

Gender Differences in Support for the Use of Military Force in Cross-National Perspective: The War System, Modernization, and the Universal Logics of Military Action¹

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The Research Question

There is ample evidence from the US context that women, although hardly pacifist, are less supportive of the use of military force than are men. However, the evidence is largely restricted to one conflict episode (the first Gulf War), and there is almost no cross-national evidence that would allow us to evaluate important hypotheses (especially concerning the universality of gender differences). In this paper, I aim to close this gap in the evidence.

The Data Collection

The dataset includes survey measures of support for using military force in six historical episodes: the Gulf War of 1991; the ensuing confrontation with Iraq over weapons inspections (1991-2002); NATO's intervention in Bosnia (1992-1995); NATO's attack against Serbia in support of the Kosovar Albanians (1998-1999); the US war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (2001-2004); and the war against Iraq and subsequent occupation (2003-). All of these historical episodes were *internationalized conflicts*, because the sanction of international institutions was sought –although not always

¹ This is an abridged version of a paper delivered at the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 2007. A longer version is now under revision. Please contact me with comments and requests for further information.

received. (The effect of the legitimacy conferred by international institutions is explicitly analyzed.) The dataset includes 612 survey measures of support for using force, drawn from 37 countries. The regression analysis encompasses 589 of these questions. Table 2 and Figure 1 show average gender differences in support for using military force, first organized by historical episode and second by the country surveyed.

Definition of Support for Using Military Force

I define “support for using military force” in this paper as any survey item that seeks a positive or negative opinion on “the potential or actual use of military force [past, present, or future]... including questions that actively (if sometimes hypothetically) query approval or disapproval of an action involving military force as a means of policy and also including questions that ask if the action is justified, appropriate, or the right thing to do.”

Gender difference subtracts the support of women from the support of men (in both cases after “don’t know” and nonresponses have been excluded).

Hypotheses

I specify gender differences as a function of three sets of variables (and one set of nontheoretical control factors)

The War System. In what is probably the most exhaustive analysis of gendered war roles, Goldstein (2001) argues convincingly that all societies respond to the insecurities of international life –the pervasiveness of war—by socializing males to the role of warrior (an argument that is echoed in the work of other scholars as well). There

is some evidence for the generality of this view as displayed in Table 1. And if Goldstein is correct, we would expect one of the following hypotheses to be true:

H1: there are no significant variations in gender differences across societies (the constancy of the “war system” produces constant gender differences);

H2: gender differences vary as a function of a society’s participation in the “war system”; in particular, gender differences vary positively with the frequency and costliness of a society’s past war experience and its participation in global power competition.

Modernization. Inglehart and Norris have presented persuasive evidence that the emergence of citizen support for gender equality is related to the process of “modernization,” a term that encompasses the social and cultural changes that accompany increasing levels of economic growth (2003). As societies experience the changes associated with economic growth –especially changes in gendered workforce and household roles and increasing secularization – a number of associated changes take place. Most importantly, women move leftward in their political orientation, policy preferences, and voting behavior. Women in more developed societies are also relatively more supportive of government intervention in the economy generally and of social service programs specifically. To the extent that these compete with the national security budget, a “butter over guns” preference will prevail (Inglehart and Norris 2003). As a result, we can articulate a third hypothesis:

H3: gender differences vary positively with the level of economic growth;

Universal logics of military action. Three decades of research on the general question of citizen support for using military force has produced consensus on several important points (see Eichenberg 2005 for an exhaustive review of this literature). First,

the objective for which military force is threatened or employed is among the most important determinants of support, a finding that applies both to US opinion and to opinion in other countries. For example, support for a military action that is designed to deter or undo a clear aggression (*foreign policy restraint*) is generally higher than support for intervening in a civil war, and purely humanitarian interventions are the most popular of all. A second, related finding is that support is conditioned by the perceived legitimacy of the military action; actions undertaken with the endorsement or indeed participation of the international community attract more support than actions that do not enjoy international sanction. Finally, support for military action is conditioned by the perceived risk that surrounds the action, especially the risk to human life.

Can these findings be applied to gender differences in support for military actions? Several of the findings in the literature reviewed above suggest that they can. First, although the research is admittedly sparse, there is at least some evidence from the US case that women and men do indeed differ in their support for different policy objectives. For example, in the US women react more positively to humanitarian interventions (Eichenberg 2003). Second, several findings in previous research seem to suggest that women –in the US and elsewhere—are relatively more supportive of the liberal worldview, a worldview that emphasizes concern for individuals (casualties) and the value and legitimacy of international institutions. Finally, research findings in the US context show that the risk and human cost of military action increase gender differences: women are more sensitive to risky or escalatory actions, and they react more negatively to the mention of casualties in survey questions (Conover and Sapiro 1993; Eichenberg 2003).

Whether these relationships hold across a diverse array of societies is the question that motivates the analyses to follow, but there is sufficient existing evidence to state these relationships as additional hypotheses:

H4: cross-national variations in gender differences vary as a function of the policy objective for which force is employed;

H5: cross-national variations in gender differences vary as a positive function of the degree of international legitimacy attached to the action;

H6: cross-national variations in gender differences vary as a negative function of the risk and human cost associated with the action.

