

**Gender Difference in American Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force:  
Evidence from Before and After the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, 1980-2013**

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## **Gender Difference in American Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force: Evidence from Before and After the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, 1980-2013**

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In their study of gender differences in US citizen reactions to the 1990-91 Persian Gulf crisis and war, Pamela Conover and Virginia Sapiro analyzed a number of survey questions dealing with hypothetical national security policies as well as concrete questions involving the use of military force and its consequences. The results were clear. Although gender difference on the more abstract, hypothetical questions was weak or nonexistent, when the analysis turned to specific questions concerning the use of force against Iraq and the civilian and military casualties that could result, the differences became large indeed. Conover and Sapiro concluded that “when we moved from the abstract to the concrete—from hypothetical wars to the Gulf War—the distance separating women and men grew, and on every measure, women reacted more negatively. These gender differences are some of the largest and most consistent in the study of political psychology and are clearly of a magnitude that can have real political significance under the right circumstances” (Conover and Sapiro 1993, 1095).

Less than ten years later, as NATO warplanes attacked Serbia, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that the gender difference in public opinion concerning the war over Kosovo was far smaller than had been the case in the past: “As debate persists in America over how much to use force, fewer women are ‘doves’” (Marks 1999, 1). After September 11, 2001, the Council on Foreign Relations conducted a survey on defense issues and reported that “women’s opinion on defense policies has been transformed” because their views of defense spending and missile defense (among other issues) now closely resembled those of men (Council on Foreign

Relations 2001). However, in yet another reversal of patterns, in 2013 a Pew Research Center poll found a substantial gender difference of seventeen percentage points in Americans approval of drone strikes as part of the “war against terror” (Stokes 2013).

What explains these variations in the size of the gender difference on issues of war and peace? One might speculate that the 1991 Gulf War was unique, a dramatic, highly publicized occurrence accompanied by considerable discussion of potential casualties and an extremely polarized political leadership. That public opinion would also polarize in such a context is not surprising. The Kosovo War, in contrast, began with President William Clinton’s stated intention to avoid using ground troops, thus lessening the fear of casualties. One might also speculate (as does the *Christian Science Monitor*), that the war over Kosovo involved humanitarian and other issues that convinced women of the moral necessity of using force to halt the atrocities carried out by Serbian forces in Kosovo—many against women. And while the attacks of September 11 understandably brought near unanimity to the view of citizens and leaders in the short term, the actual response of the US government over the next ten years caused a substantial polarization of the public in opinions of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the use of military force more generally.

However plausible such speculation, there is no basis in the social science literature for favoring one or the other of these explanations, because scholarly knowledge of gender differences on national security issues remains incomplete. For example, Bruce Jentleson’s “principal policy objectives” framework has produced robust findings on the determinants of overall public support for the use of military force, but there has been no attempt to extend that framework to an analysis of differences within the general public (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998). In addition, scholarly research on gender differences and the use of force are

focused on World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf War of 1991. These are important historical cases, but they are also unique—they are wars after all—and therefore potentially unrepresentative. Finally, with the partial exception of research on these wars, there is to my knowledge no research on the *historical evolution* of gender differences on the use of force, and there is little work that compares major wars to other situations in which the use of force is threatened or employed. Of course, the lack of data over time makes it difficult to sort out the degree of constancy or variability in gender differences. Perhaps not surprising, therefore, the standard monograph on public opinion and US foreign policy concludes that “the evidence reviewed here neither wholly refutes nor strongly confirms the gender gap thesis” (Holsti 2004, 215).

Given the importance of gender in electoral politics and the apparent importance of gender on issues of national security, this gap in the scholarly literature is lamentable. The purpose of this paper is to close the gap. In the following section, I briefly review research on overall US public support for the use of military force and research on gender differences in support for using military force. This review suggests a synthesis in which the likely magnitude of gender differences is cast as a function of four sets of factors: 1) the purpose for which military force is employed; 2) the type of military action; (3) the likely consequences of employing force, especially the prospect of civilian and military casualties; and (4) whether the use of force is contemplated or conducted by the US alone or in conjunction with multilateral partners. In subsequent sections, I present an analysis of 965 individual survey questions that query support for using US military force in twenty four historical episodes, beginning in 1982 with questions about the provision of military aid to the government of El Salvador and

continuing through the recent wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. The most recent surveys in the database were conducted in December, 2013.

My analysis of the survey items focuses on several important questions. First, how variable are gender differences on the question of using military force? Are they present in some historical conflicts and not in others? Is there any historical trend in the magnitude of gender difference? Have the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq caused an increase in gender polarization compared to historical trends, perhaps because of the casualties suffered in those wars?

Second, what explains variation in observable gender differences? Do gender differences vary with the purpose for which military force is being used? Does the type of military action, such as air strikes versus the use of ground troops, have any impact? What other factors affect the magnitude of gender differences? Third, does the prospect of casualties in international conflicts cause an increase in gender difference? Finally, a few studies have suggested that women are more likely to support the deployment of military force when the action is part of a multilateral effort or if the action is sanctioned by multilateral institutions, but the evidence to date is limited. With this data collection, I hope to provide a more robust examination of the extent to which multilateralism decreases gender polarization.

Several important conclusions emerge from the analysis. First, gender differences are indeed generalized: on average, women are less supportive of the use of military force for any purpose, and in every historical case examined here, women were less supportive of using force. Second, variations in the magnitude of gender differences largely confirm past theory and research. In most historical conflicts, women are relatively more sensitive to humanitarian concerns and more sensitive to the loss of human life. However, during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, gender difference was initially quite large, but during the course of the wars, the

support of men eroded and ended up near the level of women, so that gender difference was reduced. Third, contrary to the findings of some research, women do not display a disproportionate attraction to multilateral undertakings. It is true that the support of women for using force is higher when multilateral participation is mentioned, but the same is true of men, which leaves the average gender difference unchanged. Fourth, despite the presence of gender difference, women are hardly pacifists, and men are not uniformly bellicose. An average of 44 percent of women has supported the use of force since 1982, and an average of 42 percent of men has opposed it. Gender difference occurs at the margins in response to specific circumstances and the specific military actions that are contemplated. Finally, given the magnitude of some gender differences on some issues involving military force, gender differences have the potential to be a significant factor in political decisions to employ military force and in the political response to the use of force. Indeed, in many cases, a majority of men favors using force, but a majority of women opposes it.

### **Gender Difference on Issues of National Security: the State of the Evidence**

Research on gender differences in attitudes toward national security reveals a scholarly consensus that is very much like the more general consensus on the impact of gender on partisanship, voting, and policy preferences: Scholars know that gender difference exists, but there is less clarity as to the degree of variability and why variation occurs. In addition, the task of explaining variation in any gender difference in views of national security is limited by the fact that time-series data describing gender difference have been far less readily available than are data on partisanship and voting, where so much progress has been made (Kaufman and

Petrocik 1999; Sapiro 2004; Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Kellstedt, Peterson, and Ramirez 2010).

Nonetheless, there is sufficient scholarship to suggest that women and men differ in three important respects: women are less likely to support the use of violence as an instrument for dealing with *any* social conflict; women appear more sensitive to the human cost of conflict; and women are more supportive of international institutions and multilateral approaches for dealing with conflict.

### Women, Risk and Violence

There is now a scholarly consensus that women are less likely than men to support policies that involve the use of force. Indeed, women are less likely to endorse any violent action than are men, and there is some evidence that they are less supportive of national security policies more generally (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986, 42-61; Smith 1984, 384-396; Crowder-Meyer 2007; Burris 2008). Beyond this important general observation, however, scholars know less than they would like. In particular, as concerns the use of military force, the most concrete evidence is based on public reactions to a limited number of military actions, and there is little data that tracks gender differences over time.

