent; *Education* takes 7 values from 1 (less than eighth grade) through 7 (some postgraduate education); all other independent variables are dummy variables constructed from respondent declaration of party identification and race or interviewer coding of gender and region.

Figure 5. Combined Marginal Effects of Partisanship and Gender on Support for Torture



probability of support

Table 5. Logistic Regression Analysis of Support for Torture, 2009

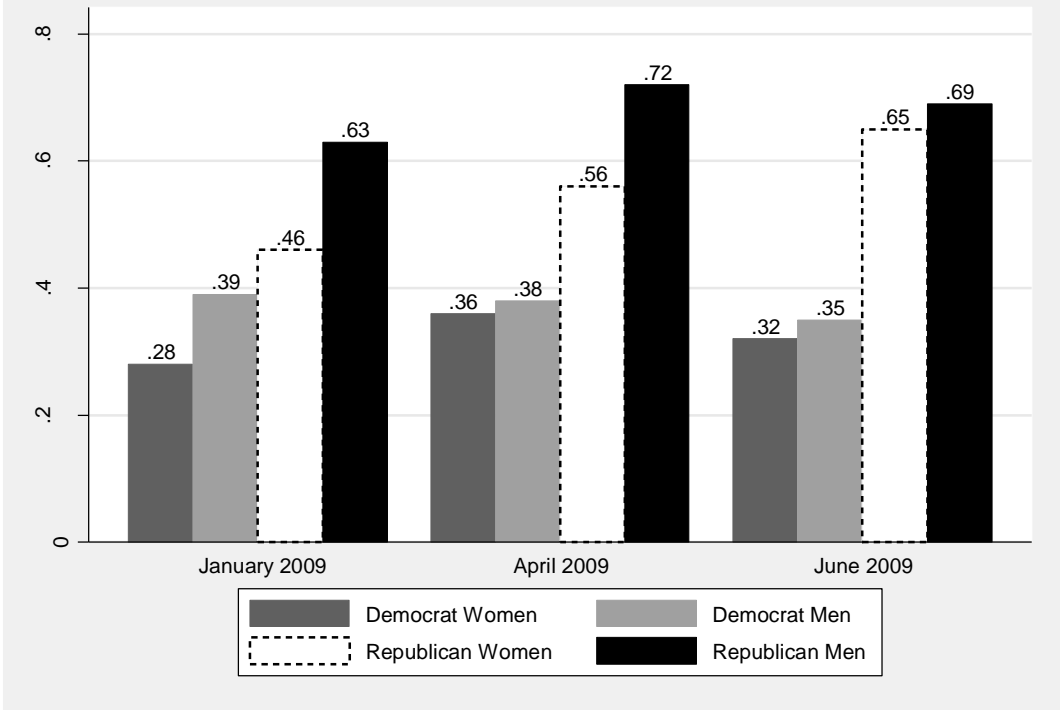
	(1) ABC/WP Jan 2009	(2) ABC/WP April 2009	(3) ABC/WP June 2009
Ideology	.446*** (.105)	.407*** (.107)	.553*** (.110)
Female	-.613*** (.139)	-.330* (.141)	-.050 (.149)
Republican	.623* (.250)	.370 (.256)	1.090*** (.260)
Democrat	-.291 (.242)	-.745** (.251)	-.354 (.261)
Education	-.0284 (.061)	-.100 (.064)	-.128 (.067)
Age	-.002 (.004)	.002 (.004)	-.005 (.005)
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>			
Black	-.389 (.202)	-.465* (.213)	-.426 (.289)
Hispanic	-.568 (.340)	-.269 (.328)	-.173 (.336)
Other race	.169 (.291)	-.572 (.300)	-.200 (.302)
Northeast	.304 (.191)	.175 (.190)	.281 (.198)
South	.166 (.158)	.274 (.159)	.248 (.167)
Constant	-.847 (.461)	-.184 (.493)	-.829 (.514)
Pseudo R ²	.10	.12	.15
Observations	999	980	935

*** p<0.001, **p<0.01, * p<0.05

Coefficients are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent replies that “there are cases in which the United States should consider torture against terrorism suspects,”

(versus President Obama's ban on the use of torture). *Ideology* takes three values: 1 Liberal 2 Moderate 3 Conservative; *Education* takes six values from 1 (less than eighth grade) through 6 (some postgraduate education); *Age* is actual age ascertained from respondent. All other independent variables are dummy variables constructed from respondent declaration of party identification and race or interviewer coding of gender and region.

Figure 6. Combined Marginal Effects of Partisanship and Gender on Support for Torture



Appendix

Survey Organization	Sampling Dates	Sample size	Roper Center Reference
Pew	August 17-21, 2011	1509	USPSRA.090111.R81
	October 28-November 8, 2009	2000	USSRBI.120309P.R70F2
	March 31-April 21, 2009	3,013	USPSRA.052109.RB25F1
	February 4-February 8, 2009	1,303	USPSRA.09FEB04.R48F1
	February 20-February 24, 2008	1,508	USPSRA.022808.R73F1
	November 20-November 26, 2007	1,399	USSRBI.120407P.R45
	December 12-January 9, 2007	2,007	USPSRA.032207.R28
	September 21-October 4, 2006	1804	USPSRA.100506.R51
	October 12-October 24, 2005	2006	USPSRA.111705.R36F1
	March 17-March 27, 2005	1090	USPSRA.051005.R14
	July 8-July 18, 2004	2009	USPSRA.081804.R77F2
Gallup	November 11-November 13, 2005	1006	USGALLUP.05NV011.R27
	January 7-January 9, 2005	1008	USGALLUP.05JNY07.R34C
	October 5-October 6, 2001	819	USGALLUP.01OC05.R17C
	April 24-April 25, 2009	1044	USGALLUP.09APRIL24.R02
	September 15-September 17, 2006	1003	USGALLUP.092106.R3
ABC/Washington Post	June 18-June 21, 2009	1001	USABCWP.062209.R33
	April 21-April 24, 2009	1072	USABCWP.042609.R29
	January 13-16, 2009	1079	USABCWP.20091085.Q035
	December 15-December 18, 2005	1003	USABCWP.121905.R41
	May 20-May 23, 2004	1005	USABCWP.052704.R28A
	September 4-September 7, 2003	1004	USABC.091003.R50F