Analysis and Findings

In Table 3, I present a regression analysis of gender differences in support for using military force. Gender differences are modeled as a function of the variables discussed above (“universal logic” variables are dummy variables representing the presence or absence of the variable in question wording). Previous research has established that all of these variables are associated with overall population support for using force, but here the question is whether the impact of the variables is different for men and women –and thus whether these differential impacts increase or decrease gender differences (the third column of the table is a regression, not a subtraction).

The most important findings in Table 3 are the following:

1. *There are many commonalities in the determinants of support among men and women*, in particular the prominent impact of universal logics.
2. *Nonetheless*, there are also prominent differences, that is, variables that differ either in significance or magnitude in their impact on the views of men and women, which

of course increases or decreases gender differences. Among the most important are the following:

- a. Gender differences do not vary as a function of the “war system”, as cumulative historical battle deaths are uncorrelated with the support of either men or women;
- b. Economic growth has a stronger impact on men than on women; gender differences therefore increase at higher levels of wealth, as Inglehart and Norris would predict;
- c. Women respond more positively to humanitarian interventions and to interventions involving United Nations troops (which men do not respond to at all). These findings suggest that a liberal worldview is more strongly held among women.
- d. Men respond more strongly to questions that mention “terror” or “terrorism” (usually phrased as part of the “war against terror”). Men also increase their support more strongly when the question mentions military actions involving the NATO Alliance. Note that women do respond positively to such actions – the magnitude of their reaction is simply less. This may be because these two actions do not involve an international mandate, which as discussed under b. above does evoke more positive reactions from women. It may also be due to a more general aversion of women to more violent actions (at the margins).

Conclusions and Implications

The findings have important implications for several questions that permeate the literature on gender in international relations:

Gender differences vary substantially across societies and within a number of international conflicts. The data therefore cast doubt on any theory that would predict constant gender differences, most importantly any biological explanation, but also the version of Goldstein's hypothesis that relates universally gendered war socialization to the pervasiveness of the "war system".

The fact that gender differences vary positively with economic growth suggests that they result from changes in political circumstances, economic structures, and attitudinal change (rather than from some constant proclivity).

There are many commonalities in the views of men and women, but the direction of gender differences is always and everywhere that women are less supportive of using military force than men. The structure of the parameters suggest that women are supportive of a liberal (Wilsonian) view of the world, and thus most likely to approve of military action to help individuals in need and support an internationally agreed mandate.

Finally, the magnitude of gender differences call to mind the words of Conover and Sapiro, who observed that gender differences are "clearly of a magnitude that can have real political significance under the right circumstances" (1993, 1079-1099). Of course, the crucial element is the combination of circumstances. In this paper, I have shown some circumstances that produce differences in the views of men and women, and these are circumstances that are likely to accompany future international conflicts. Since

they produce differing views among men and women, there is every prospect that future political debates about the use of force will be gendered debates.

Table 1. Percent Agreeing with the Assertion that "War is Sometimes Necessary to Obtain Justice"