Conover and Sapiro report an interesting finding in their study of gender differences during the Gulf crisis and war of 1990/91: women in the US were more likely to exhibit a “fear of war” and to express what the authors call “isolationist” sentiments, that is, they were more likely to agree that “this country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world” (Conover and Sapiro, 1088-1091). Berinsky finds a similar gender difference in US attitudes toward various types of assistance to Britain and

France prior to World War II, versus the option of “staying out” (2009, 53-54). While puzzling perhaps for students of international relations or political behavior, these results are in keeping with the literature on gender, threat perceptions, anxiety, and risk. Specifically, there is substantial evidence that women perceive higher threat from their environment than do men in the same environments. For example, women are more likely to fear victimization by crime and to perceive external threats (Huddy et. al. 2002, 2005; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2009). However, they are less likely to favor a forceful or violent reaction to threats. For example, women in the US felt more threatened than men by terrorism after September 11, 2001, but they were less likely than men to endorse retaliatory measures, such as the initiation of the war in Afghanistan (Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2009, 11-16). The reason is that women are also more likely to experience anxiety at the prospect of forceful retaliation, and anxiety increases the perception of risk, uncertainty, and loss of control: “Women express higher levels of anxiety and perceive greater risks associated with war and terrorism” (Huddy et. al. 2005, 594-595). Furthermore, “anxious individuals are motivated to reduce anxiety, leading to a preference for less risky options” (Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2009, 4).

That women should perceive higher levels of risk from the violence of war is not hard to understand. Hudson and her colleagues demonstrate that there is a strong correlation between the level of violence against women in a society and the propensity of that society to engage in warlike behavior (Hudson et. al. 2008/09). Further, although the subject was neglected by students of international relations and war until recently, scholarship now documents the historical regularity with which violence against women—especially sexual violence—has been employed as a tactic of warfare.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Huddy, Feldman, Capelos, and Provost note that the fear of rape almost completely explains women’s greater fear of personal crime, but they observe that it would not explain women’s greater fear of nuclear weapons or the risks

All of this suggests that risk and violence are likely to produce gender differences on issues of international security. Most importantly, we would expect the threat or use of the most violent military actions to produce the largest gender differences in public opinion. However, we might also expect to find that women are more supportive of military interventions that are designed to mitigate the effects of violence, as is the case in studies of citizen support for humanitarian intervention, a subject that I discuss below.

Existing studies support this expectation. For example, Berinsky demonstrates that gender difference characterized American opinion on entry into World War II, contrary to the common depiction of American opinion as unusually united on that war (2009, 52-54). Studies of subsequent wars find a similar pattern. One of the most comprehensive studies found gender differences in the United States and Great Britain on a number of national security issues: the fear (and risks) of war; the use of conventional military force in Korea and Vietnam; and the testing, deployment, and potential use of nuclear weapons (Brandes 1994). Nincic and Nincic find the same gender difference concerning the military interventions in Korea and Vietnam, and they report the additional finding that women were less likely during these conflicts to support escalation of the existing commitment and more likely to favor a negotiated settlement (2002, 550). The combined implication of these findings is to cast doubt on two popular hypotheses: first, that gender differences are the product of a fairly recent political mobilization of women, and second, that the Vietnam War catalyzed a polarization that destroyed a prior public consensus on national security issues. To judge from these studies, gender polarization may be a longstanding phenomenon.

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posed by violent conflicts, such as terrorism (Huddy et al., 2002, 490). Yet given the correlation between violence against women and the violence of war that has been documented in recent scholarship, the connection does not seem surprising. Recent scholarship on violence against women in war includes Goldstein (2001, 332-402), Wood (2006), and Burds (2009).

However, there are shortcomings of existing research as well, especially the limited focus on World War II, Korea and Vietnam. These were all long, violent, and costly struggles. True, these wars may be likely templates for more recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but what of more limited conflicts with more limited objectives, such as the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s or more recently in Libya and Syria? As Nincic and Nincic observe, “Our research encompassed only very major instances of military intervention, and what applies at one extreme of the continuum may not apply to less dramatic and costly cases of resort to force” (2002, 656). In summary, there is a need for study of gender differences in a greater variety of situations involving the actual or threatened use of military force.

This seems all the more important in light of the findings in one final study. David Fite and his colleagues analyzed a large number of foreign policy items from the quadrennial surveys commissioned by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. Studying data from four surveys (1975, 1979, 1982, and 1986), they found significant gender differences on both the ends and means of foreign policy, including the use of troops in a variety of hypothetical circumstances. Moreover, the impact of gender grew stronger during the 1980s, as it did in party politics more generally (Fite, Genese and Wilcox 1990, 492-513). These findings suggest that, across time and a number of survey items dealing with military issues, gender differences appear to be generalized, in two senses of the word. First, they are general across a number of questions dealing with different aspects of national security policy, suggesting that women are in fact relatively more “~~d~~ovish” than men. Second, the findings are general across time. Of course, even these latter conclusions are based on data from only four surveys in four years, and like the other studies, they do not evaluate evidence from the substantial number of cases since the 1980s when

the United States actually used or threatened to use military force. There remains a need to trace gender differences across a larger number of historical cases involving the use of military force.

### Gender and Principal Policy Objectives

Early research on US public support for the use of military force was heavily influenced by the collapse of support for the war in Vietnam. John Mueller's finding that support for the war eroded as a function of mounting casualties became the standard hypothesis for the future. One putative lesson of Vietnam was that the US public would not support military interventions that could lead to the loss of American lives (Mueller 1973; see also Eichenberg and Stoll 2006; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2006). Other researchers focused on different causes for the polarization over Vietnam, especially the hypothesis that support for the use of force was a function of the perceived vital interests at stake (Russett and Nincic 1976). Pulling these two strands together, one could say that most research on public support for using military force has pursued either the question of the effect of casualties or the effect of perceived vital interests, although different variations on these themes exist.

Bruce Jentleson challenged this research framework in two studies that together covered every actual or threatened US military intervention from the 1980s through 1996 (Jentleson 1992; Jentleson and Britton 1998). Jentleson's central argument is a convincing one: public support is likely to vary as a function of the purpose of the military intervention. He distinguishes three such purposes. Foreign policy restraint (FPR) involves the use of force ~~to~~ "coerce... an adversary engaged in aggressive actions against the United States or its interests." A second category, internal political change (IPC) involves ~~force~~ "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,” or more generally  
—influencing the domestic political authority structure of another state.” Finally, during the 1990s  
a third type of military intervention became prominent: humanitarian intervention (HI), the  
—provision of emergency relief through military and other means to people suffering from famine  
or other gross and widespread humanitarian disasters” (Jentleson 1992, 50; Jentleson and Britton  
1998, 400).

Jentleson argued that public support for the use of force for purposes of foreign policy  
restraint and humanitarian intervention should be higher than support for the use of force  
designed to influence internal political change, and both Jentleson’s two studies and those by  
other scholars provided strong confirmation of this argument (Eichenberg 2005). Indeed, in a  
careful examination of alternative hypotheses, Jentleson demonstrates that the impact of these  
—principal policy objectives” (PPOs) outweigh such factors as the risk of casualties, the existence  
of multilateral participation in the mission, and the level of perceived vital interests. Jentleson  
argues convincingly that higher levels of support for foreign policy restraint and humanitarian  
interventions are rooted in two characteristics of these actions: (1) the legitimacy under  
international law of using military force to defend against encroachments by other sovereign  
states (vs. the actual illegitimacy of intervening in the internal affairs of other states); and (2) the  
clearer standard of success that accompanies such actions, compared to the hazy standards that  
accompany the nation building aspects of interventions designed to influence internal political  
conflicts. He quotes Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf on this specific lesson of Vietnam: —When you  
commit military forces, you ought to know what you want that force to do. You can’t kind of say  
—Go out and pacify the entire countryside.’ There has got to be a more specific definition of  
exactly what you want the force to accomplish. ...But when I harken back to Vietnam, I have

never been able to find anywhere where we have been able to clearly define in precise terms what the ultimate objectives of our military were” (Jentleson 1992, 53-54).

Whatever one thinks of Jentleson’s reasoning, it is difficult to dispute the findings that he presents. There is a clear hierarchy of support that differentiates the unpopularity of intervening in internal conflicts from the much higher levels of support for humanitarian interventions and the restraint of aggressive behavior of other sovereign states. As will see below, the distinctions also have important implications for explaining the magnitude of gender differences on the question of using military force.

#### Gender, International Institutions, and Multilateralism

Empirical research on citizen support for the use of military force has produced an important finding: although both men and women are more likely to support the multilateral use of force, the effect appears to be more pronounced among women. For example, my study of support for using force in 37 countries found that mention of UN participation increased support by 8 percentage points among women, but there was no significant increase among men (Eichenberg 2007). Similarly, employing a survey experiment, Brooks and Valentino find that women are actually more likely than men to support the use of force when the action is approved by the UN (Brooks and Valentino 2011).

At least three reasons might underlie the relatively higher sensitivity of women to military actions that are carried out by –or with the sanction of—multilateral organizations. First, multilateral actions collectivize the human and financial cost of war. Thus, if women are sensitive to potential casualties in war, the pooling of effort with others might reduce the risk to the lives of a single country’s soldiers. Similarly, to the extent that women are wary of the

financial costs of war on pragmatic grounds (it threatens social and other programs of higher value to women), military actions in which the costs are shared should be more acceptable. Second, as I noted, women are more sensitive to the risk of violence, and multilateral actions usually delay the onset of violence because they require a substantial period of consensus building. For that reason, multilateral actions may appeal disproportionately to women who have been socialized to use violence only as a last resort.<sup>2</sup> A third hypothesis is offered by Brooks and Valentino, who reason that women may prefer a “consensus orientation” in decision-making that emphasizes “cooperation and compromise within groups over aggression as a means of settling disputes.” Their research demonstrates that the usual gender pattern (men being more favorable than women to the use of force) is reversed when the military action has UN approval (Brooks and Valentino 2001, 273). The same reasoning might explain the higher level of support among American women for international institutions more generally (Eichenberg 2012; Wolford and Johnston 2000).

Despite these findings, there is still some disagreement in the research literature about a particular preference among women for multilateral actions. For example, Jentleson found that multilateralism has no impact on public opinion at all (1992). My own research on gender difference in the US and Europe showed that mentioning the United Nations or NATO did increase the support of women for military action to prevent Iran or North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons, but the same impact exists among men (2012). In summary, a fuller assessment of the influence of multilateralism remains an outstanding task on the research agenda.

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<sup>2</sup> Conover and Sapiro argue that “The point is not that women learn early in life never to engage in conflict nor use violence, but rather that they learn to put off the use of violence until later in the course of a conflict than do men, to escalate its use more slowly, and to be more emotionally upset by it” (Conover and Sapiro 1993, 1096).

## Gender and the Human Cost of Combat

One of the notable regularities in research on gender differences is the fact that women are more sensitive to the prospect of civilian and military casualties in war. Brandes, as well as Conover and Sapiro, analyzed this question by studying a particularly useful series of questions about the Persian Gulf War that were administered in the American National Election Study in 1990 and 1991. In evaluations of the actual fighting (bombing) and in the “emotional distress” that accompanied reactions to the fighting and its consequences, both Brandes and Sapiro and Conover found clear gender differences on the prospect of using force in the gulf. Of particular note is the fact that women were far more sensitive-- and negative--about the prospect of civilian and military casualties in the war (Brandes 1994; Conover and Sapiro 1993). The same finding emerged in a unique tracking study conducted by the Wirthlin Group during the Persian Gulf crisis from August through December 1990. Using nightly samples, Wirthlin eventually queried almost 17,000 respondents on their opinions of President George H. W. Bush’s handling of the crisis, support for an eventual attack against Iraq, and willingness to absorb the costs of the war. The results were striking: gender differences on all of these questions were high, but they were highest on the question of the human costs of the war. In fact, gender difference on the prospect of casualties pervaded all economic and social classes and was the single most important influence on public opinion during the crisis (Wilcox, Ferrara and Alsop 1993, 343-359). Finally, I found a similar result in a study of attitudes toward the use of force during ten historical episodes in which the United States threatened or actually used military force during the 1990s. Specifically, I found that the gender difference in support for using force increased by 3 percent overall when casualties were mentioned in survey questions because women lowered their support more than men (Eichenberg 2003, 133).

## **Measuring Gender Differences in Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force**

Scholarship on public opinion emphasizes two lessons. First, a single question on any issue will be a misleading gauge of the public mood because an infinite variety of question wordings on any issue is conceivable, and each is likely to yield a different set of responses. The response to a single question on using “ground troops” in Iraq is likely to be modified (or even contradicted) by a second question with even slightly different question wording, and a question about “air strikes” will yield altogether different percentages. The second lesson, however, is that the study of many questions does yield an estimate of the public’s preferences that is both plausible and systematically related to government actions (Stimson 1999, 2004; Zaller and Feldman 1992). Survey respondents are attentive to the nuances of policy choices, and they do react differently to questions that reflect these nuances. The implication is that a reliable analysis requires the study of many survey questions that employ a variety of question wordings.

Table 1 summarizes my collection of individual survey questions on the potential or actual use of military force in each of twenty four historical episodes.<sup>3</sup> I include only questions that query approval or disapproval of an action involving military force as a means of policy.

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<sup>3</sup> I include only nationally representative probability samples of the entire population. The average sample size is 1000. The largest number of surveys came from the IPOLL database available to members of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of. In addition, I retrieved surveys from archives at the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at the University of North Carolina; the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research; the Pew Center for the People and the Press; the Program on International Policy Attitudes; and the yearly *Transatlantic Trends* surveys conducted by the German Marshall Fund since 2002. Gallup surveys on the Persian Gulf War are taken from Mueller (1994), supplemented by later retrospective questions retrieved from the archives listed above. For comparisons to World II, I draw on data presented by Berinsky (2009, 54). For comparisons to Korea and Vietnam, I employ Mueller (1973, 142-143).

This includes questions that ask if respondents “favor” or “agree” to a specific action involving military means of policy. As further described below, these military actions include: general statements about the use of force or military actions; air and missile strikes; war; use of naval forces; deployment, maintenance, or increase of troops abroad; provision of advisors or training; and the sale or provision of military goods. General questions concerning approval of the president’s “handling” of the situation, or questions that asked if an action was a “good idea” or “right or wrong” were excluded. Also excluded are questions that contain a neutral third option, such as “doing nothing” or continuing negotiations for a peaceful settlement. I included questions inquiring of support before, during, and after military force is contemplated or actually employed.

Three examples illustrate the variety of survey questions to be analyzed. The following questions were posed before the United States and coalition forces invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003:

- December 16, 1998: —“As you may know, the *United Nations'* chief weapons inspector has reported that Iraq has not complied with its agreement to allow United Nations inspections of possible weapons facilities. In response, the United States *and Britain* have launched an *air attack* against Iraq this evening (December 16, 1998). Do you approve or disapprove of this attack?” (Gallup Poll)
- August 6, 2002: —“Do you approve or disapprove of the United States taking *military action* against Iraq to try and *remove Saddam Hussein* from power?” (CBS News poll)
- March 14, 2003: —“Would you favor or oppose *invading* Iraq with US *ground troops* in an attempt to *remove Saddam Hussein from power*?” (Gallup Poll).

These examples make clear that there are a number of variations in question wording of potential theoretical or policy interest (~~“missile strikes”~~ vs. ~~“ground troops”~~; mention of removing Saddam Hussein; ~~“military action”~~ vs. ~~“invading”~~; mention of the United Nations or an ally such as Britain). Other variations in question wording—such as the mention of potential or actual casualties or approval of the occupation—also exist and have been coded in the database. I employ these differences in wording to examine the sources of variation in support for using military force.

With one exception, these procedures for including surveys are close to identical to those employed by Jentleson (Jentleson 1992, 54-55; Jentleson and Britton 1998, 400). The exception arises from my desire to further pursue the impact of casualties on gender difference in support for the use of force. During many of the episodes listed in Table 1, survey organizations posed a variant of the following question (here concerning Iraq): ~~“Do you think getting Saddam Hussein to comply with United Nations weapons inspectors is worth the potential loss of American life and other costs of attacking Iraq, or not?”~~<sup>4</sup> There are several reasons to include this ~~“worth it”~~ question. First—and surprisingly—most survey questions dealing with particular military actions seldom mention casualties within the ~~“action”~~ question itself. In my database, survey organizations included questions about casualties in only 20 percent of the total questions that they asked. Thus, in studying this important issue, scholars need to find better information, and this variant of the casualty question represents the best available. Second, these ~~“worth it”~~ questions invariably occur within survey questionnaires that also inquire about support for

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<sup>4</sup> Survey by CBS/*New York Times*, December 13-17, 1998. A similar version of the question has been regularly administered by the ABC/*Washington Post* survey, the NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll, and occasionally by others.

military actions—indeed, that is often the sole purpose for conducting the survey. Thus, due to “questionnaire effects,” it seems plausible that respondents connect the “worth it” question to the specific military actions queried in other items on the same survey questionnaire.<sup>5</sup> Third, the question serves as a supplement and comparison to the far greater number of polls that do query specific military actions; scholars can compare the reaction to surveys that do not mention casualties to this question that does. Fourth, this survey question evokes an important calculus of security policy in a democratic society, what Michael Howard has called the requirement of public *reassurance* “to persuade one's own people, and those of one's allies, that the benefits of military action, or preparation for it, will outweigh the costs” (Howard 1982/83, 309).