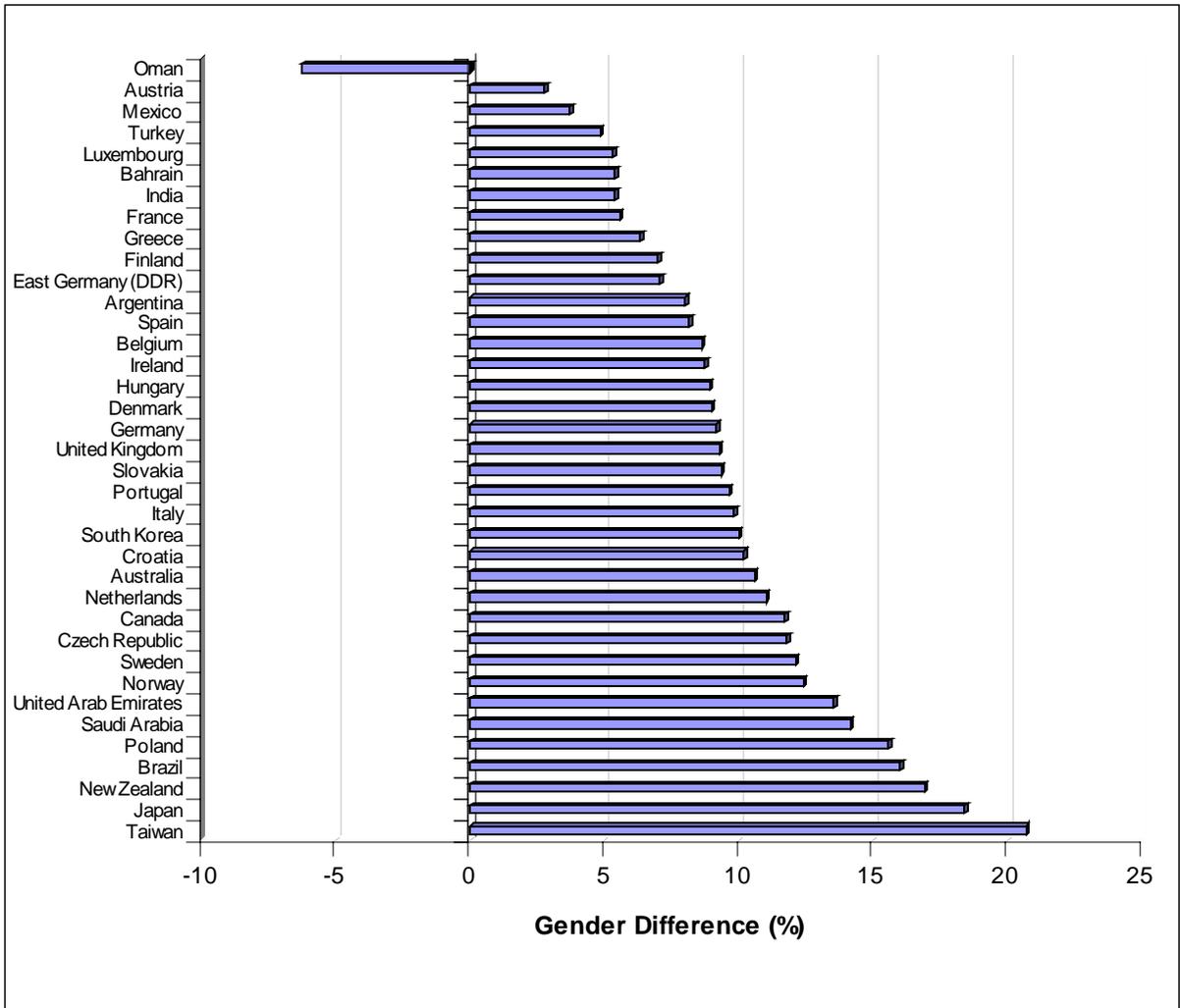
	Men Agree (%)	Women Agree (%)	Gender Difference
Germany	36	17	18
The Netherlands	57	40	18
France	41	24	17
Portugal	42	26	17
Spain	30	15	15
Poland	38	24	15
Italy	35	21	14
UK	73	60	13
Bulgaria	32	22	11
Slovakia	40	33	7
USA	82	80	2
Turkey	51	50	1
Romania	35	35	-1
Average	46	34	11

Source: German Marshall Fund of the United States (2006).

Table 2. Average Support of Men and Women for the Use of Military Force During Six International Conflicts

	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference	Number of Survey Questions
Gulf crisis and war 1990/1991	59	52	7	98
Bosnia 1992-1995	50	43	7	280
Confrontation with Iraq 1993-2002	57	48	10	7
Kosovo 1998-1999	63	45	19	32
War Against Terror 2001-2004	53	42	11	87
Iraq War 2003-2004	42	32	10	108
Total	51	43	9	612

Figure 1. Gender Differences in Support for Using Military Force (men – women)



Note: The country averages are gender differences in support for using military force for any purpose across six the six historical conflicts listed in Table 2.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Support for Using Military Force and of Gender Differences

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Men	Women	Gender Difference
<i>The War System</i>			
Cumulative Battle deaths per 1000population	0.013 (0.032)	0.024 (0.032)	-0.012 (0.015)
<i>Modernization</i>			
GDP/capita current prices	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)
<i>Universal Logics: policy objectives</i>			
Humanitarian intervention	20.294*** (2.498)	25.614*** (2.540)	-5.284*** (1.198)
Foreign policy restraint	9.486*** (2.238)	11.407*** (2.277)	-2.029* (1.074)
Terror or terrorism mentioned	12.047*** (3.070)	5.549* (3.124)	6.653*** (1.473)
Peace keeping	-5.957 (9.971)	-2.410 (10.137)	-3.600 (4.780)
<i>Universal logics: international legitimacy</i>			
UN forces mentioned	1.455 (2.694)	8.027*** (2.740)	-6.648*** (1.292)
NATO forces mentioned	5.060* (3.038)	0.180 (3.124)	5.556*** (1.473)
U.S. forces mentioned	-12.080*** (2.402)	-12.050*** (2.442)	-0.082 (1.152)
Survey country's forces mentioned	-6.724** (2.979)	-8.662*** (3.030)	1.808 (1.429)
<i>Universal logics: casualties and risk</i>			
Civilian or military casualties mentioned	-32.160*** (3.199)	-32.901*** (3.253)	0.749 (1.534)
Send or increase troops	-6.697*** (2.277)	-7.364*** (2.331)	1.053 (1.099)
Sell or provide arms	-21.004*** (1.895)	-10.324*** (1.926)	-10.646*** (0.908)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Men	Women	Gender Difference
<i>Control variables</i>			
Member of NATO	6.597*** (1.967)	6.775*** (2.000)	-0.107 (0.943)
Mutual defense ally of U.S.	5.562* (3.091)	5.415* (3.143)	0.203 (1.482)
Constant	47.296*** (2.732)	40.831*** (2.781)	6.647*** (1.311)
Observations	586	585	585
R-squared	0.44	0.41	0.32

Standard errors in parentheses.

* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

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