### **An Overview of Gender Difference in Public Opinion on the Use of Force**

The general expectation in any analysis of gender difference and the use of military force might very well be that the primary—and perhaps only—factor is the actual or potential use of force itself, because much of the theoretical literature and a great deal of empirical research emphasizes that it is the differential acceptance (or toleration) of violence in social conflicts that most divides men and women. And in fact, across all 965 survey questions for the twenty four historical episodes summarized in Table 1, the gender difference in support for the use of military force is 10 percentage points (54 percent of men favor use of force versus 44 percent of

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<sup>5</sup>There is a fairly standard sequence in survey questionnaires on the potential or actual uses of military force.

Generally, survey organizations ask about (1) attention to the matter; (2) approval of the president’s “handling” of the situation; (3) approval of the action itself (“air strikes” or “send troops”); and (4) occasionally about approval if casualties would be suffered (including the “worth it” question discussed here).

women). Among men, a majority or more supported the use of force in thirteen of the twenty four episodes, while among women a majority existed in only eight.

The interesting question is the degree of variation in this gender difference. As Figure 1 illustrates, there is substantial variation across the historical episodes, but there is no obvious pattern as concerns the size of the gender difference. The data do seem to suggest that gender differences were slightly higher during the 1980s than in the period after 1991. As further illustrated in Figure 2, larger than average gender difference characterized the period before 1991, evidence perhaps that the forceful policies of the Reagan presidency were the source of large gender difference, just as gendered voting became very prominent in the 1980s (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999). However, as we will see below, it is also true that the types of military action contemplated in the 1980s—especially providing weapons to governments or insurgents as part of the Cold War anti-communist struggle—evoked particularly large gender difference. In contrast, many of the episodes after 1991 are based on survey questions that stated an explicit humanitarian intention (Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia), and in other episodes the presidents implementing the action emphasized humanitarian intent (Kosovo, Libya). In other words, the difference between the 1980s and later years may be due to the different mix of principal policy objectives.

In addition, there is an interesting additional pattern to the data in Figure 1: gender differences on average are lower in episodes during the 1990s in which violence against women was an explicit tactic of warring parties and was heavily featured in media reporting. This is true, for example, for the conflicts in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Kosovo, where atrocities against women were widely reported and for which gender differences are lower than the overall average of 10 percentage points. Women, it appears, are more sympathetic to military action when they

can identify with the suffering that has been experienced by women in those conflicts. One would expect this to be a feature of the War against Terror surveys as well because the plight of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban was widely reported. It is confounded, however, by the fact that the attacks against Afghanistan were in retaliation for an attack against the United States itself, which should reduce gender differences. In the event, gender differences for the Afghanistan War are actually about average in Figure 1. Nonetheless, the sensitivity of women to the plight of other women who are plagued by violence is an important avenue for further research.<sup>6</sup>

As we will see, additional factors affect variation in the magnitude of gender difference, but these data are sufficient to provide provisional answers to two questions raised above. First, there is no upward secular trend in gender difference, as might be expected if the political and economic mobilization of women is the root of differences in national security views. In fact, as shown in Figure 1, the gender differences in my data collection are very similar to those found by scholars working on World War II (Berinsky 2009) and the Korean and Vietnam Wars (Mueller 1973). Second, it does not appear that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have made a major impact on the magnitude of gender differences. In fact, the average difference for these two wars is very near the overall average.

The range of variation in gender difference is further revealed by comparing the types of specific military action undertaken by the United States or posed hypothetically to survey respondents within each episode. That is, even within a specific historical episode, survey organizations may ask if respondents favor sending troops, conducting air strikes, increasing

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<sup>6</sup> An interesting starting point might be the survey sponsored by the Center for Gender Equality, *The Impact of Terrorist Attacks on Women*, conducted during November 2001. The survey showed widespread knowledge among American women of the situation of women in Afghanistan. The results of the survey can be found at [http://gqrr.com/articles/1619/1416\\_GenderEquality\\_release.pdf](http://gqrr.com/articles/1619/1416_GenderEquality_release.pdf)

troop levels, or if they approve of the presence of troops already deployed. In some cases, survey organizations may ask several or all of these questions in the same survey. Table 2 shows average support levels and gender differences broken down by the type of military action that is mentioned in each survey question. One finding displayed in the table is clear: men are more supportive of using any type of military force. Indeed, a majority of men supports eight of the eleven actions listed in the table, while a majority of women supports only three.

Second, among both men and women, support for using military force is highest when the action stated in the survey question is general rather than specific or when the type of action involves air or naval forces. This confirms the pattern found by Sapiro and Conover, who noted that gender differences are larger when their analysis moved “from the abstract to the concrete” (1993, 1095). It seems plausible that both generally stated actions and the use of naval and air forces are more popular because the risk of casualties among US forces is less than in actions involving troops. Note, however, that there are substantial gender differences for specific types of military action, especially using naval forces, increasing troop deployments, selling arms, air or missile strikes, and maintaining troops in place. In three of these five types of action, a majority of men favors the use of force, while a majority of women opposes it. In addition, men are less wary than women with regard to sending, maintaining, or increasing troops. In fact, in every category involving the mention of “troops,” men display majority support, whereas women are opposed, a pattern that again suggests that women may be more sensitive to the risk of casualties.

## Gender Difference and Principal Policy Objectives

The percentages for each of the historical episodes and military action types reviewed above elide the question of the purpose for which military force is used or threatened. One can ask if respondents favor “sending troops,” but to what purpose? In fact, there is substantial variation within each episode and military action in the principal policy objective queried in survey questions. For example, one question on Rwanda asks if US military forces should participate in “stopping the fighting,” which clearly suggests active participation in an internal political conflict. Yet other survey questions on Rwanda asked if US forces should assist in providing “humanitarian relief.”

Similar variants exist within other historical episodes. On Iraq, for example, there are a number of questions concerning the use of military force to coerce compliance with weapons inspections, to remove Saddam Hussein from power, or (fewer) to aid the Kurdish resistance. Within the Bosnian and Kosovo episodes, there are questions suggesting participation in an internal political conflict (actively defend Bosnian Muslims or Kosovar Albanians) and humanitarian purposes (drop relief supplies to Bosnian Muslims). As Jentleson has shown, these variations within historical cases are more important than the target of military action itself. It is not enough to ask the public if it supports the use of force; one also has to ask why.

In this section I provide an analysis of gender differences according to the principal policy objective mentioned in the survey question. My definitions follow Jentleson, as reviewed above. Foreign policy restraint involves the contemplated, threatened, or actual use of force to coerce another state or non-state actor that is threatening US interests or allies. Internal political change involves the use of force (most generally) to “[influence] the domestic political authority

structure of another state.” Humanitarian intervention refers to the ~~pro~~vision of emergency relief through military and other means.”

In the course of reviewing the survey materials, it became clear that a fourth category—~~peacekeeping operations~~—was both conceptually necessary and empirically obvious.

Conceptually, it is difficult to argue that peacekeeping operations are per se a participation in internal political conflicts, for the entire spirit and purpose of peacekeeping is to provide a neutral buffer to warring parties. Indeed, in this sense, peacekeeping is also very much in the humanitarian tradition, since peacekeeping is often offered precisely because civilians have suffered mightily. Empirically, support for almost any question that mentions peacekeeping troops is generally low and very stable, which suggests that it is seen much differently than the use of force for other purposes.

The ~~neutral buffer~~” interpretation seems to me sufficient to analyze public opinion toward peacekeeping operations as a separate category, but it is crucial to the analysis that this neutrality be conveyed in the question wording. The reason is that in five situations (Somalia, Bosnia, the war over Kosovo, and hypothetical peace keeping missions to ~~help end~~” the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the conflict in Darfur), a shift in the military mission from peacekeeping (or humanitarian) missions has been considered by policymakers, queried by pollsters, or has indeed actually occurred. In Bosnia and Kosovo, the ultimate insertion of peacekeepers was accomplished only after coercing one of the parties to an internal conflict to accept a peacekeeping force.

Survey organizations have recognized the difference and have adjusted their question wording accordingly, making it possible to distinguish the purpose that underlies the military action (~~peacekeeping~~”) that is proposed in survey questions. One version frequently inquires of

–sending troops to enforce a peace agreement once peace has been established.” This formulation strikes me as closest to the true purpose of peacekeeping (the conflict has ended, and “peace” is what is being enforced). Other formulations are really questions about participating in internal political conflicts. One variation asks of sending peacekeepers “to help end the conflict [or: stop the violence].” Surely survey respondents understand that this wording suggests potential participation in the conflict. Yet other questions ask if peacekeeping troops should be sent to “protect ethnic Albanians in Kosovo,” which surely has a similar effect on survey respondents. Therefore the key rule as I coded the surveys was to establish the distinction between a question that actually is inquiring of “neutral” peacekeeping and one that is actually inquiring of “peacekeeping” that might involve participation in the internal political struggle under way.<sup>7</sup>

For the analysis of gender differences according to principal policy objectives, I therefore present four categories rather than the three employed by Jentleson: foreign policy restraint, humanitarian intervention, internal political change, and peacekeeping operations. As this discussion suggests, the overriding methodological principle in the classification of survey questions by principal policy objective was this: follow the wording of the question that is put to survey respondents. Government pronouncements or scholarly arguments about the purpose of an intervention are irrelevant, because the scholarly literature confirms that survey respondents answer the question that is put to them (Zaller and Feldman 1992). If the question inquires about deterring adversaries or defending against threats to US security, then the question is coded foreign policy restraint. If the question mentions “regime change” or taking the side of one party

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<sup>7</sup> I accomplished this by classifying only two types of action as true “peacekeeping operations.” The first is mention of sending peacekeepers *when there is no suggestion that these forces would participate in an internal conflict or assist one side in an internal conflict*. The second involves questions about military actions to protect peacekeepers or facilitate their evacuation, but again only if there is no suggestion that the forces would participate in the conflict by assisting one party in the conflict.

involved in an internal conflict, the question is classified as internal political change. If the question asks about the use of US military forces to help relieve the suffering of an anguished population, it is classified as humanitarian intervention.

Using this rule, 79 percent of the survey questions were classified by principle policy objective. The remaining 244 questions concern the invasions of Grenada, Panama, and Iraq, the marine deployment in Lebanon in 1982 and 1983, and a small number of questions concerning the NATO military action against Libya. Of these, the lion's share (193 questions) concerned conflict with Iraq. In these instances, question wording alone did not provide an unequivocal basis for classifying principal policy objectives. Perhaps this is not surprising because, in each of these historical episodes, the US government offered multiple justifications for intervention, putting pollsters in the position of leaving judgments to respondents. In each case, threats to US interests were a prominent government argument in favor of intervention (foreign policy restraint); but in each case, participation in internal political change was either offered as a justification or emerged as a fact of the intervention (Lebanon, Grenada, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya).

Because the wording of the unclassified survey questions does not resolve the matter, I treat these questions as "mixed" cases that potentially invoke both foreign policy restraint and internal political change. Whether these "mixed" cases also yield different levels of citizen support is something one can judge from the survey responses themselves. This is the same approach taken by Jentleson. He finds that support levels for the mixed cases fall between that for foreign policy restraint and internal political conflict (Jentleson 1992, 59-64). For the analysis according to principal policy objectives, I therefore present five categories rather than

the four ultimately employed by Jentleson: foreign policy restraint, humanitarian intervention, “mixed” objectives, internal political change, and peacekeeping.

The breakdown of support among men and women for each of these purposes is presented in Table 3. The striking feature of the data in this table is the strong confirmation of the utility of Jentleson’s framework: foreign policy restraint and humanitarian intervention enjoy the strongest support by far among both men and women. This is true not only of the overall totals shown in the table, but also within each of the historical episodes for which different objectives have been queried in surveys (not shown). The only exception is Iraq, where support for internal change (which for the most part involves questions on removing Saddam Hussein) is essentially the same as support for foreign policy restraint.

The interesting feature of the gender differences is that, although the overall hierarchy of support is the same for men and women, the degree of sensitivity to different policy objectives does vary, and this affects the magnitude of the resulting gender differences. For example, both men and women exhibit much higher support for humanitarian intervention, but the effect is stronger for women. Overall, women’s support for humanitarian actions is 16 percentage points higher than the average for all uses of force, but for men the figure is 11 percent. Thus the smaller gender difference for humanitarian actions results from this fact that women are relatively more sensitive to the mention of humanitarian actions.

The mention of peacekeeping operations also produces an average gender difference smaller than the overall average. However, the reason in this case is that, while men reduce their average level of support when peacekeeping is mentioned (from 54 percent to 50 percent), the support of women for peacekeeping is exactly the same as the overall average for women. Thus peacekeeping operations are relatively unpopular among both men and women, but they are

slightly less popular among men in terms of the change in opinion that the mention of peacekeeping operations evokes.

Somewhat paradoxically, the largest gender difference—11 percentage points—occurs within the episodes involving foreign policy restraint; a robust majority of men support FPR, but a majority of women do not. The paradox is that the most popular reason for using force (restraining a threatening adversary) should also be the most divisive on gender grounds. One clue to the anomaly may be found in the fact that in most cases of foreign policy restraint (the missile strikes against Sudan/Afghanistan being the exception), the situation was in fact a highly publicized and therefore salient war (Grenada, Gulf War, Afghanistan, Iraq) or involved countries with whom the United States had actually fought prior wars (North Korea, Iraq). Recalling from Table 2 that the mention of the words “war” in survey questions also evinces a very high gender difference leads to speculation that the higher level of sustained violence associated with “war” sets limits to women’s support relative to men, even when the objective is popular.<sup>8</sup> Further, although it is possible that women are simply more disapproving of the sustained social violence that war represents, based on the research reviewed above, it seems equally plausible that it is the risk of major casualties in these wars that affects women’s views.

### *The Casualty Issue and Gender Difference*

For the total population, 51 percent favored the use of force in the episodes studied here when casualties are not mentioned in the question. When casualties are mentioned, the figure is 47 percent. Thus, when organizations or news sources report the percentage of the population that

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<sup>8</sup> Mention of the word “war” occurs frequently in surveys on the Gulf War; Iraq confrontation, 1992-2003, Iraq War, and War in Afghanistan and a total of ten times in surveys on the Panama invasion, North Korea, Kosovo, Iran, and Syria.

supports the use of force without mentioning casualties in the question, it is likely that they are overestimating the public's support by about 4 percentage points.<sup>9</sup>

The data in Table 4 demonstrate that the prospect of casualties does condition the magnitude of gender differences, but not in a uniform pattern across all historical episodes. Overall both men and women demonstrate lower support for using force when casualties are mentioned in the question. As shown at the bottom of the table, the decline when casualties are mentioned is 4 percentage points among both women and men. The impact of casualty sensitivity is dramatically revealed in another way: when casualties are not mentioned in surveys, men express majority support for military force in nine of the ten episodes that are listed in Table 4. However, when casualties are mentioned, there is majority support in only five. Among women, there is majority support for using force in six of the ten episodes when casualties are not mentioned. When casualties are included in the question wording, there is majority support among women in only one.

I speculated earlier that the low level of support for intervening in internal conflicts might result from the inherent risk of casualties in those situations. At first blush, Table 4 does not bear out this reasoning; the decline in support when casualties are mentioned is actually somewhat less than average for situations of internal conflict (Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti). Indirectly, however, there is some evidence for the proposition. In two situations—the confrontation with Iraq after 1991 and against Serbia in 1999—there is a steep drop in support among both men and women when casualties are mentioned. What these two situations have in common is the reliance on air power as the principal means of coercion. Throughout the 1990s, the United States

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth emphasizing that survey organizations include mention of casualties in their questions only about 20 percent of the time, so the vast majority of polls that are reported likely inflate support for using military force. For example, since 2010 there have been 14 polls suggesting that an average majority of 53 percent of the American public would support the use of force against Iran to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons, but my analysis suggests that the percentage is closer to 48 percent.

conducted air strikes and missile strikes against Iraq, but the prospect of renewed ground war was never seriously raised until the end of 2002. In the war against Serbia, the use of ground troops was ruled out from the beginning. Given the drop in support in these situations when casualties are mentioned, it appears that citizens are revealing a clear preference for military means that pose less of a risk to American lives. When the death of Americans is raised, support drops precipitously, and the gender difference—already large on average—increases.

One interesting aspect of Table 4 is that the effect of casualty considerations is not uniform across the historical cases. In six cases, mention of casualties increases the gender difference (Lebanon, Grenada, Bosnia, Confrontation with Iraq, Haiti, and Kosovo). In four other cases, the gender difference declined slightly when casualties were mentioned (Gulf Crisis and War, Somalia, War against Terror, and Iraq War). The evolution of gendered casualty sensitivity during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan deserve special scrutiny. As Table 5 shows, the effect of mentioning casualties in both wars had the effect of reducing the gender difference that existed at the beginning of the wars and for several years thereafter. As concerns Iraq, between 2003 and 2011, men and women reduce their support for the war by similar amounts when casualties were not mentioned (the left side of the table). When casualties were mentioned in the questions, however, men reduced their support substantially more than women did (by 30 versus 21 percentage points on the right side of the table). The result is that the gender difference essentially disappeared by 2011 when casualties were mentioned. The Afghanistan War is similar. With no mention of casualties, men and women reduced their support between 2001 and 2012 by identical amounts (50 percentage points). In questions mentioning casualties, in contrast, men decreased their support more than women, once again reducing the gender difference that had existed in 2001.

Why men reduced their support in reaction to casualties is a matter of speculation. Following the studies by Huddy and others cited earlier, it may be that the higher anxiety and risk assessments that women associate with the use of force mean that women “price in” the risk of casualties even before a conflict has begun (Huddy et. al. 2005, 594-595; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2009, 4). Following this logic, men are more open to risk prior to the conflict and perhaps in its early stages, but the data suggest that, as the conflict unfolds and casualties actually mount, they adjust their support to a level more similar to that of women. In any case, contrary to what has been found in some past studies, my data suggest that women are more sensitive to casualties in some, but not all, historical cases. Moreover, in the two wars that stretched over ten years or more, the decline in support among men as casualties mounted was actually greater than among women.

#### The Impact of Multilateral Participation on Gender Difference

I noted above that there is some disagreement in the research literature on the question of whether multilateral military operations are seen more positively by women, perhaps because of a more generally favorable attitude towards international institutions, or perhaps because of the cost- and risk-sharing that these operations entail. Table 6 provides clear evidence on the matter: most types of multilateral participation do indeed increase support for military action, but multilateralism is equally popular among men and women. For example, mentioning both NATO and UN participation in a military action increases support among women by 17 percentage and 18 percentage points among men. Mentioning the UN only increases support among both genders by 9 percentage points. Although there are minor variations depending on which type of multilateral participation is mentioned, the most important result is that none

reduces gender difference in any meaningful way. While it is surely important to have solid evidence that multilateral actions are substantially more popular among all citizens, the lack of any gendered effect suggests that other factors are more important determinants of gender difference.

*Pulling It Together: What Moves Gender Differences on Issues of Military Force?*

To this point I have analyzed several factors that affect variation in gender differences on issues of using military force. In particular, I have shown that the type of military action, the principal policy objective, and the mention of casualties in the survey question each influences the gender difference when taken individually. But the question arises: Which of these (and other factors) are the most important influences, and to what degree?

In Tables 7 and 8, I summarize the relative impact of a number of important factors that influence the support of men and women –and thus any gender difference that exists—controlling for all of the factors listed in the table. Table 7 reports the results for all historical episodes, and Table 8 repeats the analysis excluding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The figures in the table are parameters from a multiple regression analysis containing all of the factors (variables) listed in the table. Because the variables take the values of 1 and 0 (indicating the presence or absence of a particular question wording), they are readily interpretable as the percentage change in opinion due to the presence of a particular wording. The beginning point is a baseline average level of support for questions classified as foreign policy restraint. The resulting gender difference in Table 7 is 9.96 percentage points (the baseline average is the constant in the regression). The impact of a different question wording (say, a question that is coded as humanitarian or mentions air or missile strikes) can be read as

the deviation or change from this baseline average. For example, average support among men for humanitarian intervention is eleven percentage points higher (+11.36) than foreign policy restraint and seventeen percentage points higher among women (+17.20), and the difference in the impact of this humanitarian wording decreases the gender difference by almost six percentage points (-5.83)

As the immediately preceding example makes clear, principal policy objectives are a powerful influence on support for the use of force among both men and women, but as noted earlier, the relative impact of some factors on men and women differ—and therefore conditions the magnitude of gender differences. For example, the reduction in the gender difference that accompanies the mention of humanitarian goals is due to the fact that women’s support for using force for this purpose rises more than men. In contrast, the reduction in the gender difference due to mentioning peacekeeping operations occurs because women do *not* reduce their support for this purpose as much as men (-1.84 versus -6.00). Thus, although women and men both react to these reasons for using force, women react more positively to humanitarian intervention and less negatively to peacekeeping operations. However, it is not the case that this generalizes to a more liberal world view on the part of women. Controlling for other factors, the mention of UN participation in the mission increases support for military action among men even more than for women.

The mention of specific military actions or their consequences produces notable effects. Two actions in particular increase the gender difference significantly – air or missile strikes or selling or sending weapons to participants in a conflict. Other actions (keep or increases troops) and the mention of casualties produce a curious result: they yield changes in gender difference that are not statistically significant. At least in the cases of actions such as maintaining troops or

increasing troops deployed, the result is curious because my previous bivariate analysis suggested a large gender difference for these actions (Table 2). That casualties do not influence gender difference is less curious, since we saw in Table 5 that a large share of questions mentioning casualties occurred during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and during these wars the gender difference was large at the beginning, but as the wars dragged on, it narrowed substantially as men reduced their support in light of casualties (Table 5). A similar phenomenon may be affecting the results for actions such as maintaining or increasing troops, since the largest share of these questions also occur during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For this reason, it is useful to repeat the analysis, this time omitting these two major wars. The results are shown in Table 8, and in many respects they are similar to the preceding results: the overall baseline averages are almost identical to those in Table 7, and the impact of principal policy objectives and mention of the UN on gender difference are very similar. However, once the two wars are omitted, the impact of increasing and maintaining troops, mention of war, and mention of casualties become highly significant impacts that increase gender difference. The difference in the results confirms that the dynamics of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are indeed different from what occurred in other historical episodes. Although the overall gender difference in support for these two wars is almost identical to that in the other episodes, on the related issues of casualty sensitivity and support for maintaining or increasing troop levels in particular, a large gender difference at the beginning of the war decreased over time because the support of men eventually declined to the level that women had exhibited several years before (Table 5 makes this clear for casualties). This is an obvious corrective to the view that men are less sensitive to casualties in all circumstances. What it suggests is that men may be more willing to risk casualties at the beginning of the conflict, but that they withdraw support as

casualties mount and the war drags on. This has important political implications, which I discuss in the concluding section.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

Just ten years ago, Holsti's review of the research literature led him to conclude that —the evidence... neither wholly refutes nor strongly confirms the gender gap thesis" (Holsti 2004, 215). The data that I analyzed in this paper suggests that this conclusion must be revised: based on substantial data extending as far back as World War II, I have shown that women are consistently less likely to endorse violent or escalatory actions, and they are relatively more sensitive to humanitarian objectives and peacekeeping operations. The data also cast doubt on some hypotheses and provide a larger sample on which to judge previous research. For example, women are more sensitive to casualties, as some have found in the past, but the Iraq and Afghanistan wars demonstrate that, at least in longer wars with significant casualties, men are sensitive to casualties as well. Similarly, although some past research suggested that women are more supportive of multilateral military operations, I find little evidence of this effect in a larger sample of questions. Although fragments of evidence on each of these relationships existed in past research, there is now evidence that they exist on the basis of a substantial sample of public opinion surveys, with considerable historical reach, and with considerable variety in question wording.

Five conclusions emerge from the research and provide additional thoughts on the implications for theory and policy. The first conclusion concerns the strength of the explanatory argument developed by Jentleson. Using slightly different methods and a far greater number of survey items, I have nonetheless confirmed the importance of principal policy objectives in

explaining the overall level of citizen support for the use of force. As Jentleson argued, foreign policy restraint and humanitarian interventions are popular, whereas intervening in internal conflicts is not. By studying peacekeeping operations separately, I have shown that Americans are unenthusiastic about this role as well. Notice also that this pattern holds even when we analyze other considerations in survey questions, such as the nature of the military action or the risk of casualties. These factors shift opinion at the margin –which is obviously important—but they do not rearrange the overall pattern.

The second conclusion is that gender differences are truly generalized. As I have noted, past research left open the possibility that any gender difference was due to the specific nature of the relatively few historical episodes or survey questions that have been studied. In this article, I have demonstrated the generality of gender differences by examining all episodes in which the United States contemplated, threatened, or used military force and by laboring to examine all questions available for each episode. Although I have presented evidence that gender differences do vary in magnitude, this does not belie the fact that—on average—women are generally less supportive of the use of military force for any purpose, involving any type of military action, in every historical episode.

Third, variations in the magnitude of gender differences largely support the theoretical arguments offered in past research or documented in previous analyses. Past theorizing and research have emphasized the argument that—for many reasons—women may be less supportive of the use of violence to resolve social conflicts and more sensitive to humanitarian concerns. My results confirm that this is indeed the case across a large number of diverse historical episodes. Although there are some exceptions, women are less supportive of overt military actions, such as air strikes, increasing or maintaining troops, or selling weapons to participants in

conflicts, and they are more sensitive to the prospect of casualties in many instances. Moreover, although both men and women both respond positively to the prospect of deploying military forces for humanitarian purposes, women do so at relatively higher levels, and they do not reduce their support as much as men when the purpose is neutral peacekeeping.

Fourth, despite these relative differences between men and women, women are not uniformly pacifist, and men are not uniformly bellicose. Moreover, there is substantial similarity in the overall structure of the determinants of support among men and women. The difference is at the margins, in the degree to which the genders respond to different variations in question wording. Further, majorities of women support the use of force in some historical episodes, and a majority of women do support certain types of military actions. In addition, certain factors reduce the support of men as well as women. Thus, whether a significant gender difference will attend any particular threatened or actual use of force depends on the circumstances and the actions being contemplated.

Fifth, it nonetheless remains the case that in many historical episodes, circumstances and policy options have produced a gender difference that is potentially of political significance. For example, majorities of men supported the use of force in thirteen of twenty four historical episodes, but among women majority support occurred in only eight. Thus, one of the most significant political implications of my research is that gender differences on the use of military force must be an important consideration for politicians who would attempt to gauge the public mood on the use of force. The reason is the well-documented impact of gender on partisanship and voting; no politician can ignore the potential impact of her or his actions on the potential for gendered responses in the voting booth. This is not the place for a detailed review, but scholarly studies indicate that foreign policy opinions—and thus gender conflict on foreign policy issues—

are most likely to affect actual voting behavior if: (1) the issue is salient at the time of the election; (2.) candidates differ in their approaches to the issue; and (3) the issue is not overly technical in nature. Although the second of these conditions cannot be foreseen, the first and third are clearly met in a dramatic international crisis or a well-publicized debate about the use of military force (Carmines and Stimson 1980, 78-91; Page and Brody 1972, 979-995; Aldrich, Borgida and Sullivan 1989, 123-141).

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Table 1. Survey Items and Gender Difference in Twenty four Historical Episodes

Episode	Date of first Survey	Date of last survey	Average Gender Difference	Number of Survey items
El Salvador	1982	1983	12	8
Libya airstrikes	1986	1988	11	2
Lebanon (marines)	1982	1984	12	11
Grenada invasion	1983	1988	14	2
Nicaragua	1983	1988	17	12
Re-flag Kuwaiti tankers	1987	1987	13	3
Panama invasion	1989	1989	12	1
Gulf crisis and war	1990	1993	17	18
Bosnia	1992	1998	8	134
Confrontation with Iraq	1992	2003	11	120
North Korea nuclear confrontation	1993	2013	10	51
Haiti occupation	1992	1995	11	49
Somalia	1992	1993	9	39
Rwanda	1994	1994	5	3
Sudan/Afghan missile strikes	1998	1998	10	5
Kosovo	1998	1999	7	71
War against Terror (Afghanistan)	2001	2013	10	126
Iraq War	2003	2011	9	212
Iran	2002	2013	7	38
Syria	2003	2013	6	18
Liberia	2003	2003	11	4
Israel/Palestine peacekeeping	2002	2003	3	6
Dafur/Sudan	2006	2006	11	1
Libya/NATO intervention	2011	2011	6	31
Total	1982	2013	10	965

Figure 1. Comparison of Average Gender Difference in Historical Episodes

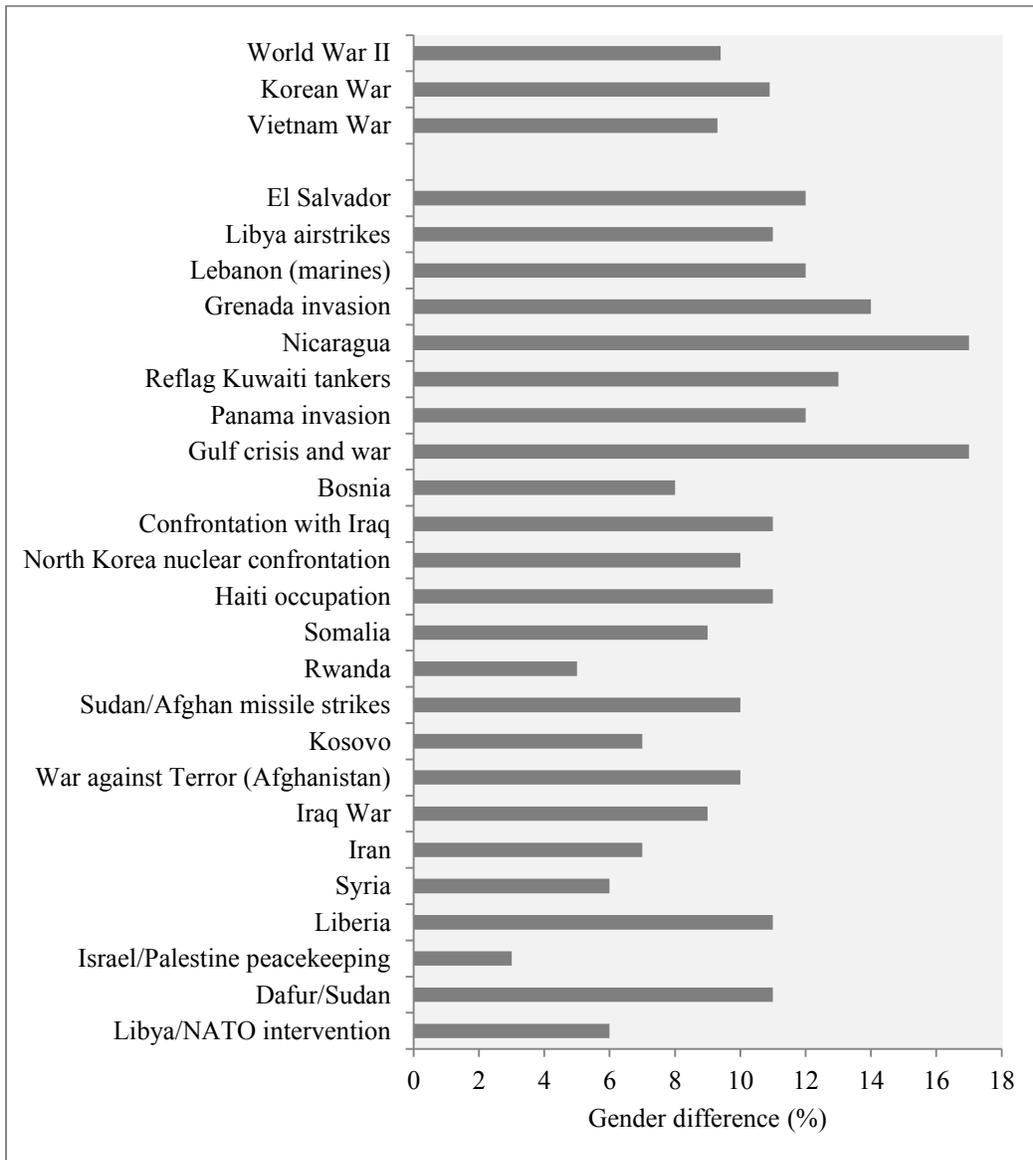


Figure 2. Average Gender Difference by Half Decades

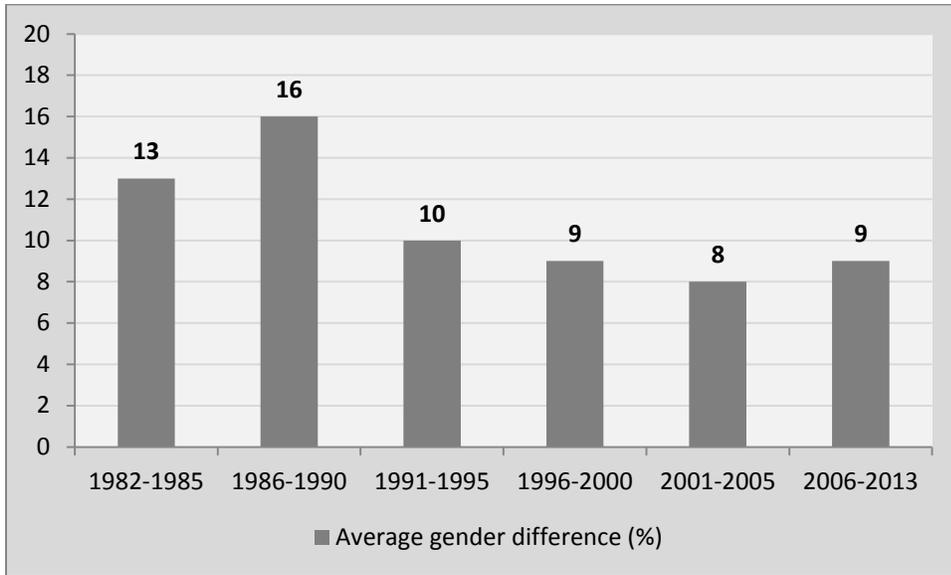


Table 2. Support for Using Military Force for Specific Types of Military Action

	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference (%)	Number of Survey items
naval forces	64	51	13	5
increase troops	53	40	13	41
sell or send arms	45	32	13	32
air or missile strikes	64	52	12	111
keep/maintain troops	52	40	12	52
war	48	39	10	236
unspecified action type	54	44	10	26
military action (general)	61	53	8	187
presence of troops	52	45	8	27
send troops	50	43	8	246
provide advisers or training	48	41	7	2
Total	54	44	10	965

Table 3. Average Gender Difference by Principal Policy Objective

	Men favor	Women favor	Gender Difference	Number of Survey items
Foreign policy restraint	60	49	11	304
Mixed IPC/FPR	49	39	10	199
Internal political change	51	42	9	327
Peacekeeping	50	44	7	106
Humanitarian intervention	65	60	5	29
Total	54	44	10	965

Table 4. Support for Using Force by Episode and Mention of Casualties.

	Men Favor	Women Favor	Gender Difference	Number of Surveys
	%	%	%	
Lebanon (marines)				
No casualties mentioned	50	39	11	6
Casualties mentioned	37	25	12	5
Grenada invasion				
No casualties mentioned	61	51	10	1
Casualties mentioned	66	48	18	1
Persian Gulf Crisis and War				
No casualties mentioned	75	57	18	7
Casualties mentioned	63	48	16	11
Bosnia				
No casualties mentioned	50	42	8	128
Casualties mentioned	43	32	11	6
Confrontation with Iraq				
No casualties mentioned	72	62	10	101
Casualties mentioned	55	40	15	19
Haiti				
No casualties mentioned	43	31	11	46
Casualties mentioned	38	26	12	3
Somalia				
No casualties mentioned	62	53	9	28
Casualties mentioned	60	53	8	11
Kosovo				
No casualties mentioned	56	50	7	58
Casualties mentioned	46	35	11	13

Table 4 continues on next page

Table 4 continued

	Men Favor	Women Favor	Gender Difference	Number of Surveys
	%	%	%	
<hr/>				
War against terror				
No casualties mentioned	65	54	11	98
Casualties mentioned	56	48	9	28
Iraq War				
No casualties mentioned	50	38	11	100
Casualties mentioned	48	40	8	112
<b>Total all episodes</b>				
No casualties mentioned	55	45	9	756
Casualties mentioned	51	41	10	209
<hr/>				
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>965</b>

Table 5. Gender Difference During Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

Iraq war	Casualties not mentioned			Casualties mentioned			Gender Difference
	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference	
2003	78	67	10	2003	63	53	10
2004	50	46	5	2004	53	45	8
2005	65	47	18	2005	48	39	9
2006	41	31	10	2006	42	35	7
2007	41	28	13	2007	41	33	8
2008	41	30	10	2008	36	31	5
2009	35	28	8	2009	37	31	6
2010	41	29	13	2010	32	27	5
2011	32	26	6	2011	33	32	1
Total	49	38	11	Total	48	40	8
change from 2003	-46	-42	-4		-30	-21	-10

Table continues on next page

Table 5 continued

Afghanistan	Casualties not mentioned			Casualties mentioned			
	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference (%)	Men Favor (%)	Women Favor (%)	Gender Difference (%)	
2001	87	81	6	2001	80	69	11
2002	81	74	7	2002	49	39	10
2003	75	68	7				
2006	65	48	17	2006			
2007	55	38	17	2007	66	46	20
2008	63	47	16	2008	61	47	14
2009	56	42	13	2009	54	44	10
2010	49	37	12	2010	44	38	6
2011	46	32	14	2011	40	36	4
2012	37	31	6	2012	35	31	4
Total	65	54	11	Total	56	47	9
change from 2001	-51	-50	0		-45	-38	-7

Table 6. Gender Difference and Multilateral Participation in Military Actions

	Men Favor	Women Favor	Gender Difference	Number of Surveys
no multilateral mention	53	43	10	741
both NATO and UN mentioned	72	61	12	25
specific country mentioned	66	50	16	58
UN specifically mentioned	63	53	10	92
NATO/allies mentioned	55	47	8	8
allies or friends mentioned	54	46	8	2
general multilateral	52	44	8	39
Total	54	44	10	965

Table 7. Summary of the Effects of Principal Policy Objectives and Other Variations in Question Wording on Support for Using Force among Men and Women, and the Resulting Gender Difference

(All episodes, 1982-2013)

	Change in Support (%)	Change in Support (%)	Effect on Gender Difference (%)
	Men	Women	
Baseline Average			
Foreign policy restraint:	56.65	46.69	9.96
Effect of question mentioning:			
Humanitarian intervention	+11.36	+17.20	<b>-5.83</b>
Internal political change	-5.87	-3.61	<b>-2.26</b>
Peacekeeping operations	-6.00	-1.84	<b>-4.14</b>
—end troops”	-3.92	-5.05	+1.14
—keep/maintain troops”	-4.48	-7.00	+2.52
—increase troops”	-1.26	-4.52	+3.26
—ground troops”	-2.67	-.36	-2.31
—air or missile strikes”	+6.45	+3.32	<b>3.13</b>
—sell or send weapons/supplies”	-6.26	-12.00	<b>5.74</b>
“war”	-7.54	-7.02	-0.52
casualties mentioned	-1.34	-2.01	+.67
United Nations mentioned	+10.32	+8.87	<b>+1.45</b>
NATO mentioned	+5.74	+5.83	-0.10
—Terror” or —terrorism” mentioned	+20.44	+22.38	<b>-1.94</b>
Number of observations	965	965	965

Coefficients that are statistically significant for gender difference are shown in bold.

Table 8. Summary of the Effects of Principal Policy Objectives and Other Variations in Question Wording on Support for Using Force among Men and Women, and the Resulting Gender Difference

(All episodes *excluding* Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan)

	Change in Support (%)	Change in Support (%)	Effect on Gender Difference (%)
	Men	Women	
Baseline Average			
Foreign policy restraint:	56.54	47.72	+8.82
Effect of question mentioning:			
Humanitarian intervention	+12.05	+19.68	<b>-7.63</b>
Internal political change	-6.66	-4.23	<b>-2.43</b>
Peacekeeping operations	-6.02	-1.35	<b>-4.66</b>
—end troops”	-3.75	-6.59	+2.85
—keep/maintain troops”	-7.76	-12.98	<b>+5.22</b>
—increase troops”	+5.53	-2.37	<b>+7.90</b>
—ground troops”	-2.97	+0.30	<b>-3.28</b>
—air or missile strikes”	+8.08	+3.93	<b>+4.14</b>
—sell or send weapons/supplies”	-5.48	-12.68	<b>+7.20</b>
“war”	+3.53	+0.94	<b>+2.59</b>
casualties mentioned	-3.22	-8.15	<b>+4.93</b>
United Nations mentioned	+9.65	+7.64	<b>+2.01</b>
NATO mentioned	+5.46	+5.18	+0.28
—Terror” or —terrorism” mentioned	-2.11	+0.06	+0.06
Number of observations	627	627	627

Coefficients that are statistically significant for gender difference are shown in bold.